extra inch in Eugene Robinson's Post-Partisan column in the Washington Post last week, he would have read, "but he may be right when he suggests that he and his black-robed colleagues should give the State of the Union address. Their presence looks like a tradition whose time has come and gone." It is true, the progressive Robinson agrees with the conservative Roberts that, in the words of the chief justice, "The image of having all members of one branch of government standing up, literally surrounding the Supreme Court, cheering and bellowing while the Court — according to the requirements of protocol — has to sit there expressionless, I think is very troubling."

As for Justice Samuel Alito’s “not true” comment mourned when President Obama stood at the podium to complain about a recent Court decision, Robinson says Alito should be allowed the reaction: "He should hide his head and muttered — and even in a

setting of such high ceremony, some allowance has to be made for muttering." If Robinson had his way, "on State of the Union night, the justices can get together at the courthouse, order some takeout and watch the whole thing on the tube. They’ll be free to cheer and boo all they want, just like the rest of us."

Of course if you didn’t get through that first sentence, we understand — after all, Eugene Robinson is wrong about a lot of things — mostly things, actually.

**Sentences We Didn’t Finish**

Green Zone looks at an American war in a way almost no Hollywood movie ever has: We’re not the heroes, but the dupes. Its message is that Iraq’s failed ‘weapons of mass destruction’ did not exist, and that neocons within the administration fabricated them, lied about them . . .

(Roger Ebert, Chicago Sun Times, March 10, 2010).

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**Render Unto Mike**

I met Michael Cromartie in 1985 at Windy Gap, a Christian retreat in North Carolina. I had recently converted, I was there to talk about the only religious subject about which I knew anything: how I happened to become a Christian in my 30s after having been blasé about religion for years. Mike was way ahead of me in the Christianity department. Nonetheless, we soon got to be close friends. We both worked in Washington, D.C., and wound up attending the same church, the Falls Church. One thing I learned about Mike was that he’d spent a year commuting to Philadelphia to work as the mascot Hoops, a mixture of the Roadrunner and a chicken, for the 76ers, the city’s NBA basketball team. Pretty cool, I thought. Mike and I had similar interests — sports, politics, you name it.

A few months before we met, Mike had applied for a job with the Ethics and Public Policy Center, a small but high-powered think tank. In his application, Mike noted his friendship with theologian Carl Henry, and the head of the center, Ernest Lefever, was quite interested when he interviewed Mike. “Carl Henry came to my wedding,” Mike told him. “Carl Henry wants to work with you. Lefever replied. ‘That’s why I dropped his name,’ Mike said. He got the job.

His title was director of religious studies. This was a growing field in the 1980s, and Mike was (and still is) one of its few experts. The Christian Right had suddenly emerged as an important player in national politics. Yet its leaders and their motivations were not well known, and that was a problem.

I kept getting more and more calls from very smart writers who knew nothing about faith and religious beliefs,” Mike says. He was amazed at their ignorance. They didn’t know a fundamentalist from a Pentecostal or an evangelical.

In the late 1990s, Southern Baptists were caught up in a highly publicized debate on the proper relationship between men and women. This prompted a reporter for the New York Times—Mike wouldn’t even the name to call and ask why the Baptists were making such fools of themselves.

“Well,” Mike said, “it says in Ephesians, chapter 5, verse 22 . . .” (the passage says, “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husband.”)

The conferences, which focus on three subjects over two days, started in Maine in 2002, then moved to Key West. Mike has recruited experts on Methodism, Islam and Christianity. Rick Warren of Saddleback Church in California was a speaker.

Last week’s conference was held in Miami’s South Beach. James Davison Hunter of the University of Virginia argued that Christian conservatives are undermining their cause by “politicizing values.” David Gellner of the Galilee Institute in New York and a writer of “obscene liberalism” as a secular religion. Rabbi David Saperstein, president of the Religious Action Center of the Disability to speak.

The conferences are, I believe, a rare example of the quality of journalism we used to have. One participant, Adrian Wodrow of the Economist, wrote in his book God Is Back, cultures, countries where they are “one of the most plaintext as well as one of the most instructive experiences in journalism.”

The future of the conferences will be determined by the results of the conferences. We will see if the conferences will continue. Pew sponsored the first ten, then withdrew, and Mike’s assistant Robin offered funding from the Pew Center, with his employee that the conference would continue.

Luis Lago, who runs the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, was in synch with Mike on the need to educate the press on religion. They started with lunches, funded by Pew, in Washington that brought experts on religion together with a dozen or more print and TV reporters and writers.

Then Lago told Mike, “Think big.” The result was the Faith Angle Conference series. “The idea is to get more people in, position practitioners to explain some area of religion and public life to help journalists do their jobs better,” Mike says. “This is not a hook to get them into a Bible study. It’s not to convert anybody.”

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**FRED BARNES**

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