

250 Anecdotes About Religion

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Dedicated to Steve Farmer

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Anecdotes are usually short humorous stories. Sometimes they are thought-provoking or informative, not amusing.

Retold in my own words to avoid plagiarism.

Chapter 1: From Animals to Confession

Animals

- Lawyers aren't always necessary to resolve disputes between neighbors. When country comedian Jerry Clower was growing up, some cows broke out of a neighbor's field one night, got into his stepfather's cornfield, and caused considerable damage. The next morning, Mr. Clower's stepfather went to the neighbor and said, "Your cows stayed in my field all night." The neighbor apologized: "I'm sorry. My cows broke through the fence. I didn't know they were in your field." The neighbor then said, "I tell you what let's do. Let's go get an impartial person living in the community, a member of our church, and ask him to walk over the field to determine the damage. Then he can tell me how much corn he believes those cows ate and I will put that much corn in your corncrib." That's exactly what they did. They agreed on a fair and honest man to serve as judge of the damage. He walked through the cornfield, then said, "Twenty bushels is what's due." Later that afternoon, the neighbor drove up and unloaded 20 bushels of corn into Mr. Clower's stepfather's corncrib.¹

- In the summer of 1984, a small black dog began to come to the Catholic Church in Uvalde, Texas, where Msgr. Vincent Fecher serves. The dog arrived with its master, then stretched out on the lawn of the church. When the master left after Mass and went home, the dog stayed on the lawn, buried in the tall, cool grass, and it moved only to stay in the shade of a tree. At the end of the day, it went home until the following Sunday. Father Vincent says about the dog, "I always thought that its presence there, facing towards the sanctuary, was a silent sermon to everybody that even a dog had sense enough to come to church on Sundays."²

- Rabbi Stephen Wise met a man who boasted about a horse he had recently purchased. The horse could go as fast or as slow as you wanted. It could do any work to which it was put. It was gentle, but it had spirit. It went when you wanted it to go, and it stopped when you wanted it to stop. It had no bad habits, plus it came immediately when called, and it didn't run off when confronted with something strange. Dr. Wise admired the horse, saying, "I wish that horse were a member of my congregation."³

- Buddhist texts say that animals should not be slaughtered for food, and Buddhist monks in Tibet make a vow not to kill any conscious being. While in his palace above the Tibetan capital city, Lhasa, the 14th Dalai Lama noticed people bringing in yaks for slaughter. By buying as many as he could, he saved 10,000 yaks from being slaughtered.⁴

Anti-Semitism

- During the Middle Ages, an anti-Semite falsely accused a Jew of killing a Christian, who had accidentally drowned in a well. However, the anti-Semite said that he would let God decide whether the Jew was guilty. He would write "guilty" on one slip of paper and "innocent" on a second slip and let the Jew choose one. Whichever slip of paper the Jew chose would determine whether he would go free. However, the Jew knew that the anti-Semite would write the word "guilty" on both slips of paper. Therefore, he chose a slip of paper, but he quickly put it in his mouth and swallowed it. "Look at the other slip of paper," he said. "That will tell you what the slip of paper I swallowed said."⁵

- Sherry Britton was a Jewish stripteaser. During World War II, an American soldier sent her a photograph of herself that he had taken from a dead Nazi soldier. Ms. Britton says, "If the

German had known he was carrying around a picture of a Jewish girl, he wouldn't have had to be killed. He would have committed suicide.”⁶

- Oscar Strauss was Jewish and rich — and happy to be both. Long ago, while vacationing in Lakewood, New Jersey, he saw a house that rented rooms. In front of the house was this sign: “No dogs or Jews allowed.” A few minutes after he saw the sign, he bought the house and ordered the sign torn down.⁷

- Hadrian saw a Jew, who greeted him. Hadrian said, “Should a Jew see Hadrian and greet him? Cut off his head.” Hadrian’s soldiers carried off the Jew and beheaded him. Hadrian then saw a Jew, who did not greet him. Hadrian said, “Should a Jew see Hadrian and not greet him? Cut off his head.”⁸

- In the former USSR, Jews suffered from anti-Semitism. In one underground joke, several Communists go to Heaven, form a party cell, and then discuss who should be the secretary. One of the Communists nominated God, but another Communist objected, “We can’t elect Him! He had a son in Israel!”⁹

Baseball

- Sandy Koufax was a great Jewish major league pitcher. Umpire Tom Gorman was shocked to learn that Gene Oliver had hit .330 against Mr. Koufax, since Mr. Oliver was a left-handed hitter with a .220 batting average. He asked Mr. Oliver how he had managed to get so many hits against Mr. Koufax, and Mr. Oliver answered, “I’ll tell you, but it’s a secret. Don’t tell anybody. He thinks I’m Jewish.”¹⁰

- Tim Burke was both a New York Mets pitcher and a Born-Again Christian. In 1991, he was asked about Jesus and his career. He replied, “If Jesus were on the field, he’d be pitching inside and breaking up double plays.”¹¹

Censorship

- While Maury Maverick, Jr. was a member of the Texas House of Representatives in the 1950s, a bill came up advocating censorship in the Texas schools. Remarkably, an organization of Texas schoolteachers came out in support of the bill — after having been bought off with a pay raise. This scared Mr. Maverick, who was knowledgeable about bookburning by the Nazis and who wrote, “When that starts happening, that’s the beginning of the end. That’s when someone is going to start killing Jews, or Presbyterians, or Methodists, or conservatives, or liberals, or whatever. Somebody’s going to get killed if that doesn’t stop.”¹²

- Nancy Garden is the lesbian author of *Annie on My Mind*, a young people’s novel portraying lesbian characters in a positive manner. Religious groups in Kansas attacked the book, which was in school libraries, and a fundamentalist preacher even burned a copy of the book in public. However, students, parents, and librarians protested when *Annie on My Mind* was removed from school libraries. One boy and his friends even checked approximately 3,000 books out of school district libraries to show how empty the shelves would be if controversial books were removed.¹³

- In the former USSR, members of the secret police attended church services to check the content of the sermons. Cardinal Wyszynski used to start his sermons by saying, “Brothers in Christ and delegates of the government...”¹⁴

Charity

- Rabbi Meir Shapiro of Lublin often said that he had learned from a beggar how to collect money for charity. A beggar had appeared at his door, and the good Rabbi had given him a generous handout, but the beggar asked for more. Someone present said that he was surprised that the beggar had asked for more money because the beggar had often accepted much smaller sums of money without arguing. The beggar replied that when he was given a small amount of money, it wasn't worth arguing about because what he would get if he won the argument? Another small amount of money. But a sizable amount of money was worth arguing about because if he won that argument he would get another sizable amount of money. Rabbi Meir Shapiro said, "Whenever I ask a donation from a wealthy man and he gives me a sizable sum, I tell that story."¹⁵

- Hei-zayemon was a wealthy philanthropist who tried to live his life in accordance with the insights gained by ancient sages. By using his money wisely, he relieved much of the hunger and misery of the poor people in his part of the world. One day, a monk showed up at his doorstep. Having heard of Hei-zayemon's philanthropy, the monk requested money to build a gate for his temple. Hearing this, Hei-zayemon laughed, and then said, "I help people because I cannot bear to see them suffer. What's so bad about a temple without a gate?"¹⁶

- Entertainer Eddie Cantor put his knowledge of human nature to use while raising money for charity in what was reputed to be a tough town for fundraising. He did it by appearing to get sicker and sicker just before the fundraiser, even calling to see if someone could host the event for him at the last minute — which of course no one could. Because the people of the town thought Mr. Cantor was dying and was making his last request, he succeeded in raising \$450,000 in a town where he normally would have been lucky to raise \$150,000.¹⁷

- Andrew Carnegie was a very wealthy man who had a reputation for donating money to charitable causes. Mark Twain wrote him to say that he wanted to buy a \$2 hymnbook, pointing out that "I will bless you, God will bless you, and it will do a great deal of good." Mr. Twain then added a postscript: "Don't send the hymn-book — send me the two dollars."¹⁸

Children

- During a session of a junior church league, the preacher, Edwin Porter, was delayed, so he asked his oldest daughter, Janette, who was about 10 years old, to begin the session without him. The session started well, with 15 young children singing, "When the Roll is Called Up Yonder." Next came individual prayers, spoken out loud, during which Reverend Porter arrived in time to hear one young girl pray about his daughter Janette, "Dear Jesus, make that preacher's daughter quit stealing my sweetheart — and send him back to me." Another little girl prayed about one of Reverend Porter's young sons, "You know I need a husband — give me Edd Porter for my own." Yet another little girl — the daughter of two prominent members of his church — prayed, "Dear God, do keep Mama and Papa from fussing so much of the time."¹⁹

- Abraham, the first Jew, was the son of Terach, a maker of clay idols. When Abraham was a boy, he sometimes watched the shop while Terach was away. One day, while Terach was away from the shop, Abram (who was later called Abraham) broke all the idols. When Terach returned, he asked Abram what had happened. Abram said, "It was terrible. The smaller idols got angry and began fighting, then the bigger idols got angry and began fighting, and finally all

the idols broke each other into bits.” Terach said, “Idols don’t get angry, and idols don’t fight. They’re made of clay — they just sit there.” Abram replied, “So why do you worship them?”²⁰

- A woman used to say “God!” whenever she was annoyed, which was several times a day, so her son — a regular attendant at Sunday School — decided to teach her a lesson. He called out, “Mommy!” She responded, but then he did not say anything. He did this five times in one day, and finally his mother said, “You don’t have anything to say, so why do you call me all the time?” Her son replied, “Mom, I called you five times, and already you have lost your patience. Each day, you call ‘God!’ more than five times. I wonder whether God has lost His patience with you.”²¹

- Mrs. Miriam Pincus was a Rabbi’s wife who used her histrionic ability to teach her young Hebrew School students Bible stories. While telling about David and Goliath, she used deep growls for the giant’s voice and the voice of a hero for David. She also sang comic songs to keep her young students entertained. One Monday, three tots rang the Rabbi’s doorbell. When the Rabbi came to the door, they asked, “Can Mrs. Pincus come out and play?”²²

- Quaker unprogrammed meetings frequently include long periods of silence. A small child who was attending his first meeting sat quietly for a while, then he asked his mother, “Why are they all sitting so silently?” The mother hushed the child, but a Quaker rose and said, “Our first speaker this morning has put before us a most important question.”²³

- Mary Farwell’s five-year-old son was playing with his Speak-and-Spell computer. He typed the word “G-O-D” into it, but he was surprised when the computer told him, “Word not found.” He tried it again, only to meet with the same unsatisfactory result. He then looked at his computer and said, “Jesus is not going to like this!”²⁴

- A little boy had been naughty, so as punishment he was sent to bed after supper and was not allowed to watch his favorite TV program. His mother told him as he went to his room, “Pray to God so you can be a good boy tomorrow.” “Why?” asked the little boy. “What’s on TV tomorrow?”²⁵

Christmas

- In Philadelphia, the Old First Reformed Church, United Church of Christ, always has a Christmas program in which a newborn baby from the congregation portrays the baby Jesus in a scene set in the manger. If a woman in the congregation gives birth to a girl, then Jesus is portrayed by a girl. If an African-American woman in the congregation gives birth, then Jesus is portrayed by an African-American baby. If a Hispanic woman in the congregation gives birth, then Jesus is portrayed by a Hispanic baby. One year, a woman in the congregation gave birth to twins, so Jesus was portrayed by twins.²⁶

- Comedian Lou Costello enjoyed trimming the Christmas tree by himself late on Christmas Eve after his children had gone to bed. One year, he arrived home very late on Christmas Eve because he had been detained at the radio station where *The Abbott and Costello Program* was produced, and he saw that the butler had decorated the tree. Mr. Costello was so disappointed that he went to his bedroom and cried.²⁷

- A Sunday School class taught by Rolf E. Aaseng participated in a Christmas program that celebrated Jesus, the Light of the World. Four members of the class were supposed to carry

large cardboard letters on stage to spell out the word STAR, but they got mixed up and displayed the letters in reverse order: RATS.²⁸

- Michael Moore, the director of *Roger and Me*, went Christmas caroling in 1998 at the homes of the CEOs of the top tobacco companies. He took along with him the Awful Truth Choir, whose members have lost their voice boxes (aka larynxes) because they smoked.²⁹

Church

- As a young pastor, William Woughter wanted to set new attendance records at his church. Therefore, he got hold of a number of old vinyl records and promised that whoever brought the most visitors to church on Sunday could publicly break a record over his head. Things went well for the first four Sundays — attendance was booming, and the records broke easily (pun definitely intended). On the fifth and final record-breaking Sunday, a young boy proudly led 27 visitors into the church. However, when the young boy took hold of the record and tried to break it over Pastor William's head, the record refused to break — despite the boy's several valiant attempts to break it. Later, a bruised Pastor William discovered that this particular record had been made with an unbreakable metal core.³⁰

- The Second Ponce de Leon Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia, used to have a problem with parking. Nearby were two other places of worship: the Catholic Cathedral of Christ the King and the Episcopal Cathedral of St. Philip. Parking was hard to come by, and since these two churches met for worship earlier than the Second Ponce de Leon Baptist Church, the Catholics and Episcopalians used to park in the parking lot of the Baptist Church, resulting in a lack of parking spaces for the Baptists when they arrived for worship. Fortunately, the Second Ponce de Leon Baptist Church was able to solve the problem. Members of the Baptist Church simply put these bumper stickers on all the cars in its parking lot: "I'm Proud to Be a Southern Baptist."³¹

- Lots of people complain that churches don't have the facilities to compete with worldly entertainments, but country comedian Jerry Clower remembers offering to let his 14-year-old daughter (Sue) and one of her friends go with him on a trip to Hollywood, where they could meet celebrities Lorne Greene, David Janssen, Dinah Shore, and Mel Tillis. She told him, "Daddy, I love you and I'm so glad that you would arrange it to where me and one of my friends could go on this trip, but daddy, there's something going on at the church activities building I don't want to miss. I won't be able to go with you this time." When Mr. Clower heard his daughter say this, tears came to his eyes and he said, "Praise God from Whom all blessings flow."³²

- A Vermonter was the only person to show up for early morning church services, so the minister asked the Vermonter what they should do. The Vermonter replied, "When I take a load of hay out into the field to feed the cows, and only one cow shows up, I don't turn her away hungry." Hearing this, the minister preached to his audience of one a sermon well over an hour long, and then he asked the Vermonter what he thought of the sermon. The Vermonter replied, "When I take a load of hay out into the field to feed the cows, and only one cow shows up, I don't make her eat the whole load."³³

- According to Quakers, speaking in unprogrammed meeting is not something that can be planned; instead, it is a matter of divine inspiration. John Warren attended a meeting in Maine, where people expected that he would speak. However, he didn't feel the Holy Spirit calling

him to say anything, so he remained silent. After an hour in which no one spoke, the meeting was over, and Mr. Warren started walking out of the meetingplace. He overheard one boy tell another, "Didn't that beat the devil!" Mr. Warren turned around and told the boy, "That is what it is intended to do."³⁴

- The Quakers, aka Friends, perform social (and religious) service as well as attend religious meetings. They often hold unprogrammed meetings in which people are silent unless someone feels moved to speak. A person who knew nothing about Quakers attended a meeting and waited and waited for something to happen, but everyone remained silent. Finally, he nudged a Quaker and asked, "When does the service begin?" The Quaker replied, "The service begins when the meeting ends."³⁵

- Mark Twain attended the church of his friend, the Reverend Joseph Twichell, and he became very interested in the sermon. After the church service was over, Mr. Twain told Reverend Twichell, "Joe, this mustn't happen again. When I go to church, I go for a good rest and quiet nap. Today I haven't been able to get a single wink. I tell you it won't do; and it must not happen again."³⁶

- Ballerina Margot Fonteyn seldom attended church as a child because her mother believed in letting children go to church only when they wanted. Why did Margot's mother believe that? Because when she was a little girl, she had been forced each Sunday to attend church three times. As a grownup, she went to church only for weddings.³⁷

- A Sunday School teacher asked her class, "What do you think about when you see the church doors open to everyone who wants to worship God here?" An African-American student answered, "It's like walking into the heart of God."³⁸

- After first arriving in Philadelphia, Benjamin Franklin attended a silent Quaker meeting. He fell asleep and did not wake until someone roused him when the meeting was over.³⁹

Clothing

- Reb Simcha loved and admired his father, Reb Elchanan. When Reb Elchanan's shoes wore out, he gave his young son money to buy a new pair. When his son returned with the shoes, Reb Elchanan put them on and walked about. Seeing that his father looked perturbed, young Simcha asked what was wrong. Reb Elchanan replied, "My son, the laces upset me. I usually don't wear shoes with laces. Now I will have to spend time lacing my shoes, unlacing them when a lace breaks, tying them in the morning, untying them at night; they will require precious time that could be used instead for learning."⁴⁰

- A very stupid man had trouble getting dressed every morning because he could not find his clothes. One day, he had the idea of writing down where he put his clothes when he went to bed. The next morning, he looked at the writing, found his pants and put them on, then he looked at the writing again, found his shirt and put it on, and so on. But when he was dressed, he said, "But where am I? Where in the World am I?" He looked and looked, but he could not find where he was in the World. According to Rabbi Hanokh, we are like this man: We cannot find ourselves and we do not know where we are in the World.⁴¹

- Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli (who became Pope John XXIII) spent much time as Papal Nuncio in France, where he was often invited to dinners at which many women dressed fashionably

but immodestly. Plans were made to ask the women to dress more modestly, but he rejected them, saying, “I have found that on such occasions it is not so much the woman at whom the crowd is looking but at me to see my reaction.”⁴²

Cold Weather

- In Rankin, Illinois, Al Karlstrom’s father was the pastor of Grace Lutheran Church. Each Sunday morning, he would remind his children to shine their shoes in preparation for church. One very cold Sunday, his children were running late, so to save time shining their shoes, they used Vicks VapoRub instead of shoe polish. This worked out very well, as it made a nice shine. However, the steam radiators were running on high that Sunday to keep the cold out of the church, and the fumes coming off the pastor’s children’s shoes cleared up the heads of the congregation.⁴³

- Rabbi Israel Salanter and two friends stayed at an inn in the midst of a very cold winter. He observed a serving girl drawing water and carrying the buckets in the cold, and when it came time for him and his friends to wash their hands before eating, he used very little water although his friends used lots of water. When asked about this, Rabbi Israel replied, “One should not be over strict in his observance of the law at the expense of someone else.”⁴⁴

Collections

- Art Linkletter’s first public appearance was in church. His father was an evangelist whose income depended on the contributions the congregation made. Therefore, he would dress up his son in clean but patched clothing, and then send him out to collect the offering while he told the congregation to “dig deep, brothers and sisters, for the good work.”⁴⁵

- Rabbi Stephen S. Wise took up a collection in his synagogue, and he told the worshippers, “Friends, tonight is the Sabbath when it is forbidden to carry money. Empty your pockets and put the money in the collection plates.”⁴⁶

Compassion

- Kamala Masters, who teaches Buddhist meditation, sailed with some friends in Hawaii. She felt seasick on the boat, so her friends urged her to get into the water. Because she didn’t have a life vest, she didn’t want to, but her friends persuaded her. She and some of her friends got in the water, a squall started blowing, and it blew the boat away from her. She started to panic, so her friends asked her to remember her Buddhist teachings, saying, “Kamala, what if these are your last moments? What do you want right now? Don’t you want more love in your heart? Don’t you want more compassion? What do you really want?” Kamala was very honest, and she admitted, “What I want right now is the boat!”⁴⁷

- In the early 20th century, Rabbi Aryeh Levin was walking in a field with Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook. When Rabbi Levin plucked a small flower from the field, Rabbi Kook started to tremble and told him that he refrained from plucking anything living unless some benefit could be gained from so doing, since every living thing, including plants, had a guardian angel looking out for it. From this experience, Rabbi Levin learned from Rabbi Kook to be compassionate toward all living things.⁴⁸

Confession

- Songwriter Grant Clark brought a priest to see the great American scoundrel Wilson Mizner. Mr. Mizner told the priest, “Hello, Father. I went to confession yesterday, and the priest left in the middle of it.” Surprised, the priest asked, “Where did he go?” Mr. Mizner replied, “For the police.”⁴⁹

- A woman went to confession, but instead of saying, “Bless me, Father, for I have sinned,” she absent-mindedly began to say a common table prayer: “Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest” Fortunately, the priest had a sense of humor and asked, “What’d you do, bring your lunch?”⁵⁰

Chapter 2: From Courage to Food

Courage

- In Poland, Irene Gut Opdyke witnessed Nazis shooting unarmed Jews, and she prayed to God to ask Him “to give me responsibility, to bring me the opportunity to help, even if my own life should be taken.” She helped many Jews, and she even hid several Jews at the villa of the elderly German major for whom she worked. (The architect of the villa had realized that war was coming, so he had built a hiding place under the gazebo. Much of the time the Jews were hidden there.) Unfortunately, the elderly German major discovered that she was hiding Jews. However, he said that he would protect her secret if she would become his mistress. She did. After the war, Ms. Opdyke said, “It was a small price to pay for the many lives.”⁵¹
- At the trial by the Inquisition of Joan of Arc by biased judges who knew ahead of time that they would find her guilty no matter what defense she made, her judges asked her trick question after trick question. One example was this question: “Are you in God’s grace?” If she answered that she was, her answer would be evidence that she was guilty of the sin of pride. If she answered that she was not, her answer would be evidence that God had rejected her. However, she was very intelligent — as well as justifiably defiant — and she answered, “If I am not, may God bring me to it; if I am, may God keep me in it.”⁵²
- St. Athanasius tried to escape from some assassins by rowing a boat on a river. As he was rowing in one direction, the assassins approached him in a boat going in the other direction. When the assassins saw him, they cried out, “Where is the traitor Athanasius?” He avoided lying by answering, “Not far away,” continued to row, and escaped the assassins.⁵³

Death

- According to Deuteronomy 6:5, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.” When Rabbi Akiba was about to be unjustly executed, it was the time of the Jewish prayer known as the Shema. (*Shema* is the first word of the Hebrew sentence which means “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is One.”) His disciples asked him why he was reciting the Shema at this time. He replied that he had interpreted the verse “with all thy soul” to mean “even if He takes away your life” and he had always worried about when he could obey that commandment. Now that he had the opportunity of obeying the commandment, he would do so.⁵⁴
- Entertainers were not always regarded with respect; long ago, they were regarded as wicked people who needed to repent. Jean-Baptiste Lully became very ill, and thinking he might die, he sent for a confessor. The priest told him, “In view of your stage-life, I want you to do penance by sacrificing something very dear to you.” The priest then suggested that Lully allow him to throw into the fire the manuscript of a new opera that Lully had composed. Lully agreed, and the manuscript was burned. Instead of dying, Lully recovered. A friend remarked to him that it was a pity that the opera had been burned, but Lully told him, “Oh, that’s all right. I have a copy of it.”⁵⁵
- A general swept through a region during wartime, creating havoc and terror wherever he went. He entered a temple and was surprised that the Zen master was not terrified of him. The general asked the Zen master, “Don’t you know that I can run this sword through your body

without batting an eye?” The Zen master replied, “Don’t you know that I can have a sword run through my body without batting an eye?” The general bowed to the Zen master, and then left him in peace.⁵⁶

- Martin Luther King’s mother, like himself, died because of violence. On June 30, 1974, while playing the organ in church, she was shot and killed, as was a church deacon. The murderer was Marcus Wayne Chenault, a mentally disturbed African American who said that he had killed them because they were Christians. He was tried, found guilty, and sentenced to die. However, the King family opposed the death penalty, and the sentence was later reduced to life in prison.⁵⁷

- Marpa was a great Tibetan teacher who as a Buddhist taught that everything is an illusion. Unfortunately, his oldest son died and Marpa grieved greatly. A Buddhist monk came to him and said, “I don’t understand. You teach us that everything is an illusion. Yet you are crying. If everything is an illusion, then why do you grieve so deeply?” Marpa replied, “Indeed, everything is an illusion. And the death of a child is the greatest of these illusions.”⁵⁸

- A man dying of AIDS told his nurse that he would like to become a Catholic. Immediately, the nurse telephoned her priest and asked him to come right over. However, upon hearing that the man was dying of AIDS, the priest hesitated, saying that this was a controversial situation. The nurse responded, “This man is dying, and he will not live much longer. Get your butt over here now, or I’ll baptize him myself.” The priest came right over.⁵⁹

- When Wilson Mizner lay dying after a life devoted to gambling, illegal drugs, and the spending of money, a clergyman who was very successful in obtaining the deathbed conversions of rascals was brought in to him. Mr. Wilson declined to be converted, saying, “I don’t expect too much. You can’t be a rascal for 40 years and then cop a plea the last minute. God keeps better books than that.” A few minutes later, he died.⁶⁰

- In 1949, Mother Teresa found a dying man lying on a sidewalk in Calcutta. She asked a nearby hospital if she could bring the man in, but she was not allowed to. Therefore, she visited a pharmacist to get medicine for the man, but by the time she returned, the man had died. Mother Teresa had witnessed such callousness more than once. She said, “They look after a dog or a cat better than a fellow man.”⁶¹

- Early American colonists suffered from high rates of infant mortality. Often, a family would keep giving their children the same Christian name until one child finally survived. In addition, women frequently died in childbirth. At some old cemeteries, the husband would be buried along with several of his wives and several of their children who had died as infants or in childhood.⁶²

- When Pope Pius II died, Dr. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., announced the death to his Harvard class titled “Intellectual History of America from 1776 to the Present.” He stated that because he had read it in the *Christian Science Monitor* he knew it was true, and he added, “I anxiously await my copy when Mary Baker Eddy decides to come back to life.”⁶³

- Bodhidharma, a Buddhist monk, founded both Zen Buddhism and early karate after traveling from India to China. According to legend, after Bodhidharma died in China, he was seen walking back to India while wearing one sandal. To check on the story, Bodhidharma’s coffin was opened — nothing was in it, except one sandal.⁶⁴

- “Shoeless Joe” Jackson was kicked out of professional baseball after being suspected of helping the Chicago Black Sox throw the 1919 World Series — despite batting .375 in the series. When he died, his last words were, “I’m going to meet the Greatest Umpire of all, now. I know that He will judge me innocent.”⁶⁵
- When Zen master Tekisui was on his deathbed, another Zen master named Keichu came by his house. He left a box of cakes for Tekisui, and he also gave this message to a servant to give to Tekisui: “You’re old enough to die without regret.” When Tekisui heard the message, he smiled.⁶⁶
- Franz Liszt was buried at Bayreuth, where he had died, although some people wanted his body to be moved and buried at Weimar. However, Liszt was of the Order of Franciscans, whose rules specify that members of the order must be buried where they die.⁶⁷
- Comedy writer Barney Dean refused to take hospitals seriously. On his way to the hospital where he would die, he told a friend, “You’d better take my wallet. I don’t want these nuns rolling me.”⁶⁸
- Rabbi Stephen S. Wise tells us that when a man named Freeman (alas, he doesn’t give a first name) died, he requested that this epitaph be carved on his tombstone: “He died learning.”⁶⁹

Easter

- On Easter, worshippers at McMasters United Methodist Church in Turtle Creek, Pennsylvania, saw two large red letters — M and T — behind the altar. Of course, the letters stood for the good news about Jesus’ tomb — that it was eMpTy. The pastor, Reverend Jeffrey D. Sterling, wanted to quiz the children about the meaning of the letters during the children’s lesson, so after all the children had gathered at the front of the church, he asked them, “What’s different about the church today, kids?” His own daughter answered the question. Ignoring the large red letters, she said, “It’s full, Dad!”⁷⁰
- Country comedian Jerry Clower is a devout Christian who attends Baptist church each Sunday, and sometimes he gets a little upset at Christians who attend church only on Easter. One year, while driving to Easter services, he told his wife, Homerline, “Darling, if there’s a lost man sitting in the pew where I usually sit this morning, on Easter Sunday, I’ll kneel by him and pray or stand outside in the rain. He can have my seat. But if a Baptist is in my seat that ain’t been there since last Easter, he’s getting *up*.”⁷¹

Education

- When the scholar Rabbi Bun died at an early age, Rabbi Zera spoke highly of his scholarly labors, comparing him to a worker in a king’s vineyard who worked hard for two or three hours. The king called the worker to him, and they walked together. At the end of the day, the king paid all his laborers, including the man who had worked for only a few hours, the same wage. The other workers complained, saying that they had worked for the entire day, and they asked, “Is it right that he should receive the same wages we do?” The king responded, “Why are you angry? This man has done as much work in two or three hours as the rest of you have done in a whole day.” And so, Rabbi Zera said, “Thus, too, Rabbi Bun has accomplished more in the realm of the Torah during his 28 years than a diligent student could ordinarily accomplish in 100 years.”⁷²

- A university professor visited Japanese Zen master Nan-in. The professor was supposed to be there to learn about Zen from Nan-in, but it quickly became apparent from the professor's comments that he believed that he was already an expert in Zen. Therefore, when Nan-in served the professor tea, he filled the professor's teacup full and then continued pouring so that the tea ran to the ground. The professor cried out, "Stop! It is already full! No more will go in!" Nan-in replied, "Like this cup, you are full of your own opinions. How can I show you Zen unless you first empty your cup?"⁷³

- A Buddhist teacher from India visited the United States. When he was asked what he thought of Buddhist practices in America, he said that they reminded him of a person in a rowboat rowing and rowing, yet getting nowhere because the rowboat is tied to the dock. Many people in the United States devote much time and effort to meditation about lovingkindness, he said, but they forget to practice lovingkindness toward other people in the course of their daily activities.⁷⁴

- Peter Cartwright was a pioneer circuit-riding preacher who was suspicious of educated preachers. He met an educated preacher who addressed him in Greek in order to humiliate him. Not to be outdone, Mr. Cartwright spoke to him in German. The educated preacher, who did not know Hebrew, concluded that Mr. Cartwright had replied to him in that language, and he said that Mr. Cartwright was the first educated Methodist preacher that he had ever seen.⁷⁵

- Governor Wang questioned the teaching methods of Zen master Rinzai. Governor Wang asked if the monks read sutras. Rinzai said they did not. Governor Wang asked if the monks learned meditation. Rinzai said they did not. Governor Wang then asked, "If they don't read sutras or learn meditation, what are on earth are they doing here?" Rinzai replied, "All I do is make them become Buddhas and Bodhisattvas."⁷⁶

- Not being able to spell may have advantages. A young Quaker woman attending Oxford University was very intelligent but completely unable to spell. On a visit to the continent, she filled out a form in Customs. In the space by the word "Occupation," she wrote, "Nun" — and she was amazed at how much quicker than her traveling companions she passed through Customs.⁷⁷

- When Rolf E. Aaseng first began teaching Sunday School, he and another teacher complained about the rooms they taught in. Mr. Aaseng taught in a stinky basement, and the other teacher taught in the kitchen. However, yet another teacher topped them both — because of lack of space, she was forced to teach her Sunday School class in the women's restroom!⁷⁸

- Rabbi Stephen S. Wise knew a couple who had gotten their son accepted into an excellent boys' school before their son was even born. Rabbi Wise asked what they would have done if they had had a girl, but they assured him that they had considered that and had also applied for their child's admission into an excellent girls' school.⁷⁹

- Rabbi Jacob Joseph grew up in a very poor household in Lithuania. His father, who worked in a brewery, used to scrimp on food so that he could pay his son's tuition. Because of this experience, Rabbi Joseph knew that poor people often value Jewish education more than rich people.⁸⁰

- A school in Germany had only one Jewish student. The teacher told her, "Just like all the Jews, you are greedy. Your father pays tuition for only one student, but you are learning

enough for three.”⁸¹

Enlightenment

- A student came to Zen master Suiwo, seeking enlightenment, so Suiwo gave him a problem to solve: “Hear the sound of one hand.” The student meditated for three years, but he never solved the problem and so did not achieve enlightenment. Finally, the student asked to return home in disgrace because he had not become enlightened. Suiwo urged the student to stay another week, which the student did, but without becoming enlightened. Suiwo again urged the student to stay another week, then five days, which the student did, but always with the same lack of results. Finally, Suiwo told the student, “Meditate for three days longer, then if you fail to attain enlightenment, you had better kill yourself.” The student attained enlightenment.⁸²

- Zen master Ikkyu accepted an invitation to become the abbot of a subtemple; however, at a banquet held after he became abbot, several wealthy people told him that in return for their making large donations to the subtemple, they expected him to give them *inka* — written confirmation that they had become enlightened. Refusing to be bribed, Ikkyu and his chief disciples immediately left the subtemple.⁸³

Etiquette

- Rumi, the founder of the Whirling Dervishes, understood and practiced good etiquette. When an Armenian butcher bowed to him seven times, Rumi returned the bows. On another occasion, several children in a group bowed to him, and Rumi bowed to each of the children. One child was far off, and he called to Rumi, “Wait for me until I come.” Rumi waited, the child arrived and bowed to him, and Rumi returned the child’s bow.⁸⁴

- In Philadelphia, a homeless person named Carlos was very hungry and wondering where his next meal would come from. A priest appeared and gave him a sandwich. Carlos was so hungry that he ate the sandwich before remembering to thank the priest. After eating the sandwich, he looked for the priest, but the priest had disappeared. After that, Carlos always thanked someone who gave him food, and then he ate the food.⁸⁵

Faith

- R’ Shimon Sofer of Cracow was very young when a heretic asked him a question that he could not answer, so he approached his father, the Chasam Sofer, and asked for the answer to the question. The Chasam Sofer did not answer the question right away, but waited a few days, then easily answered the question. When his son asked why he had waited, although he could have answered the question right away, the Chasam Sofer replied, “I wanted to teach you that in questions of faith, one does not have to worry if he does not have an immediate answer. If he doesn’t have an answer today, he will have it tomorrow. Meanwhile, there is no reason to lose faith.”⁸⁶

- Sheikh Abu al-Bistami had several disciples who complained that the Devil had taken away their faith. After hearing this, the Sheikh summoned the Devil and asked if his disciples’ complaint was true. The Devil told him, “I never force anyone to give up their faith because I fear God too much to do that. However, many people foolishly throw away their faith for trivial reasons. Whenever that happens, I take the faith they have thrown away.”⁸⁷

- A young man who doubted the existence of God asked Menachem Mendel, Rabbi of Kotzker, where God really lived. The Rabbi answered, “Wherever He is admitted.”⁸⁸

Family

- Catholic priests may not have biological children of their own, but they do have families. An American, Msgr. Vincent Fecher had been studying in Rome for five years, but then he was assigned to be the priest at a Catholic church in the small town of Uvalde, Texas. He was walking with an Italian friend and discussing his return to America when the Italian friend said, “I guess it’s only natural that you should want to go back to America and be near your family.” Father Vincent said, with conviction, “My family is right here!” Then he continued, more quietly, “Gino, you’re my family. I am closer to all of you here than I am to my own brothers and sisters, some of whom I have not seen in 15 years. Some of whom I hardly know.” Since saying that, Father Vincent has become even more convinced that the “parish is my real family.”⁸⁹

- Dr. Stephen S. Wise was introduced in an African-American church by a minister who said, “I have the honor to introduce you to a man who is conceited to be America’s greatest orator.” When Dr. Wise related this story to his family later, they commented, “How well this minister knows you.”⁹⁰

Food

- Do you know the first drink and food to be drunk and eaten on the moon? According to astronaut Buzz Aldrin, “The very first liquid ever poured on the moon and the first food eaten there, were communion elements.” While Mike Collins orbited the moon, and Buzz Aldrin and Neil Armstrong were on the moon in the *Eagle*, Mr. Aldrin requested a few minutes of silence from Houston. Mr. Aldrin then opened some plastic packages containing the communion wine and bread and poured the wine into a chalice his church had given to him. After Mr. Aldrin had read the words, “I am the vine — you are the branches. Whoever remains in Me, and I in him, will bear much fruit; for you can do nothing without Me,” he and Mr. Armstrong took communion.⁹¹

- While the Israelites were wandering in the desert, they decided to ask God to dinner. Their leader, Moses, explained that God is not a physical being and so He does not eat. But when Moses went up on the mountain to talk with God, God said to him that He would accept the Israelites’ dinner invitation. All the next day, the Israelites prepared dinner for God. An old man, poor and hungry, arrived and asked for something to eat, but the Israelites were too busy to give the old man some food. That evening, the Israelites looked for God, but they didn’t see Him. The next morning Moses went up on the mountain and asked God why He had not come for the dinner. God replied, “I did come. If you had fed the old man, you would have fed Me.”⁹²

- Back in the days when Catholics did not eat meat on Friday, Rear Admiral George Dufek and Father Linehan (a geo-physicist from Boston College), were at the South Pole. Rear Admiral Dufek pulled some sandwiches out for lunch, but Father Linehan looked at the sandwiches, saw that they were made with ham and roast beef, and said, “None for me. It’s Friday, you know.” Rear Admiral Dufek replied, “If you’ll step about 15 paces to the left, it will still be Thursday.” Father Linehan did so, and then he enjoyed lunch.⁹³

- Some of the food eaten on the Jewish Sabbath is especially good. For example, the bread known as Hallah is eaten on the Sabbath. One day, a Jew had a visitor who ate only the expensive Hallah but did not touch the common, inexpensive bread. The host hinted to the visitor, “Taste the bread,” but the visitor continued to eat the Hallah, remarking that Hallah is better than plain bread. “True,” said the host, “but it’s expensive.” The guest replied, “The extra expense is worth it.”⁹⁴
- While walking along a river, two monks noticed a lettuce leaf floating downstream. “How sad,” said one of the monks, who knew that Zen master Gizan lived one mile upstream. “Gizan has started to waste food.” Just then, Gizan burst out of the bushes, panting and sweating, jumped into the river, and began to swim downstream after the lettuce leaf. The two monks bowed low in the direction of Zen master Gizan, and then they continued their walk.⁹⁵
- A rich man came to the Maggid of Mezeritch and tried to impress him with his piety. When the Maggid asked the rich man what he ate, he replied that he ate nothing but bread. The Maggid shook his head sadly, and then he ordered him to eat cake. When the rich man asked why, the Maggid explained, “If you are content to eat bread, you will believe that the poor can live by eating stones, but if you eat cake, you will give bread to the poor.”⁹⁶
- On the American frontier, getting enough food to eat was sometimes a major struggle and thus took precedence over other things. One frontier preacher was giving a sermon when some dogs near the camp started barking at a bear. The preacher listened for a moment, then told the women to pray while he and the other men took off after the bear. After they had killed the bear, the preacher resumed his sermon.⁹⁷
- Zen master Taji was on his deathbed. His disciples knew that he liked a certain kind of cake, so they went from shop to shop in Tokyo until they found the kind of cake he liked, then they brought him a piece. After Taji had eaten the cake, his disciples asked if he had any last words for them. “Yes,” he replied, and as his disciples leaned toward him, he said, “My, but this cake is delicious.” Then he died.⁹⁸
- The Buddhists believe in a realm of being that is populated by “hungry ghosts.” They have enormous bodies but very small mouths, so they are constantly feeding themselves to fill up the emptiness inside. Thich Nhat Hanh, a Buddhist teacher in Vietnam, was asked what the realm of the hungry ghosts is like. He replied, “America.”⁹⁹
- A preacher ate a couple of Sunday dinners with the same farming family, who served chicken each time. After the second dinner, the preacher remarked on a hen that he said was particularly proud looking. “She should be proud,” said the farmer. “She has two children in the ministry.”¹⁰⁰
- After Mother Teresa gave a piece of bread to a small, hungry girl lost in the streets, the girl began to eat the bread very slowly, crumb by crumb. Mother Teresa said, “Eat, eat the bread! Aren’t you hungry!” The girl replied, “I am just afraid that when I run out of bread, I’ll still be hungry.”¹⁰¹
- God cares more about how you earn your money than what you eat. As Israeli economist Meir Tamari has pointed out, in the Torah, over 100 commandments concern economics, but only 24 commandments make up the foundation for traditional Jewish dietary practice.¹⁰²

- A starving dervish asked a rich man for food, but the rich man asked him to return the next day, when he was holding a feast. The dervish replied, “Give me some food today, so that I may live until tomorrow to attend your feast.”¹⁰³

Chapter 3: From Freedom of Religion to Money

Freedom of Religion

- The Puritans faced religious discrimination in Great Britain, so they moved to Massachusetts Bay — where they engaged in discrimination. When the Quakers arrived in Massachusetts Bay in 1655, the Puritans whipped them, put them in prison, and then banished them. After some Quakers returned to Massachusetts Bay, the Puritans passed a law calling for the execution by hanging of any Quaker who had been banished, but returned. The Puritans also banned Catholic priests and sometimes whipped and imprisoned Baptists. James Madison put freedom of religion into the Bill of Rights in order to outlaw such religious discrimination.¹⁰⁴
- The Puritans did not practice freedom of religion. When Native Americans in New England did not keep the Sabbath, the Puritans used that as an excuse to seize their lands.¹⁰⁵

Gays and Lesbians

- Not all churches are loving. A minister speculated that the son of a family in the church was gay, and he started spreading that speculation around. The speculation turned out to be true. Very quickly, the family of the gay boy came under verbal attack from other members of the church. Meanwhile, the gay boy was being both verbally and physically attacked at school. The mother of the family complained about the church: “Instead of being overwhelmed by love, we were overwhelmed by judgment.” The family was unwilling to give up on religion because of a few bigots, including a bigoted minister, so the family left that church and attended a much more loving Episcopal church.¹⁰⁶
- Gays and lesbians have their own church in which to worship God. The worldwide network of Metropolitan Community Churches is nondenominational. In addition, many gay and lesbian groups exist within established denominations. Integrity is a group for gay and lesbian Episcopalians, Dignity is for gay and lesbian Catholics, and Affirmation is the name of two groups, one for gay and lesbian Mormons and one for gay and lesbian United Methodists. Some synagogues specifically serve gay, lesbian, and bisexual Jews — the oldest such synagogue is Temple Beth Chayim Chadashim in Los Angeles whose Rabbi, Lisa Edwards, is a lesbian.¹⁰⁷
- As a lesbian, Lois Hoxie didn’t feel comfortable at a Catholic Church in the Oakland, California, area, so she stopped attending. Shortly afterward, she was surprised when the priest stopped by to visit her and asked, “Why don’t you go to church?” She replied, “I don’t feel welcome at Saint Pascal’s.” “Why is that?” the priest asked. She replied, “Because I’m gay.” The priest asked, “Yes, but why don’t you feel welcome at Saint Pascal’s?” The priest didn’t mind that she was gay; however, other Catholics made her feel unwelcome, so eventually she became a Friend, aka Quaker.¹⁰⁸
- Following a Gay Pride march, several gay men and lesbians gathered at a church for worship. Unfortunately, some protesters arrived and shouted, “Sinners! Repent of your sick and evil ways!” The gay men, lesbians, and the minister of the church began chanting in return, “Jesus loves me and Jesus loves you. Jesus loves me and Jesus loves you.” This angered the protesters, and they shouted, “Jesus hates you! Jesus hates you!” In this case, the protesters won — they shouted down the gay men, the lesbians, the minister, and this message: “Jesus loves me and Jesus loves you.”¹⁰⁹

- Lesbian comedian Kate Clinton appeared on a daytime talk show, the producers of which decided to create controversy by busing in a group of churchwomen to sit in the audience and watch the show. To the surprise of the producers, the churchwomen fully supported the rights of gays and lesbians.¹¹⁰

- When people tell lesbian comedian Judy Carter that homosexuality is a sin against God, she replies, “So is judging people.”¹¹¹

Heaven and Hell

- Among Mark Twain’s favorites of the books he had written was *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc*, about a French heroine for whom Mr. Twain had enormous respect. Mr. Twain met the Archbishop of Orléans, who told him that St. Joan (aka the Maid of Orléans) would no doubt see to it that anyone who wrote so beautifully about her would get into Heaven. Mr. Twain replied that he would be “perfectly satisfied” in the next life if he were near Joan of Arc and as far away as possible from her enemies.¹¹²

- Mark Twain attended a large dinner where the topic of conversation was Heaven and Hell. Mr. Twain remained quiet — something very uncharacteristic of him. When a woman asked him, “Why don’t you say something? I would like to hear your opinion,” he replied, “Madam, you must excuse me. I am silent of necessity — I have friends in both places!”¹¹³

- A Cardinal and a Congressman died and went to Heaven. The Cardinal was given barely adequate accommodations, but the Congressman was given a luxurious mansion to live in. The Cardinal asked St. Peter about the different accommodations, and St. Peter replied, “In Heaven we have lots of Cardinals — but he’s our only Congressman.”¹¹⁴

- Will Rogers was a human being who felt for other human beings. When fellow comedian Eddie Cantor was sad because his grandmother wasn’t still alive when he was a hit in the 1917 Ziegfeld Follies, Will comforted him by saying, “Now, Eddie, what makes you think she didn’t see you? And from a very good seat?”¹¹⁵

- A man asked a Zen master what would happen after the Zen master died. The Zen master calmly replied, “I will enter Hell.” “Enter Hell?” the man said. “You are a paragon of virtue. Why would you enter Hell?” The Zen master answered, “If I don’t enter Hell, who will enlighten you?”¹¹⁶

- Radio announcers always keep a record handy to play in case a live feed goes dead. When technical difficulties interrupted a Sunday morning sermon broadcast, the announcer grabbed the handy record and played it. It was Cab Calloway singing, “You’ll Never Get to Heaven That Way.”¹¹⁷

- Agnellus Andrew used to act as a consultant on Catholic affairs for the BBC. BBC TV producer Hugh Burnett asked him how he could get the official Catholic view concerning Heaven and Hell. Mr. Andrew sent him a one-word memo: “Die.”¹¹⁸

Holocaust

- In southeast Poland, Andrew Sheptitsky was head of the Greek Catholic Church. During World War II, he helped save over 150 Jews from the Nazis by hiding them in monasteries, convents, churches, and his home. To a Jewish man who had been hidden in a monastery, and

who sometimes pretended to be a monk in order to avoid capture by the Nazis, Mr. Sheptitsky said, “I want you to be a good Jew, and I am not saving you for your own sake. I am saving you for your people. I do not expect any reward, nor do I expect you to accept my faith.”¹¹⁹

- Archbishop Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, later to be Pope John XXIII, was apostolate delegate to Turkey during the days of the Nazis. The German ambassador, Franz von Papen, came to him to see if Rome would support the German army’s fight against the “atheistic Communists.” Archbishop Roncalli was unimpressed and replied, “What shall I tell them about the millions of Jews your countrymen are murdering in Germany and in Poland?”¹²⁰

- During World War II, Father Jonas of Vidukle, Lithuania, used his church to hide 30 Jewish children. The Nazis discovered that Jewish children were hiding there, and they battered down the door of the church and entered. Father Jonas told the Nazis that they would have to kill him before they could harm the children. The Nazis murdered Father Jonas, and then they murdered the children.¹²¹

- Many people, including religious, resisted Nazi efforts to commit genocide against the Jews in Italy. Frequently, Jewish children were hidden in convents and monasteries. At a Carmine convent, unfortunately, Nazis discovered 50 Jewish children and took away most of them. Only two were saved — the mother superior succeeded in hiding two little girls under her skirts.¹²²

- Movie director Steven Spielberg is Jewish, and some of his relatives survived being in concentration camps during the Holocaust. As a three-year-old boy, he learned to count by reading the numbers tattooed on a relative’s forearm.¹²³

Humility

- The Dalai Lama gave a series of lectures in Tucson, Arizona. Although his English is good, he lectured in Tibetan about Shantideva’s *Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life*, and a translator spoke in English. At one point, the Dalai Lama told the translator, “You’re mistaken. That’s not what I said.” They then argued about a sentence by Shantideva — the Dalai Lama thought the sentence was “She said that to him,” but the translator thought the sentence was “He said that to her.” After discussing the sentence for a while, the Dalai Lama looked the sentence up, and then he started laughing and admitted, “Oh, I made a mistake.” Although he was lecturing in front of 1,200 people, he freely admitted that the mistake was his.¹²⁴

- One day Pope John XXIII went to a nursing home that was run by nuns so he could visit a dying prelate. The nun who answered the door was understandably astonished to see the Pope, and she almost fainted. However, the Pope told her, “No need to be alarmed, Sister. After all, I’m only the Pope.”¹²⁵

Husbands and Wives

- The private Groucho (real name: Julius) Marx was as funny as the public Groucho Marx. His first wedding was like a scene out of a Marx Brothers movie. Harpo hid behind a potted plant and made it appear to be walking around the room. When the minister said, “We are gathered here in holy matrimony,” Groucho’s response was, “It may be holy to you, Reverend, but we have other ideas.” And when the minister asked, “Do you, Julius, take this woman to be your

lawful wedded wife,” Groucho replied, “Well, we’ve gone this far. We might as well go through with it.”¹²⁶

- A young, newlywed Hindu couple came to Mother Teresa and gave her much money, which they had saved by not celebrating their wedding, not buying wedding clothes, and not going on a honeymoon. When Mother Teresa asked why they had made such a sacrifice, they answered, “We love each other so much that we wanted to share the joy of our love with those you serve.”¹²⁷

- An atheist heckled Billy Sunday during a sermon by interrupting with questions designed to embarrass believers. For example, the heckler asked, “Who was Cain’s wife?” Mr. Sunday responded, “I honor every seeker after the truth. But I should like to warn this man that he shouldn’t risk salvation by too many inquiries after other men’s wives.”¹²⁸

- Bob Hope’s wife, Dolores, is a devout Catholic. Once, she got on a plane in which two priests were seated in front of her and three nuns were seated behind her. Charlie Lee, one of Mr. Hope’s many writers, was also on the plane. He asked Mr. Hope, “Why can’t she take out regular insurance, like the rest of us?”¹²⁹

Hypocrites

- Reed Smoot was one of the first Senators from Utah. He was a Mormon, and it was rumored that he was a polygamist, although he wasn’t (however, he did support polygamy when that was Mormon doctrine). Mr. Smoot’s swearing-in was delayed by a filibuster until another Senator looked at all the philanderers in the Senate, then said, “Gentlemen, I would rather have a polygamist who does not polyg, than a monogamist who does not monog.”¹³⁰

- A nobleman told the Bishop of Meaux, Jacques Bossuet, that he didn’t go to church because too many hypocrites were there. Bishop Bossuet responded, “Don’t let that keep you away, my lord, because there is always room for one more.”¹³¹

Ignorance

- Religion in the American frontier was often almost nonexistent, save for circuit-riding preachers, who were sometimes astonished by the ignorance of the people they were trying to teach. The Reverend Freeborn Garrettson, a Methodist circuit rider, asked a frontiersman, “Do you know Jesus Christ?” The frontiersman answered, “Sir, I do not know where the gentleman lives.” To test a young boy’s knowledge of Scripture, another circuit rider asked, “Who killed Abel?” The young boy answered, “I didn’t know he was dead. We just moved here last week.”¹³²

- Rabbi Isaac Elhanan Spektor received a visit from a young man who was wondering whether he should give up his belief in God and become a free thinker. Rabbi Spektor asked whether the young man had read the Talmud. The answer came back: No. Had he read Maimonides? No. Had he read the Torah? No. Had he read Moses Mendelssohn? No. The Rabbi sighed and said, “Young man, you are too ignorant to call yourself a free thinker. You should call yourself by your correct name — an ordinary ignoramus.”¹³³

Marriage

- After a man and woman of Sidon had been married for 20 years without having any children, they were required by law to get a divorce. Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai told them that just as they had had a festive banquet when they got married, so now they should have one as they got a divorce. At the banquet, the husband told his wife that although he was divorcing her, she could have whatever she valued most in what had been their house. That night, as he slept, his divorced wife ordered her servants to remove him from his house to the house of her father. When her divorced husband woke up, he asked, “Where am I?” She told him, and when he asked why he was there, she replied, “Don’t you remember your telling me last night that I may take with me whatever I like best when I return to my father’s house? Nothing in the whole world do I like better than you!” They then went to Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai and remarried. (This time, she became pregnant, after the good Rabbi had prayed for her.)¹³⁴

- A couple of Jewish painters were working inside a Catholic church when they became intrigued by a ritual. After asking what the ritual was, they learned that a nun was being prepared for the ceremony of professional — a ceremony that could be likened to a wedding between the nun and Jesus. After asking permission, the Jews were allowed to be present at the actual ceremony, but a surprised priest asked what they were doing there. The Jews replied, “We’re relatives of the groom.”¹³⁵

- A Quaker thought about proposing, but he hesitated because he wanted to make the right decision. However, while having tea at his loved one’s house, he asked for half a cup of tea, and she filled his cup exactly half full. This so pleased the Quaker that he proposed. Years after they were married, his wife asked him why he had decided to propose to her. He explained the matter of the half a cup of tea, and she replied, “I remember that afternoon well — there wasn’t another drop in the teapot.”¹³⁶

- Abraham Lincoln liked to tell a story about a soon-to-be justice of the peace who gave a marriage certificate to two people although he had not yet been authorized to hold office. The “marriage” certificate read: “To all the world Greeting. Know ye that John Smith and Peggy Myres is hereby certified to go together and do as old folks does, anywhere inside coperas precinct, and when my commission comes I am to marry them good and date em back to kivver accidents.”¹³⁷

- In the old days, women frequently died in childbirth, and their husbands remarried quickly. Only a few months after his first wife had died, Methodist preacher Joshua Thomas, aka “the Parson of the Islands,” proposed marriage to a young woman. She asked, “Isn’t this rather sudden?” He replied, “But I’ve had my eye on you for quite a while.”¹³⁸

- After Sydney Smith was married, he tossed six worn teaspoons into his bride’s lap, and then he explained that he had just fulfilled one of his marriage vows — he had endowed his wife with all his worldly goods.¹³⁹

Mass

- Kathleen O’Connell Chesto tells this story about attending Mass with her two-year-old daughter, Liz. In his homily, the priest described Solomon’s Temple as “magnificent.” Liz recognized the word, so she stood up and told the congregation, “My Daddy calls me magnificent.” The priest stopped his homily and said to the congregation, “Isn’t that what being a Christian is all about? Each of us can say that we have a Daddy Who thinks that we are magnificent.”¹⁴⁰

- Three major league umpires, Tom Gorman, Augie Donatelli, and Artie Gore, went to Mass. Afterward, the three umpires and the priest, Father John, were standing outside the church when Milwaukee shortstop Johnny Logan walked by. Father John said to Mr. Logan, “How nice to see you. Do you see my three umpires? They all went to Mass and hit the rail. How about you?” Mr. Logan replied, “Father, they need it.”¹⁴¹

- Pope John XXIII was the son of winegrowers, and he knew and appreciated good wine. After tasting some new wine from the Vatican vineyards, he joked with the papal gardener, “Enrico, do me the favor of not allowing any of the priests who come here to taste this wine. The Monsignors will all want to have it for their Masses, and then they might want to say Mass four or five times a day!”¹⁴²

Money

- As a Methodist preacher in Texas, Edwin Porter attended Annual Conference each year, where he found out to which church he would be assigned for the following year and where stewards voted on allocating funds to worthy projects. One such project was the bishops’ fund, but when discussion arose on this important topic, one steward didn’t hear the final letter of the word “fund.” The steward stood up and said, “Now, Brother Porter, I want to be a good member of the church and pay my part, but there’s one thing I’m not willing to contribute to — that’s the bishop’s fun. Why can’t the bishop pay for his own fun?”¹⁴³

- Comedian Eddie Cantor was getting ready to star at one of the many benefits he supported to raise money for Israel. At this particular benefit, the admission was the purchase of a \$1,000 Israel bond per person. On an elevator, Mr. Cantor happened to overhear an elderly couple talking about the benefit, which they were going to attend. The husband whispered to the wife, “Think of it. It’s costing us \$2,000 for this dinner today.” The wife whispered back to the husband, “See, I’m telling you, Sam, it’s costing more and more to eat out these days.”¹⁴⁴

- Lillian Baylis of the Old Vic and Sadler’s Wells knew how to get people to work for her cheap. First, she would get on her knees and pray to God: “Please, God, send me a good tenor. And let him be cheap.” After the tenor had asked for more money than she was prepared to pay, she would say, “You are asking for more money? Just a minute, dear. I will have to ask God.” As the tenor stood in her office, she would get on her knees again and pray to God, and then she would stand up and tell the tenor, “I’m sorry, dear. God says ‘No.’”¹⁴⁵

- Mulla Nasrudin was sitting upstairs when a beggar knocked at his door. Nasrudin poked his head outside the window and asked, “What do you want?” The beggar replied, “Come downstairs and I will tell you.” Nasrudin went downstairs, where the beggar asked Nasrudin for alms. Nasrudin said, “Follow me,” then he and the beggar went upstairs, where Nasrudin answered, “No.” “Why did you drag me upstairs?” asked the beggar. Nasrudin replied, “For the same reason you dragged me downstairs.”¹⁴⁶

- W.C. Fields got his first paying juggling job in 1891, when the deacon of a Methodist church agreed to pay him and a friend 30 cents to perform their act at a festival hosted by the church. However, after the act, the Methodist deacon refused to pay the money. This made Mr. Fields and his friend so angry that they stole 31 umbrellas from the Methodist church and pawned them for \$1.20. After this unfortunate experience, Mr. Fields formed the resolution to do his act only for Baptists.¹⁴⁷

- Gregor Mendel, whose research on peas led to the development of the science of genetics, joined the Order of Saint Augustine and eventually became the abbot at his monastery in Brunn, Moravia. One of the reasons the other monks elected him as abbot was that the government taxed the monastery each time it elected a new abbot and therefore it preferred to elect young abbots, such as the 45-year-old Father Mendel, who would probably live for many years.¹⁴⁸

- Elias Hicks, a Quaker farmer, once had an abundant wheat crop when his neighbors' fields did poorly. Speculators knew that the price of wheat would rise, and they offered to buy Mr. Hicks' crop at a high price, but he declined to sell. Later, when his neighbors began to suffer from the effects of the poor growing season, Mr. Hicks sold them wheat — but at the normal price, not at the higher price.¹⁴⁹

Chapter 4: From Monks to Preachers

Monks

- According to legend, the monks who studied at the Shaolin Temple had a unique graduation ceremony. They were sent to the temple's maze of underground passageways and had to find their way out by passing many tests. In one test, the monk came to a wall on which were hanging many weapons, a broom, and a sign saying, "Choose one." The monk would select one, and then go into the next room, which turned out to be filled with scorpions. If the monk had chosen the broom, he was able to simply sweep the scorpions out of his way. Getting through the room was much more difficult if the monk had chosen a sword. At the end of the underground passageways, one final door needed to be opened, and the only way to open it was to use one's bare arms to lift and move a searingly hot cauldron decorated on each side with dragon designs. In moving the cauldron, the monk's graduation diploma — the figures of the dragon — were burned into his arms.¹⁵⁰

- Two monks and a woman crossed a river on a ferry. One monk ogled the woman, then he winked to his companion, so the woman slapped him. The monk then closed his eyes, but a few minutes later the woman slapped him again. The monk said, "What have I done wrong? I had my eyes closed!" The woman said, "You have been thinking about me with your eyes closed — and that is worse than ogling me with your eyes open!"¹⁵¹

Mothers

- Before one seeks truth in faraway places, one ought to find the truth that is available at home. Yang Pu wished to study Buddhism under a great Buddhist teacher, so he left his home and went to Sichuan Province. However, he met an old man to whom he confided his ambition. But the old man asked, "Wouldn't it be better to seek Buddha rather than a teacher?" "Of course," said Yang Pu, "but where is Buddha to be found?" The old man said, "Go home. When you see a person wearing a blanket and with shoes on the wrong feet, that person is Buddha." Yang Pu returned home, where his mother, who was not fully dressed, heard him. She was so happy that he was home that in order to run to greet him she threw a blanket around herself and put on her shoes so hurriedly that she put them on the wrong feet.¹⁵²

- When Dovid Goldwasser acted as Rabbi at a summer camp in Poland for Jewish adults, he met many people who had stories to tell about the Nazis and the death camps. One man, Boruch Segal, told about being lined up to be deported to Buchenwald by the Nazis. A mother in line, who was not observant as a Jew, saw a Rabbi and ran over to him so he could bless her infant daughter. The Rabbi blessed her daughter, saying, "May your daughter live a long life and may she one day become a leader of her community." After telling this story to Rabbi Goldwasser, Mr. Segal pointed to a woman nearby — a leader of one of the groups at the camp — and said, "*She* was that baby."¹⁵³

- When Kathleen O'Connell Chesto, a Christian, was a young girl, she looked into a mirror and complained about a perceived lack of beauty. Her mother overheard her complaints, then told her, "Don't you dare criticize my handiwork!"¹⁵⁴

Movies

- One of the studio heads at Paramount invited Groucho Marx to a screening of *Samson and Delilah*, starring the muscular Victor Mature and the beautiful Dorothy Lamarr, then the studio head asked Groucho how he liked the movie. Groucho pointed out the one glaring fault the movie had: “No picture can hold my interest where the leading man’s bust is bigger than the leading lady’s.” For a long time thereafter, Groucho wasn’t invited to screenings at Paramount.¹⁵⁵

- At the end of the movie *Schindler’s List*, many Jews saved by Oskar Schindler are shown placing stones on his burial marker. This is a Jewish tradition — the stones symbolize that the wind will not blow away the memory of this man.¹⁵⁶

Nazis

- One form of resistance against the Nazis was the telling of jokes. (The powerful never like to be mocked.) In one story, Nazi propagandist Paul Joseph Goebbels toured a school where he asked the children for patriotic slogans. One student shouted, “*Heil Hitler!*” Goebbels was pleased and said, “Very good.” Another student shouted, “*Deutschland über alles.*” Goebbels was again pleased, but asked, “How about a stronger slogan than these?” A small boy raised his hand, then declared, “Our people shall live forever.” “Excellent,” Goebbels said. “That is indeed a stronger slogan than the others. What’s your name, little boy?” The boy replied, “Israel Goldberg.”¹⁵⁷

- Billy Wilder, the Jewish-American film director, served with the United States Army Psychological Warfare Division during World War II. After the war, some Germans wrote him for permission to put on a play depicting the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. After investigating the Germans, Mr. Wilder discovered that they had been either storm troopers or members of the Gestapo. Therefore, Mr. Wilder said that he would give them permission to put on the play — as long as they used real nails.¹⁵⁸

- Josef Müller was a Catholic priest in Grossdungen who was sentenced to death for telling an anti-Nazi joke. Father Müller told about a dying German soldier who asked to have a photograph of Adolf Hitler placed on one side of him and a photograph of Gestapo head Hermann Goering placed on the other. When he was asked why, he replied, “That way I can die like Jesus — between two thieves.”¹⁵⁹

Peace

- Betty Williams was born in Belfast, Northern Ireland, and in general she was in favor of the activities of the Irish Republican Army until the day she saw a young British soldier get shot and die. As he lay dying, she knelt beside him and they prayed together. In 1976, she and Mairead Corrigan won the Nobel Peace Prize for their efforts to stop the violence in Northern Ireland.¹⁶⁰

- John Roberts, a Quaker in New Jersey, was going by the market place, when he stooped to tie his shoe. As he did so, a man hit him in the back and said, “Take that for Jesus’ sake!” Mr. Roberts didn’t look back at the man; instead, he merely straightened up and said, “So I do,” then continued on his way. A couple of days later, the man who had hit him begged to be forgiven.¹⁶¹

People with Handicaps

- As a person with cerebral palsy, which affects his motor skills, Cordell Brown learned to put other people at ease. At a church camp, Mr. Brown knew that the other campers were uneasy with his cerebral palsy. After unsuccessfully trying several times to plug in his electric razor, he turned to the other campers and said, “Just call me speed and coordination.” The other campers laughed; after that, Mr. Brown became friends with them.¹⁶²

- People with mental retardation can be religious, too. To prepare for her Bat Mitzvah, Leslie Fish, who became mentally retarded after suffering from meningitis as a baby, studied Hebrew for five years — which she says was “hard.” She wrote her own speech for the ceremony; in her speech, she talked about being responsible for her actions.¹⁶³

Perspective

- Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach took his message to everyone, including the very poor and even the mentally disturbed. He delivered a talk to Manhattan’s Diamond Dealers’ Club, where a man asked, “Shlomo, we love your music and your Hasidic tales are also very nice, but there’s one thing that bothers some of us and which we just can’t understand: Why are you always so busy with low-lives and crazies?” Rabbi Shlomo replied that he knew he was among diamond experts, and he asked if any of them had ever thrown away a million-dollar diamond because it was a diamond in the rough. The diamond dealers laughed and said that none of them would ever do that. Rabbi Shlomo then said, “My sweetest friends, please try to remember this because it’s the most important thing to know in life. Everyone — *everyone* — is a diamond in the rough.”¹⁶⁴

- A woman continually cried, no matter what the weather was like. If it rained, she cried. If it was sunny, she cried. When she was asked why she continually cried, she explained that she had two daughters. One daughter was married to a shoe salesman and the other daughter was married to an umbrella salesman. The woman cried when it was raining because no one would go out into the rain and buy shoes, and she cried when it was sunny because no one would bother to buy an umbrella. A wise person asked her why she didn’t smile when it rained because it meant that people would buy umbrellas, and why she didn’t smile when it was sunny because it meant that people would buy shoes. After that, no matter what the weather was like, the old woman smiled.¹⁶⁵

Poor

- The motherhouse of Mother Teresa’s Missionaries of Charity had no stoves, no washing machines, no electric fans, no air conditioners. Mother Teresa explained, “I do not want them. The poor we serve have none.” When she first had the idea of starting the Missionaries of Charity, she even thought that she would allow the nuns to eat only the kind of food the very poorest people ate — rice and salt. However, she asked advice from Mother Dengal, who told her, “How do you expect your sisters to work, if their bodies receive no sustenance?” As a result of the advice, Mother Teresa allowed her nuns to eat well, but to eat only simple food.¹⁶⁶

- During years of interviewing children for his TV program *House Party*, Art Linkletter occasionally interviewed an underprivileged child. (Mr. Linkletter himself grew up in a poor family. He writes in *Kids Say the Darnest Things!* that if the church hadn’t donated dinners to his family, holidays such as Thanksgiving and Christmas would have been bleak.) In one

interview, he asked an impoverished child, “What makes a happy home?” The little boy answered, “A steady paycheck.”¹⁶⁷

- In an inn, a rich man mistook Rebbe Zusia for a beggar and mistreated him. However, when he discovered that it was Rebbe Zusia he was mistreating, and not a beggar, he asked Zusia for forgiveness. Rebbe Zusia replied, “You have treated Zusia with respect; it is a poor beggar that you have mistreated. Go and ask forgiveness from beggars everywhere.”¹⁶⁸

Practical Jokes

- Lorenzo Dow was a traveling evangelist in the old days. At a camp meeting, he met a preacher who had a habit of ending every sermon with the cry, “Hurry up, Gabriel, and blow your horn!” Therefore, the Reverend Dow hired a boy to hide in a tall tree before the preacher’s sermon, and at the conclusion of the sermon, while hidden by the tree’s leaves, to blow on a hunting horn.¹⁶⁹

- Gregor Mendel, whose work with peas led to the development of the science of genetics, was a priest in the Order of Saint Augustine. Priests aren’t supposed to have children, but Father Mendel enjoyed shocking visitors to his monastery by telling them, “Now I am going to show you my children.” He would then lead the visitors to his garden and show them his pea plants.¹⁷⁰

- Mark Twain listened to a sermon, then he told the preacher that he had at home a book that contained every word of the preacher’s sermon. This astonished and worried the preacher because he did not want to be guilty of even unintentional plagiarism. He asked to see a copy of the book, and Mr. Twain sent it to him — it was a dictionary.¹⁷¹

Prayer

- Art Rooney felt that he had gotten a good price when he bought the Pittsburgh Steelers partly because his two sisters were nuns and his brother was a priest. Another person with a religious connection was Joe Paterno, coach of Penn State. When Penn State was having a big winning streak, his mother would listen to the games, and if Penn State was losing, she would go into the bathroom with her rosary and pray. In the Orange Bowl, Kansas led Penn State for most of the game, and with Mr. Paterno’s mother in the bathroom praying, Penn State scored to come within one point, 14-13. Mr. Paterno decided to go for a win with a two-point conversion, but the attempt failed. With his mother still praying, a referee called a penalty on Kansas for having too many players on the field, and on its second attempt, Penn State made the two-point conversion to win by one point. After the game, Mr. Paterno received a telegram from Mr. Rooney: “Congratulations. I’ll trade you my brother and two sisters for your mother, straight up.”¹⁷²

- A deeply religious woman was shocked when her 14-year-old son revealed that he was gay, and so she did what deeply religious people should do — she prayed for guidance. Very quickly, she received an answer to her prayers. God said to her, “You know what a gay person is like; you lived with one for 14 years.” After hearing that, she decided that the problem was not homosexuality, but some people’s negative reaction to homosexuality. She says, “From that moment on, I never shed another tear that my son was gay. I may have shed a lot of tears for how he was treated, but not because he was gay.” (The woman’s husband quickly accepted his son’s homosexuality, saying simply, “He’s a nice boy, and I love him.”)¹⁷³

- In 1962, in *Engel v. Vitale*, the United States Supreme Court ruled against allowing a nondenominational prayer to be recited in New York Public Schools. It was a controversial decision, but many people supported it. President John F. Kennedy expressed the opinion that children could learn about prayer much more meaningfully at home and in church. Many religious leaders expressed the opinion that nondenominational prayers, such as the one that had been recited in the New York City schools, were bland, vague, and almost meaningless — hardly the stuff of real prayer.¹⁷⁴
- For much of his political career, Alabama politician George Wallace was a strict segregationist, but eventually he changed and admitted that he had been wrong about segregation. In 1987, Reverend Jesse Jackson went to Mr. Wallace’s home, and Mr. Wallace asked, “Would you pray for me?” They joined hands, and Reverend Jackson prayed for him. According to Mr. Wallace’s son, both Mr. Wallace and Reverend Jackson had tears in their eyes. At the end of the prayer, Mr. Wallace told Reverend Jackson, “Jesse, I love you.” Reverend Jackson replied, “Governor, I love you, too.”¹⁷⁵
- In 1982, Lebanon and Israel were in conflict. Mother Teresa traveled to Lebanon, where she asked to be allowed to take care of disabled children still present in hospitals that had been bombed. The authorities did not see what she would be able to accomplish during a time of fighting, so they asked her to wait for a ceasefire to start doing her good works. Mother Teresa prayed, and the very next day a ceasefire was declared. She then took the disabled children to East Beirut, where the Missionaries of Charity had a home and could take care of them.¹⁷⁶
- In the first half of the 20th century, Ed Diddle coached the football team of Western Kentucky State Teachers College — the Praying Colonels. Mr. Diddle once coached his team captain in how to say a prayer properly — one should ask for one’s team to give a good performance on the playing field, but one should not ask for victory. Before the game, the team captain started to pray, but in the middle of the prayer, Mr. Diddle interrupted: “Damn it! I told you not to ask for victory!”¹⁷⁷
- Rabbi Bunam prayed quietly, but in his youth Rabbi Hanokh of Alexandria prayed loudly with many gestures. Rabbi Hanokh was praying loudly when Rabbi Bunam entered the synagogue. Immediately, Rabbi Hanokh grew quiet, then he told himself that he should be concerned about God, not about Rabbi Bunam, so he began to pray loudly again. After Rabbi Hanokh’s loud prayer, Rabbi Bunam told him that the prayer especially pleased him.¹⁷⁸
- Comedian George Burns was not an observant Jew as an adult because of something that happened when he was a child. His grandmother died, and his family needed to have a *minyan* — a group of 10 Jews to pray and hold services. Unfortunately, his family was able to get only seven Jews — so they had to pay three other Jews to pray in the *minyan*. Mr. Burns says, “That stuck with me all my life. I couldn’t imagine anyone getting paid for praying.”¹⁷⁹
- In 1933, an earthquake struck Los Angeles. Two members of the New York Giants organization — manager Bill Terry and club secretary Jim Tierney — were rooming together. When the quake struck, Mr. Tierney, a devout Catholic, knelt and prayed. Mr. Terry, who was not a devout Catholic, also knelt, saying, “I don’t know what you’re saying, Tierney, but it goes for me, too.”¹⁸⁰

- George Washington said grace at his table although a clergyman was dining with him. After the clergyman had left, Mr. Washington's wife told him that he should have asked the clergyman to say grace. Mr. Washington expressed regret, then added, "The reverend gentleman will at least be assured that we are not entirely graceless at Mount Vernon."¹⁸¹
- A little girl had been naughty, so she was sent to her room for a quiet time. Afterward, all smiles, she returned to her family, saying, "I prayed to God." "That's good," said her mother. "Did you pray that God would help you be a good girl?" "No," she replied. "I prayed that God would help you put up with me."¹⁸²
- When Mark Twain was dying, a relative wrote him to say that she had asked some nuns to pray for him. Mr. Twain wrote back, "I am grateful for the prayers of those good nuns and for yours; they have already answered themselves in giving me a deep pleasure."¹⁸³
- Edward Everett Hale used to be Chaplain of the United States Senate. He was asked, "When you look at the state of our country, do you pray for the Senators in your charge?" He replied, "No — when I look at our Senators, I pray for our country."¹⁸⁴
- Comedian Lou Costello's mother was Catholic, and she often prayed in the Catholic Church. However, on occasion she also prayed in a nearby synagogue, saying, "It's closer to home, and I can pray there just as well."¹⁸⁵
- If you ever watch gardeners, you will realize that a common weed sometimes accomplishes what God does not — get people on their knees.¹⁸⁶

Preachers

- Lyndon Baines Johnson used to enjoy telling a story about a man who habitually napped during church services. One day, the preacher got tired of the man's napping, so he told the congregation, "If you want to go to Heaven, please stand up." Everyone in the congregation — except the sleeping man — stood up. After the preacher asked everyone to sit down, he said in his normal voice, "If you want to go to Hell," then he shouted, "STAND UP!" The sleeping man woke up and immediately jumped to his feet, only to look around and see that the other members of the congregation were sitting. So the man looked at the preacher and said, "I don't know what we're voting on, but it looks like you and I are the only ones in favor of it."¹⁸⁷
- Some people go to great lengths to protect the health of their pastor. Wesleyan preacher William Woughter received a telephone call from a woman who wanted him to go to a hospital and pray with her father. The woman explained that she had gotten his name from a relative who attended his church, and she would have asked her own pastor to pray with her father — except that her father had a highly communicable disease that she didn't want her own pastor to catch. Yes, Pastor William did go to the hospital to pray with the woman's father, and no, he didn't catch the highly communicable disease.¹⁸⁸
- When St. Patrick was speaking about the Trinity — the doctrine that there is only one God, who is Father, Son, and Holy Ghost — someone asked what sense it made to believe in only one God and yet believe God is Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. St. Patrick bent down and plucked a shamrock — a leaf of the clover plant. He displayed it and showed that it was only one leaf, yet it had three parts. The three parts of the one shamrock leaf correspond to the three parts of the one God. Since then, the shamrock has been a symbol of St. Patrick.¹⁸⁹

- Preacher George Whitefield and a friend were staying at an inn where they were disturbed by gamblers in the next room. Mr. Whitefield felt that gambling was a sin and so he went next door and remonstrated with the gamblers about their behavior, then he returned to his room and prepared for bed. His criticisms had no effect, for the people next door continued gambling, so his friend asked what he had received for his trouble. Mr. Whitefield replied, “A soft pillow,” and then he went to sleep.¹⁹⁰
- The early 19th-century Philadelphia lawyer Nicholas Waln was a Quaker. Of course, he lived long before air conditioning. On a stifling hot day, he served as head of a meeting and he chose to end the meeting very early. This shocked his fellow Quakers. When they asked why he had ended the meeting so early, he referred to the words of the prophet Hosea: “I desire mercy and not burnt offerings.”¹⁹¹
- As a young reporter, H.L. Mencken covered each Sunday the sermon given by Cardinal Gibbons. Very quickly, he learned that the Cardinal gave essentially the same sermon each Sunday, so one Sunday he didn’t bother to attend the sermon, but merely sent in the usual copy to his newspaper. That happened to be the Sunday that Cardinal Gibbons gave a rousing sermon that ended up on the front page.¹⁹²
- Reverend Andrew Jumper was the pastor of Central Presbyterian Church in Clayton, Missouri, and one year he was hired to go to spring training to give weekly services to professional baseball players. After one sermon, a player told him, “God gave you a great sermon today.” Reverend Jumper replied, “Yes, but I want you to know I typed it.”¹⁹³
- When he was elderly, Church of Christ preacher T.B. Larimore preached the same sermon two nights in a row. When his wife told him, “You preached that sermon last night,” he was unperturbed and replied, “It’s a good one.”¹⁹⁴

Chapter 5: From Prejudice to Zen

Prejudice

- The mother of James Augustine Healy was Eliza Clark, a black slave in Georgia. Mr. Healy became a priest, and in 1875, he became second bishop of Portland, Maine. Occasionally, his race caused awkward moments. While hearing one young girl's confession, Mr. Healy was surprised when she stopped and said, "I can't tell you the rest of my sins." When Mr. Healy asked why, she replied, "Because it's something I said against the bishop." After finally learning that she had said that the bishop was as black as the devil, Mr. Healy told her, "Oh, my child, don't say the bishop is as black as the devil. You can say he's as black as coal, or as black as the ace of spades, but don't say he's as black as the devil!" During another confession, a young boy told Mr. Healy, "... and I called the bishop a nigger!" Mr. Healy opened the confessional curtain so the boy could see him and said, "Well, son, is there anything wrong with being a nigger? Take a good look at your bishop. Is there anything wrong with being a nigger?"¹⁹⁵

- Butterfly McQueen, an African-American actress, played Jack Benny's maid, but eventually she quit, apparently because some people felt she was demeaning herself by playing a maid — although she was making a large salary *playing* a maid at a time when many people of color were making a small salary *being* maids. Mr. Benny protested, "Good grief! I'm paying Butterfly \$750 a week [big money at the time]. Where else can she get that kind of money? Besides, everybody loves her. I don't think she's demeaning herself." Mr. Benny paused, thought a moment about the other woman on his show, Mary Livingston, his on-radio girlfriend and real-life wife, then he asked, "What does Butterfly want to do — play Mary's sister?" A moment later, he smiled and answered his own question, "No. She wouldn't want to do *that*. Mary's Jewish."¹⁹⁶

- Country comedian Jerry Clower grew up in Mississippi at a time when white people grew up with the attitude that they were better than black people. Fortunately, he was able to unlearn bigotry. When black student James Meredith enrolled in the University of Mississippi, the state government did not encourage citizens to keep control of their hatred. Disturbances broke out, fires were set on campus, and two people died. Mr. Clower, a Christian, got down on his knees in his bedroom and prayed, "Oh, dear God, if my attitude has caused some people to react to this situation like this, I hereby re-dedicate my life. I'm going to change because I don't want to encourage an attitude that would cause people to break the law, kill folks, or keep a qualified student from entering the University of Mississippi."¹⁹⁷

- At one time, actors and theaters were regarded as sinful. After an actor named George Holland died, the great 19th-century actor Joseph Jefferson went to a church in New York to arrange for a funeral, but the clergyman told him that actors could not have funerals in that church; however, he did say that "a little church around the corner" was willing to hold funerals for actors. "The Little Church Around the Corner" is the Church of the Transfiguration, located on East Twenty-ninth Street. The critic Edward Wagenknecht says that it is "a living testimonial against bigotry and a living protest against the tendency to regard human beings as members of groups rather than as themselves."¹⁹⁸

- “Shoeless Joe” Jackson was tossed out of professional baseball after the 1919 Black Sox scandal, when he was charged with helping the Black Sox throw the World Series, although he batted .375 in the series. This disgrace stayed with him for the rest of his life. Back home in South Carolina, he and his wife, Katie, offered to buy an organ for the Brandon Methodist Church they attended, but the church turned down the money on account of the scandal, despite having accepted tithes from the couple for many years. Therefore, “Shoeless Joe” and Katie began attending the Brandon Baptist Church and bought it an organ.¹⁹⁹

- In 1928, Tom Connally and Earle B. Mayfield ran against each other in a campaign to be elected to the United States Senate. The Ku Klux Klan, which was powerful in Texas in those days and which supported Mr. Mayfield, started rumors that in San Antonio Mr. Connally’s daughter was attending a Catholic convent school. In addition to calling the KKK “un-American and devil-possessed,” Mr. Connally showed that the KKK were liars by taking his only child, a son, to his political rallies, where he introduced him by saying, “Now, folks, this is my daughter, who is attending a Catholic convent school for girls in San Antonio.”²⁰⁰

- Hung-jen, the Fifth Patriarch, met Hui-Neng, who was to become the Sixth Patriarch and who wanted to study with Hung-jen. The Fifth Patriarch asked, “Who are you, where are you from, and what do you want?” The Sixth Patriarch-to-be answered, “I am a commoner, I come from the south, and I have come here to become a Buddha.” The Fifth Patriarch decided to test him by asking, “How can a southerner and a barbarian ever become a Buddha?” The Sixth Patriarch-to-be replied, “The Buddha-nature knows of no north or south, no monk or barbarian.”²⁰¹

- When Muriel, a lesbian, was in high school, her first close friend was a girl named Millie. After Millie was missing for a couple of days, Muriel discovered that she was absent from school because of a Jewish holiday. Muriel had not realized that Millie was Jewish before, and that got her thinking about all the things that ignorant people say about people of other races, religions, or creeds. She felt that Millie was just like her, with many ideas in common, so she lost her prejudice fast.²⁰²

- Some Puritans absolutely despised the Native Americans, even though the Native Americans had helped the earliest European immigrants survive in the new land. Cotton Mather, a prominent Puritan preacher, told his congregation that it was “the duty of good Christians to exterminate” the Native Americans. In addition to fighting the Native Americans, the Puritans occasionally captured some Native Americans and sold them into slavery.²⁰³

- During the Jim Crow days, a black couple wanted to move into a white-only neighborhood. Hearing this, an outraged Catholic wrote a petition to keep the black couple out, and he asked his next-door neighbor, a Protestant, to sign it. The Protestant, however, declined to sign the petition. Puzzled, the Catholic asked why. The Protestant replied, “Petitions don’t work. Ten years ago, I signed a petition to keep *you* from moving into the neighborhood.”²⁰⁴

- A black man went to a “whites only” church and was turned away at the door and told to go to the black church and pray to God there. The black man went back to the white church the following Sunday and said, “I took your advice. I prayed to God and He told me not to feel bad that I had been kept out of your church — He said that He’s been trying to get into your church for years, and He hasn’t made it yet.”²⁰⁵

- Jewish comedian Lenny Bruce was in a diner on Sunset Boulevard when a tough-looking man got off his motorcycle, walked in, and said, “I’m gonna kill me every Jew in this place.” Mr. Bruce immediately began singing, “When Israel was in Egypt land, let my people go.” He got the worst of the fight, but he amused police officers with his comedy when they arrived to stop the disturbance.²⁰⁶

- Morris K. Udall, a Mormon and later a politician from Arizona, ran into bigotry while serving in the Army. An Army Major asked, “Morris? What kind of a name is that?” Later, Mr. Udall received a letter from “Judge Levi Udall,” and immediately the Major thought that he was Jewish, so the Major began to treat him exactly like he treated all of his Jewish officers — badly.²⁰⁷

Public Speaking

- In the old days, many people regarded playing cards as irreligious. Susan B. Anthony, a Quaker, gave a speech in which she introduced a Methodist friend of hers, the Reverend Anna Howard Shaw, as her “right bower,” thinking that a right bower was a right-hand man and not knowing that a right bower is a leading card in the game of euchre. The audience laughed, mystifying Ms. Anthony, until the meaning of “right bower” was explained to her later. The next day Ms. Anthony again addressed the audience, and she said, “When I came to your town, I had been warned that you were a very religious lot of people. I wanted to impress upon you that Miss Shaw and I are religious, too. But I admit that when I told you she was my right bower I did not know what a right bower was. I have learned that since last night.” The audience laughed, then Ms. Anthony continued, “It interests me very much, however, to realize that every one of you seemed to know all about a right bower, and that I had to come to your good orthodox town to get that information.”²⁰⁸

- Cordell Brown says that having cerebral palsy can be an advantage in public speaking, which he has often done to raise money for Camp Echoing Hills, a camp he founded in Warsaw, Ohio, for adults with handicaps. Because the cerebral palsy affects his speech and coordination, no one can tell when Mr. Brown is nervous. He sometimes used to put his hands in his pockets at the beginning of his fund-raising speech, and then tell the audience, “I’ve got my hands in my pockets to start this presentation because by the end of the evening, I’ll have them in your pockets.” Of course, having cerebral palsy does have disadvantages. Early one Saturday morning, Mr. Brown was at a car wash when a police car pulled in with its lights flashing. Someone had seen Mr. Brown washing his car, noticed that he was uncoordinated (an effect of cerebral palsy), thought he was drunk, and called the police!²⁰⁹

- Some politicians change political parties. For example, Reverend W.H. Bill Alexander started out as a Democrat, but he changed his affiliation to Republican. In 1950, he ran against the junior senator from Oklahoma, A.S. Mike Monroney. Senator Monroney’s senior colleague, Bob Kerr, campaigned for him. In a devastating reference to Reverend Alexander, Senator Kerr said, “Now, this fellow Alexander one day said to his congregation, ‘After communion with the Almighty, I have decided to enter the Democratic primaries and run for the Senate.’ Well, soon afterward, Alexander switched over and won the Republican nomination. What I’d like to know is this: If the Lord told Bill Alexander to run as a Democrat, who then told him to run as a Republican?”²¹⁰

Respect

- As a young boy, while in the Potala Palace, the 14th Dalai Lama enjoyed looking at people in the Tibetan capital city, Lhasa, through his telescope. Sometimes he looked at the people in the prison at the base of the hill the palace was situated on. Whenever the prisoners noticed that the Dalai Lama was looking at them through the telescope, they knelt to show him respect.²¹¹

- When Rumi, the founder of the Sufi order known as the Whirling Dervishes, died, many Jews and Christians showed up at his funeral. The Muslims were surprised that these non-Muslims wanted to attend the funeral of an eminent Muslim saint and sage, but they explained the great respect that they had for Rumi, and so they were allowed to attend his funeral.²¹²

Sabbath

- Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach was an Orthodox Jew, and he never traveled by automobile on the Sabbath. Once, he was late for a Sabbath “happening” at a temple in Los Angeles. Night was falling, and he told the group he was traveling with that he had to get out and start walking because the Sabbath was starting. He and his group pulled their two cars over, got out, and started what turned out to be a 27-mile walk to the temple. News of their walk traveled quickly — a deejay called the Night Owl even interviewed Rabbi Shlomo and broadcast the interview during the walk — and several people joined them. At 4:30 a.m., they arrived at the temple. Rabbi Shlomo prayed, held the Friday night service, told stories, and taught Torah, and finally at 8:30 a.m. Saturday, he and his group sat down to the Sabbath meal. A person who was there said later, “For as long as I live, I will never forget that *Shabbos* with Shlomo Carlebach. Everyone who did that walk was transformed. We were a bunch of kids who didn’t know anything about *Shabbos* until we took that walk, and this is how he taught us. After witnessing Shlomo Carlebach keeping *Shabbos* with such passion, devotion, and fervor ... how could you not keep *Shabbos* after that?”²¹³

- British actress Constance Benson sometimes toured in Scotland, whose inhabitants took the Sabbath seriously. For example, when she checked into a rooming house on the Sabbath, she was locked in her room and warned not to raise the blinds, as the landlady didn’t want her neighbors to know that a “low play-actress” was staying in her house. Ms. Benson writes that the piano was locked up on the Sabbath, but “there was generally a cheerful aroma of whiskey about the house.”²¹⁴

- A Teamster with a problem went to his Rabbi: His occupation frequently made it impossible for him to attend Sabbath services. The Rabbi listened, then asked, “While you are working, do you carry poor passengers free of charge?” The Teamster said that yes, he did. The Rabbi next said, “Then you serve the Lord in your occupation just as faithfully as I do when I am in the synagogue.”²¹⁵

Saints

- One of the most famous slaves in history is St. Patrick, who was kidnapped at age 16 in Britannia and taken away by pirates to Hibernia, which we know today as Ireland. A chief named Miliuc bought him and made him a shepherd. For six years, Patrick remained a slave, until he heard a voice that told him, “Soon you will go to your own country. See, a ship is ready.” He then escaped and walked 200 miles to the seashore, where he found a ship that was willing to take him to home and freedom. Later, of course, he returned to bring Christianity to Ireland and became a saint.²¹⁶

- In 1431, English soldiers burned the French heroine Joan of Arc at the stake. After she died, the soldiers collected her ashes and threw them into the Seine River. However, the ashes of her heart were not thrown into the river because it had not burned even though the executioner swore that he had tried to burn it using charcoal, oil, and sulfur, in addition to the original wood. After she died, several people, including some English soldiers, became convinced that in killing Joan of Arc, they had killed a saint. In 1920, the Catholic Church made their fear a reality when it made her St. Joan.²¹⁷

Scandals

- Muhammad Ali is a Muslim. Christian televangelist Jimmy Swaggart tried to convert him, but Mr. Ali declined to be converted, saying, “Think about it. If Jimmy Swaggart can convert the best-known Muslim on earth back to Christianity, what would that do for Jimmy Swaggart?” Soon afterward, Swaggart was involved in a sex scandal. One of Mr. Ali’s friends suggested, “You really ought to write Jimmy Swaggart a letter, saying that God still loves him and Jimmy Swaggart should accept Allah as his only lord and savior.”²¹⁸

- Pope John XXIII often took walks through the Vatican Gardens. To preserve the privacy of the Popes, the cupola of St. Peter’s Basilica had been closed to the public, but the good Pope ordered it open to the public again, saying, “Why shouldn’t the faithful watch me? I don’t do anything that would give cause for scandal.”²¹⁹

Scripture

- One thing to learn from the Bible is that it is possible to bargain with God. When God wished to destroy Sodom, Abraham was upset because he did not think it was fair for the righteous to be destroyed with the wicked. Therefore, he asked God not to destroy Sodom if 50 righteous people were in the city. God agreed, then Abraham asked God not to destroy Sodom if 45 righteous people were in the city. God again agreed, so Abraham kept asking for mercy until God agreed not to destroy Sodom if only 10 righteous people were in the city. (Unfortunately, not even 10 righteous people were in Sodom, so it was destroyed — but not until the few righteous people had left the city.)²²⁰

- Two Rabbis, one of whom had many followers and one of whom had few followers, began talking. The first Rabbi, who had few followers, said that the other Rabbi had so many followers because the people thought that he could work wonders such as healing the sick and reading people’s minds, then the first Rabbi asked if the other Rabbi knew what he was thinking. “Of course,” said the Rabbi with many followers. “You are thinking of the verse in *Tehillim*, ‘I have placed Hashem [God] before me always.’” “No,” said the Rabbi with few followers. “I was not thinking of that verse.” The Rabbi who had many followers said, “Then that’s why you have so few followers.”²²¹

- A pastor read John 14:2 out of the New Testament, but he used a new translation that said, “In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places.” An elderly woman in the congregation stood up and said, “I want you to read that Scripture again — from my Bible. I’ve lived in old, run-down houses all my life, and I’m looking forward to that mansion!”²²²

- A homophobe said to lesbian comedian Judy Carter, “You can’t be gay and be a Christian.” She replied, “I must have a misprint in my Bible. It doesn’t say, ‘For God so loved the world

that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him, *except homosexuals*, should not perish but have everlasting life.”²²³

- When the Declaration of Independence was adopted on July 4, 1776, a man rang the bell of the meetinghouse to announce the news to the populace. On the Liberty Bell was engraved this quotation from the Bible: “Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof.”²²⁴

- Art Linkletter interviewed a little boy who was wearing a pin he had been awarded for going to Bible school for four years. When Mr. Linkletter asked him what his favorite Bible story was, the little boy answered, “Humpty Dumpty.”²²⁵

Thanksgiving

- A rich racist Southern woman decided to have some soldiers over for Thanksgiving dinner, so she called the captain of the local Army base and said that she had room at her table for three soldiers — “but don’t send over any Jews.” Thanksgiving arrived, there was a knock at her door, and she opened it to find three black soldiers on the front porch. “Oh, no,” she said, “there must be some mistake.” “No, ma’am,” said one of the soldiers politely. “Captain Abraham Goldstein never makes mistakes.”²²⁶

- Two small girls were best friends — one girl was Jewish and the other girl was Christian. At Christmas, the Christian girl’s grandfather asked her what her best friend had gotten for Christmas. The little girl replied, “She didn’t get anything for Christmas. You see, I’m Christmas, and she’s Chanukah. I’m Easter, and she’s Passover. But we’re both Thanksgiving.”²²⁷

Theater

- In the 19th century, many clergymen looked down upon theaters and actors. One clergyman wanted to see the great actor Edwin Booth, so he wrote him to ask if Mr. Booth could arrange a way so he could see him act at Booth’s Theater without there being a chance that a member of his congregation would see him. Mr. Booth wrote back, saying, “There is no door in my theater through which God cannot see.”²²⁸

- In rehearsals for *Fiddler on the Roof*, Zero Mostel kissed a mezuzah (a scroll of holy scriptures) which was nailed to a doorpost. Other people objected, saying that only a few people would understand what he was doing, so the next time Mr. Mostel came through the doorway, he made the sign of the cross. After that, he was allowed to kiss the mezuzah.²²⁹

Tobacco

- A Mennonite pastor punished his five-year-old son by removing him from church — an act the son felt was very unfair. To get revenge, the young boy waited until later in the day, when he and his father attended a men’s business meeting, then the boy announced to the group, “My dad will probably deny this, but he smokes sometimes!”²³⁰

- One Church of Christ preacher, Jimmy Smith, caught another Church of Christ preacher, T.Q. Martin, smoking. Mr. Smith said, “I see you’re burning incense to the devil.” Mr. Martin replied, “Yes, but I didn’t expect him to catch me at it.”²³¹

Wills

- Wilson Mizner, a rascal, led a life devoted to women, gambling, opium, and the spending of money — and he also devoted his life to wit. After he died, he made one last joke in his will: He left his estate to a woman. Everybody assumed, given the life Mr. Mizner had led, that the woman must have been his mistress, but she was a woman with whom he had had a Platonic friendship for the 15 years he knew her. The woman, Florence Atkinson, called him “the best and dearest friend I ever had in my whole life. ... I know [his brother] Addison almost as well as Wilson. We were like three brothers.”²³²

- Revolutionary War general Charles Lee made an infamous will that said, “I desire most earnestly that I may not be buried in any church, or church-yard, or within a mile of any Presbyterian or Anabaptist meeting-house; for since I have resided in this country, I have kept so much bad company when living, that I do not chuse to continue it when dead.”²³³

Wisdom

- Rabbi Joshua ben Hananiah was ugly, and the daughter of the Emperor of Rome told him that she thought it was odd that so ugly a man could have such wisdom. He then asked if the Emperor kept wine in earthen vessels. She replied that he did, and Rabbi Joshua told her that it was odd to keep such a good thing as wine in earthen vessels and that the Emperor ought to keep his wine in golden and silver vessels. She told the Emperor what Rabbi Joshua had said, and the Emperor ordered that his wine be kept in golden and silver vessels — but the golden and silver vessels turned the wine sour. Therefore, the Emperor called Rabbi Joshua before him. Rabbi Joshua explained what he and the Emperor’s daughter had discussed, and he stated that he had merely repeated to the Emperor’s daughter the same principle she had told to him — good things should not be kept in common vessels. The Emperor then asked, “Are there no handsome scholars?” Rabbi Joshua replied, “If the scholars were ugly, they would be even more scholarly.”²³⁴

- A man planted flowers in his garden; however, when the flowers grew, dandelions also grew with them. The man sought advice from friends and tried several ways to get rid of the dandelions, but nothing worked. Finally, the man sought advice from a wise gardener. The wise gardener suggested several ways to get rid of the dandelions, but the man had already tried them. Finally, the wise gardener said, “I suggest that you learn to love dandelions.”²³⁵

- Many people are in despair over their evil deeds, but instead of turning from evil and doing good, they continue to despair although they instead “could be stringing pearls for the delight of Heaven,” in the words of the Rabbi of Ger. That is why the good Rabbi said, “It is written: ‘Depart from evil and do good’ — turn wholly from evil, do not dwell upon it, and do good. You have done wrong? Then counteract it by doing right.”²³⁶

- During a sea voyage, a storm raged. A passenger on ship began to scream for help, and his shrieking disturbed the other passengers, who asked the wise Bahlul what could be done to quiet the panicked passenger. “Tie a rope to him and throw him overboard,” Bahlul said. “Just before he drowns, drag him on board. Then he will realize that he is safe on board this ship.”²³⁷

- Catholics and Lutherans can work together, despite past differences. For example, Reverend Vincent Heier, a Catholic in the Archdiocese of St. Louis, invited some Missouri-Kansas

Lutherans to meet in St. Louis Cathedral. He welcomed the Lutherans by saying, “We are pleased to provide the cathedral. Please don’t nail anything to the doors.”²³⁸

- Joseph Pike and Samuel Randall were asked by Munster Province Meeting to pay visits to several Friends and speak about the subject of plainness. They did an excellent job — before speaking to anyone, they first went through their own homes and got rid of their own superfluities.²³⁹

Work

- Mulla Nasrudin made plans for the next day, telling his wife, “If it rains, I shall work inside the house, and if it doesn’t rain, I shall plow the field.” His wife replied, “Whenever you make plans, you should say, ‘God willing.’” “Why?” asked Nasrudin. “It shall either rain or not rain. There is no third choice.” The next day was sunny, so Nasrudin set out to plow his field, but a group of soldiers kidnapped him, forced him to be their guide to the next town, then beat him for his trouble. Late at night, black and blue all over, Nasrudin returned home. His wife had locked the door, so Nasrudin knocked. His wife asked, “Who is it?” Nasrudin replied, “It is I — God willing.”²⁴⁰

- Zen masters sometimes hide themselves, appearing to be ordinary people while practicing Zen in secret. One such Zen master took an unusual occupation in Japan — he ran a floating outdoor tea room. He searched for spots of natural beauty, filled with flowers and beautiful scents, then made tea there for anyone who wanted it. This sign announced his prices: “The price of tea is however much you give me, from a hundred pounds of gold to half a penny. You can even drink for free, if you like; but I can’t give you a better bargain than that.”²⁴¹

- Pope John XXIII went out of his way to visit the poor sections of Rome. On one visit, he spoke with a 12-year-old boy and asked what he wanted to be when he grew up. The boy answered, “Pope, like you.” Pope John XXIII replied, “You’ve chosen a difficult vocation. It is — you can believe me — a life of sacrifice.”²⁴²

- Joe “Ducky” Medwick, a major league baseball player for the St. Louis Cardinals, met the Pope in the company of several people who announced their occupations: “I’m a comic,” “I’m a singer,” etc. When it was Ducky’s turn to be presented to the Pope, he said, “Your Holiness, I’m a Cardinal.”²⁴³

- At an outdoor rally at which Pope John Paul II spoke, workers were warned against calling the portable potties “Porta-Johns,” as the Holy Father might find the name offensive. Therefore, the workers called the portable potties “Vati-Cans.”²⁴⁴

Yom Kippur

- Although most Jews fast on Yom Kippur, Jews are permitted to eat if they are gravely ill. When the Rabbi of Rachmistrivka became gravely ill, his physician decided that the Rabbi would have to eat on Yom Kippur. The physician was loath to tell the Rabbi this, so he stammered when he spoke to him. The Rabbi listened, then he asked, “What are you trying to say? Are you trying to tell me that I must eat on Yom Kippur?” The physician answered, “Yes.” The Rabbi then said, “Important decisions such as that should be clearly stated. In such important matters, you must be completely decisive.”²⁴⁵

- In 1965, the World Series was played between the Los Angeles Dodgers and the Minneapolis Twins. The opening game of the World Series was on Yom Kippur, and Dodger pitcher Sandy Koufax went to the synagogue rather than the ball park. Fellow Dodger Don Drysdale was on the mound, where he gave up six runs before being taken out of the game in the third inning. After being taken out, Mr. Drysdale told his manager, “I bet right now you wish I was Jewish, too.”²⁴⁶

- On Yom Kippur, the voice of radio deejay Phil Spector was on the air when a Jewish man telephoned him and asked indignantly, “How can you, a Jewish boy, be working on Yom Kippur?” Mr. Spector replied, “I’m not working — I’m on tape.”²⁴⁷

Zen

- Westerners can go to a Zen temple and meditate if they wish, but they must follow the rules, one of which is that they arrive early for meditation. While in Japan, Robert E. Kennedy was meditating at a Zen center when an American Catholic Sister arrived late for meditation. The senior monk stared at her in astonishment, then he picked up his stick — used to hit the meditators when their attention drifts — advanced toward the Sister, raised it above his head, then hit the floor beside the Sister with a loud whack. The Sister began backing away, and again the senior monk raised the stick above his head, then he hit the floor beside the Sister with a loud whack. Now the Sister began running toward the doorway, and the senior monk ran after her and hit the door frame with a loud whack. The purpose of this was not to hurt the Sister, but simply to let her know that one is never tardy for a meditation session. After that demonstration, no one was ever tardy again.²⁴⁸

- In the year 1582, some soldiers sought refuge at a Zen temple. When their enemy arrived at the temple and demanded that the soldiers be given to them, the abbot, Kwaisen, refused. Therefore, the enemy locked Kwaisen and the monks under him in a tower, then they set the tower on fire. Inside the tower, Kwaisen gave his final sermon, saying, “For peaceful meditation, we need not go to the mountains and streams. When thoughts are quiet, fire itself is cool and refreshing.” Kwaisen and the other monks died without making a sound.²⁴⁹

- A student asked Zen master Qianfeng where the road that leads directly to Nirvana is located. Qianfeng used his staff to draw a line in the dirt in front of him, then he said, “The road begins right here.”²⁵⁰

Appendix A: Bibliography

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Appendix B: About the Author

It was a dark and stormy night. Suddenly a cry rang out, and on a hot summer night in 1954, Josephine, wife of Carl Bruce, gave birth to a boy — me. Unfortunately, this young married couple allowed Reuben Saturday,

Josephine's brother, to name their first-born. Reuben, aka "The Joker," decided that Bruce was a nice name, so he decided to name me Bruce Bruce. I have gone by my middle name — David — ever since.

Being named Bruce David Bruce hasn't been all bad. Bank tellers remember me very quickly, so I don't often have to show an ID. It can be fun in charades, also. When I was a counselor as a teenager at Camp Echoing Hills in Warsaw, Ohio, a fellow counselor gave the signs for "sounds like" and "two words," then she pointed to a bruise on her leg twice. Bruise Bruise? Oh yeah, Bruce Bruce is the answer!

Uncle Reuben, by the way, gave me a haircut when I was in kindergarten. He cut my hair short and shaved a small bald spot on the back of my head. My mother wouldn't let me go to school until the bald spot grew out again.

Of all my brothers and sisters (six in all), I am the only transplant to Athens, Ohio. I was born in Newark, Ohio, and have lived all around Southeastern Ohio. However, I moved to Athens to go to Ohio University and have never left.

At Ohio U, I never could make up my mind whether to major in English or Philosophy, so I got a bachelor's degree with a double major in both areas, then I added a master's degree in English and a master's degree in Philosophy.

Currently, and for a long time to come (I eat fruits and veggies), I am spending my retirement writing books such as *Nadia Comaneci: Perfect 10*, *The Funniest People in Comedy*, *Homer's Iliad: A Retelling in Prose*, and *William Shakespeare's Hamlet: A Retelling in Prose*.

If all goes well, I will publish one or two books a year for the rest of my life. (On the other hand, a good way to make God laugh is to tell Her your plans.)

By the way, my sister Brenda Kennedy writes romances such as *A New Beginning* and *Shattered Dreams*.

Appendix C: Some Books by David Bruce

250 Anecdotes About Opera

250 Anecdotes About Religion

250 Anecdotes About Religion: Volume 2

250 Music Anecdotes

Be a Work of Art: 250 Anecdotes and Stories

The Coolest People in Art: 250 Anecdotes

The Coolest People in the Arts: 250 Anecdotes

The Coolest People in Books: 250 Anecdotes

The Coolest People in Comedy: 250 Anecdotes

Create, Then Take a Break: 250 Anecdotes

Don't Fear the Reaper: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Art: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Books: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Books, Volume 2: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Books, Volume 3: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Comedy: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Dance: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Families: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Families, Volume 2: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Families, Volume 3: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Families, Volume 4: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Families, Volume 5: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Families, Volume 6: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Movies: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Music: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Music, Volume 2: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Music, Volume 3: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Neighborhoods: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Relationships: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Sports: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Sports, Volume 2: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Television and Radio: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People in Theater: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People Who Live Life: 250 Anecdotes

The Funniest People Who Live Life, Volume 2: 250 Anecdotes

The Kindest People Who Do Good Deeds, Volume 1: 250 Anecdotes

The Kindest People Who Do Good Deeds, Volume 2: 250 Anecdotes

Maximum Cool: 250 Anecdotes

The Most Interesting People in Movies: 250 Anecdotes

The Most Interesting People in Politics and History: 250 Anecdotes

The Most Interesting People in Politics and History, Volume 2: 250 Anecdotes

The Most Interesting People in Politics and History, Volume 3: 250 Anecdotes

The Most Interesting People in Religion: 250 Anecdotes

The Most Interesting People in Sports: 250 Anecdotes

The Most Interesting People Who Live Life: 250 Anecdotes

The Most Interesting People Who Live Life, Volume 2: 250 Anecdotes

Reality is Fabulous: 250 Anecdotes and Stories

Resist Psychic Death: 250 Anecdotes

Seize the Day: 250 Anecdotes and Stories

Notes

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Source: Jerry Clower, *Life Everlaughter*, pp. 163-164.

[← 2]

Source: Msg. Vincent Fecher, *“The Lord and I”: Vignettes from the Life of a Parish Priest*, p. 30.

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Source: Tim Boxer, *The Jewish Celebrity Hall of Fame*, p. 270.

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Source: Joey Adams, *The Borscht Belt*, p. 144.

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Source: John Kolasky, collector and compiler, *Look, Comrade — The People are Laughing ...*, p. 51.

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Source: Tom Gorman and Jerome Holtzman, *Three and Two!*, p. 77.

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Source: Maury Maverick, Jr., *Texas Iconoclast*, pp. 59-60.

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Source: Beulah Collins, collector, *For Benefit of Clergy*, p. 16.

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Source: Geneva M. Butz, *Christmas in All Seasons*, p. 42.

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Source: Bob Thomas, *Bud & Lou*, p. 148.

[← 28]

Source: Rolf E. Aaseng, *Anyone Can Teach (they said)*, pp. 19-21.

[← 29]

Source: a December 1998 E-mail from Michael Moore to David Bruce (and several thousand other people).

[← 30]

Source: William Woughter, *All Preachers of Our God & King*, pp. 42-43.

[← 31]

Source: Cal and Rose Samra, *Holy Hilarity*, pp. 17-18.

[← 32]

Source: Jerry Clower, *Let the Hammer Down!*, pp. 92-93.

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Source: Rev. Francis J. Garvey, *Favorite Humor of Famous Americans*, p. 4.

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Source: Irvin C. Poley and Ruth Verlenden Poley, *Friendly Anecdotes*, p. 37.

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Source: Chuck Fager, *Quakers are Funny!*, p. 78.

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Source: Margot Fonteyn, *Autobiography*, p. 19.

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Source: Dick Van Dyke, *Faith, Hope, and Hilarity*, p. 95.

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Source: Leila Merrell Foster, *Benjamin Franklin: Founding Father and Inventor*, p. 30.

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Source: Rabbi Dovid Goldwasser, *It Happened in Heaven*, p. 172.

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Source: Martin Buber, *The Way of Man*, p. 30.

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Source: Louis Michaels, *The Humor and Warmth of Pope John XXIII*, pp. 32-33.

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Source: Cal and Rose Samra, *Holy Hilarity*, p. 13.

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Source: Menahem G. Glenn, *Israel Salanter: Religious-Ethical Thinker*, p. 96.

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Source: Philip Goodman, *Rejoice in Thy Festival*, pp. 34-35.

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Source: Sharon Salzberg, *A Heart as Wide as the World*, pp. 166-167.

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Source: Rabbi Joseph Telushkin, *Jewish Wisdom*, p. 440.

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Source: Jim Tully, *A Dozen and One*, pp. 122-123.

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Source: Ken Alley, *Awkward Christian Soldiers*, pp. 90, 92.

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Source: Anne Schraff, *Women of Peace: Nobel Peace Prize Winners*, p. 59.

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Source: a May 11, 1998 personal letter to David Bruce by a person who wishes to remain anonymous.

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Source: Henry T. Finck, *Musical Laughs*, p. 174.

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Source: Stephen S. Wise, *How to Face Life*, p. 59.

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Source: Jakob J. Petuchowski, translator and editor, *Our Masters Taught*, pp. 29-30.

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Source: Sharon Salzberg, *Lovingkindness*, p. 161.

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Source: Judy Carter, *The Homo Handbook*, p. 132.

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Source: Victoria Sherrow, *The Righteous Gentiles*, p. 75.

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Source: Tom Powers, *Steven Spielberg: Master Storyteller*, p. 20.

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Source: H. Allen Smith, *People Named Smith*, p. 105.

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Source: Helen Chappell, *The Chesapeake Book of the Dead*, p. 31.

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Source: Kathleen O'Connell Chesto, *Why Are the Dandelions Weeds?*, pp. 15-16.

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Source: Alyene Porter, *Papa was a Preacher*, p. 72.

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Source: Charles Downing, *Tales of the Hodja*, p. 75.

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