



The *Adhan* Controversy in Historical Perspective

Interpenetrating Protestant, Secular, and Pluralist Paradigms at Duke University, 1839-2016

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Abstract

This article illustrates how the 2015 *adhan* controversy exposed tensions between Protestant, pluralist, and secular paradigms at Duke University. It challenges both historical and contemporary models of the relationship between religion and higher education that assert the predominance of a single paradigm by illustrating how all three have been present throughout Duke's history, evolving and interacting through complex and contingent ebbs and flows. An interactive model is proposed for comparing how particular institutions at times have balanced (a) honoring a majority religious heritage, (b) fostering a religiously inclusive environment, and (c) creating power structures fair to all.

Keywords: pluralism, secularism, Protestant establishment, American religion, higher education

Introduction: The *Adhan* Controversy as Clash Between Protestant, Pluralist, and Secular Paradigms

In January of 2015, a campus controversy surrounding the broadcasting of a Muslim call (*adhan*) to Friday *jum'ah* prayers from the tower of Duke University Chapel exploded into an international media frenzy, revealing palpable tensions between Protestant, pluralist, and secular paradigms within the university and beyond. The intention to broadcast the *adhan* was announced as the latest expansion of pluralism at Duke, a historically Methodist, research-driven institution. As Associate Dean of Religious Life Christy Lohr Sapp wrote in an op-ed

in the local paper, “This opportunity represents a larger commitment to religious pluralism that is at the heart of Duke’s mission and connects the university to national trends in religious accommodation.” Conservative Protestants inside and outside the community rallied to defend exclusive Christian ownership of one of the most powerful symbols on campus. Franklin Graham, the state’s foremost conservative evangelical spokesman, lambasted the move, calling on Duke donors and alumni to withhold their support until the decision was reversed. Duke Divinity School Dean Richard Hays echoed Graham’s misgivings in a more measured tone. Citing “significant theological tension” between Christianity and Islam and “a great number of messages from inside and outside the community expressing concern or dismay,” Hays questioned “the wisdom and propriety of allowing Duke Chapel to be used for this purpose” considering “millions of Christians living in Islamic societies where their faith is prohibited or suppressed.” Duke administrators were thus forced to negotiate tensions between the university’s commitment to religious pluralism represented by the *adhan* and the generous funding of Muslim and Jewish programming and the persistent Protestant privilege retained through Duke Chapel worship grounded in Protestant liturgy and a Methodist-affiliated Divinity School offering confessional graduate training for aspiring pastors. Citing “numerous verified instances of credible threats,” the university backed down, moving the *adhan* from the bell tower to the chapel steps. As Vice President for Public Affairs Michael Schoenfield explained in a news release, “it was clear that what was conceived as an effort to unify was not having the intended effect” (Siceloff and Bell).

Instead, the controversy became fodder for a polarized and fragmented public discourse, alienating conservative Protestants, strict secularists, and progressive pluralists alike.¹ Liberal commentators decried the compromise as “a victory for American intolerance” indicative of “extremism at home,” highlighting “the irony of backing down on a powerful gesture of religious tolerance in response to [the Charlie Hebdo massacre]” (Mulder). Clearly, these critics were vexed by this bitter contest between the Protestant heritage and pluralist orientation of an elite educational institution they assumed to be “officially non-denominational” (Siceloff and Bell) and “nominally secular” (Jalabi). On all sides of the issue, widespread amnesia concerning the historical interaction between Duke’s Protestant, pluralist, and secular commitments exacerbated the all-too-common tendency for such controversies to descend into a futile cacophony of talking heads talking past one another.

Several recent works on American higher education have highlighted the tensions illustrated by the *adhan* controversy in similarly polarized terms. Evangelical historians George Marsden and John Sommerville have argued that a secularist paradigm² marginalizes *all*

¹ By pluralist/pluralism, I mean not only including representatives of a variety of religious perspectives but celebrating religious diversity as a positive good (in contrast to Protestant exceptionalism) and welcoming perspectives grounded in particular religious traditions (in contrast to secularism). In the historical narrative that follows, I use the terms “proto-pluralists” and “ecumenical” (a more specifically Christian term) to indicate that this perspective developed gradually over time with variances in degree along the way (see further, Hutchison 2003).

² As I use them here, “secular/secularity” and “secularist/secularism” all refer a single paradigm, but represent varying degrees. In this case study, the frame of reference is particular, i.e., a specific private institution rather than the government or the society writ large. Thus, “secular/secularity” refers to the notion that the institution’s structures should be framed without explicit reference to religion or in religiously neutral terms.

religious perspectives from the academy, compromising intellectual freedom and academics' influence in a persistently religious society. By contrast, numerous higher education scholars and administrators contend that enduring Protestant privilege obstructs the realization of a truly open and inclusive pluralism on campus (Watt, Fairchild, and Goodman; Seifert; Schlosser). In *No Longer Invisible*, Douglas and Rhonda Jacobsen offer a historical model which contests that those lamenting Protestant privilege or, alternatively, "established non-belief," invoke an outdated opposition between obsolete paradigms that have been transcended by a robust pluralism. The authors acknowledge that the 20th century was characterized by privatization (i.e. secularization) deemed necessary to dismantle the vestiges of the previous Protestant era. But they argue that we have since entered a pluriform era characterized by an increasingly diverse representation of religious and secular worldviews and affording new opportunities for open and inclusive engagement with religion on the postsecular campus (3-31). These three seemingly contradictory characterizations of contemporary American higher education as pluralist, Protestant, or secularist all highlight important realities, but none sufficiently accounts for the complex interactions between these coexisting paradigms illustrated by the *adhan* controversy.

To address this problem, I analyze how these paradigms have emerged, evolved, and interacted throughout Duke University's 178 years of history. I demonstrate that, even in the Protestant era of the 19th century, the institution's evangelical leaders self-consciously negotiated their confessional identity in relation to secular and pluralist alternatives. I show how Protestantism remained firmly established at Duke well into the middle of the privatized 20th century in an increasingly ecumenical form through which all three paradigms temporarily reinforced one another. In the 21st century, we see how Protestant privilege and secularist exclusion persist alongside the emergent pluralist paradigm. I conclude by proposing a more flexible and inclusive interactive model for comparing intersections between these three paradigms on distinct campuses throughout time and space.

While the linear model of successive eras of Protestant hegemony, privatization, and pluriformity has merit, it obscures how thoughtful educators have long wrestled to strike an optimal balance between preserving the best of a common religious heritage, protecting intellectual freedom, and maximizing inclusivity considering their present circumstances and perspectives. Historical appreciation of the complexities involved can help us transcend the simplistic, polarized debate represented in coverage of the *adhan* controversy through greater appreciation of the paradoxical record of Protestant influence in higher education – exclusive and inclusive, self-righteous and self-abnegating, domineering and deconstructed. Examining the rationale, context, and consequences surrounding the distinct compromises brokered by each generation of students, faculty, and administrators helps us to perceive the relationship between religion and higher education as a contingent progression of interpenetrating trajectories rather than an inevitable evolution of discrete, contradictory paradigms.

"Secularist/secularism" refers to a more thoroughgoing standard that seeks to exclude religious perspectives or reference points from public discourse within the institution as much as possible.

Founding: A “Non-Sectarian” Denominational Identity Emerges Amidst Secular and Ecumenical Alternatives

While the institution that would become Duke University ultimately embraced a thoroughly Methodist identity, nascent pluralist and secularist forces were present from its humble beginnings. Union Institute was named in honor of the remarkable ecumenical partnership forged between Methodists and Quakers in Randolph County in 1839. But this union between parochial Quakers and expansionist Methodists quickly proved untenable; Methodists assumed full control by the time a charter was granted in 1841. This failed ecumenical experiment informed the Trustees’ 1853 statement clarifying the school’s identity:

The College shall be theoretically and practically religious: religious in creed and heart; religious doctrinally and by conversion. To that end the College must be *denominational, without being sectarian*. Different creeds may meet for fraternity, social interests, and secular work; but, when souls are to be won, each denomination must be in its own Temple. A nonreligious college is, and ought to be, a failure in human interest, if not in number of students. The student must be a Christian, or the man will, probably, be practically an infidel. The whole tone of the College must be one of fervent piety, and revivals and conversions a part of its ordinary life (Chaffin: 103-104, emphasis mine).

From a contemporary perspective, these strong evangelistic and denominational overtones are remarkable. But in the context of the overwhelmingly Protestant antebellum South, this self-conscious situating of denominational identity, considering the demands of non-sectarian inclusivity and secular work, is equally noteworthy.

In fact, President Braxton Craven and the trustees simultaneously aligned the institution with the secular “normal school” movement for public education. They renamed it Normal College, committed its resources to the training of teachers, and operated under a public charter from 1851 to 1859. At the time, “the distinction between public and private was not very clear, and it meant much less than it does today” (Jacobsen and Jacobsen: 20). Church leaders, educators, and legislators worked together on a plan to establish a non-sectarian, denominational system of higher education for North Carolina in which the major denominations would receive state support for their institutions, including Baptist Wake Forest, Presbyterian Davidson, and Methodist Normal College. In an era when society was widely perceived as a seamless whole in which pan-evangelical Protestantism, educational institutions, and the state mutually reinforced one another, it was not protests of violation of the separation of church and state that stymied the scheme, but simply the state’s inability to fund such an ambitious system.

By the eve of the Civil War, the state had abandoned the school to the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, who purchased it, rechristened it Trinity College, and assumed full control of both governing boards. In hindsight, Methodist Trinity College might have emerged as ecumenical Union Institute or state-supported Normal College had the partnership or public proved as viable as denominational affiliation. Instead, Methodist practice and piety were deeply ingrained at Trinity for generations to come through mandated courses and extracurricular activities. Like many students throughout the country, every Trinity graduate

in the 1860s and 1870s took the mandatory “Evidences of Christianity” capstone class taught by the president himself. At commencement, each student was presented with a Bible and reminded “you have studied many books, but this surpasses them all; the knowledge of others will be useful, but a practical knowledge herein is essential” (Gallagher: 9). Each day began with scripture and prayer; each week with mandatory Sunday worship. Like most Americans, Trinity students and faculty generally “remained confident that Protestantism was still the best and highest expression of religion the world had ever seen” (Jacobsen and Jacobsen: 19).

The expansionist, missionary impulse of evangelical¹ Protestantism ironically facilitated abstract engagement with the religious other at Trinity College, long before religious minorities migrating to Northeastern and Western port cities made their way to North Carolina in significant numbers. We catch a glimpse of emerging concern over a generic religious other in the minutes of the Theological Society (Archives 1870-93), which met bi-weekly from 1870 to 1893 to debate issues of interest. At the pinnacle of its popularity, this voluntary society claimed more than fifty members, a substantial portion of a body of only a couple hundred students. Participants frequently discussed both domestic and foreign missions, taking up the questions, “what is the best plan to get at the irreligious students of Trinity College?” and “will the heathen be saved?” multiple times. Regarding the latter, students shifted from an absolutist stance toward other religions to a more moderate position, foreshadowing the pluralism of later generations. The original wording of the question, “will the heathen be saved (1:53)?” led to a negative decision by the society. Over the years, the question was reframed in ways that made it both easier for these evangelicals to entertain the possibility of salvation for non-Christians (“resolved that *it is possible* for a heathen to be saved without the gospel” [2:7]) and more difficult to deny it (“resolved that *all* heathen will be lost,” emphases mine [2:25]). By 1888, both reformulated questions had rendered verdicts in favor of the possibility of salvation outside Christianity, though by thin margins. It is not coincidental that this shift in opinion took place in the decade when most preachers “simply ceased to talk about [hell]” (Wacker: 265). In the North, engagement with religious others through Orientalist scholarship and encounters with migrants was becoming more common, but even in relatively provincial Southern institutions, Protestants began to relax absolutist interpretations of the gospel and consider the viability of religious alternatives long before they were directly confronted with substantial religious diversity.

Meanwhile, expanded state funding of higher education and emerging secular models based on the German research university created new boundaries and tensions between public and private institutions at the turn of the 20th century. Renowned Methodist preacher and Trinity president John Kilgo attacked state-funded education, contesting its pretensions to theological neutrality. He argued “no man can pass through college without fixing for himself a faith that will be a plan of his life . . . The only option left to education is the choice of the doctrines” (5). Kilgo’s choice was a staunchly evangelical form of Christian education “that assumes Christ’s estimate of all things and seeks to develop manhood in the light of His ideals and by His methods and inculcates His truths as the fundamental truths of personal and social

¹ This term enjoyed much broader application in the 19th century than it does today. Here, I use it in that context, while highlighting the nascent shifts that would come to distinguish ecumenical Protestantism and evangelical Protestantism.

character” (Gallagher: 23-24). He repeatedly appeared before the state General Assembly to thwart appropriations to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC), denouncing godless secular education and campaigning for equal allocation of public funds to the major denominational institutions. For decades to come, UNC’s leaders would respond to these attacks equivocally, promoting the democratic value of secular public education while requiring chapel attendance, placing the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) at the center of extracurricular life, and establishing a Religion Department around the piety-oriented Bible courses taught by Rev. Bernard Henry Boyd, the state’s foremost preacher.

Likewise, Kilgo was quite willing to adapt his rhetoric to emphasize Trinity’s “non-sectarian” commitments when vying for respectability and funding from an increasingly secular academic vanguard. In an application for a Carnegie grant expressly excluding ecclesial institutions, Kilgo asserted that Trinity serves all “without regard to religious creeds, political faiths, or social castes, and no attempt to proselyte students would be tolerated for a moment” (Gallagher: 29). In retrospect, this claim rings hollow. Every single faculty member was a white Methodist man (Few 1914), African-Americans would not be admitted until 1961, and the school’s mandatory chapel requirement held students captive to daily preaching, often by Kilgo himself! The bi-directional posturing highlights Trinity’s self-consciousness regarding emerging tensions between its Protestant regional constituency and the national academic elite it aspired to join, tensions that would soon lead fellow Methodist institution Vanderbilt University to disaffiliate from the church. The secular paradigm had indeed emerged as a formidable force in the upper echelons of higher education by the turn of the 20th century, but it would continue to be counterbalanced by a persistently powerful Protestant paradigm for decades to come.

Expansion: Protestant Establishments and Proto-Pluralism in a Privatized Era

Contrary to linear models which universalize the erosion of Protestant establishments at some elite northern and western institutions throughout the late 19th and early 20th century, Trinity College would ramp up its religious commitments despite these ascending secular models of higher education. During Kilgo’s seventeen-year presidency spanning the turn of the century, religious curricular and extracurricular mandates were increased. Indeed, President Kilgo embodied the denominational campus culture in its totality. As minister, he preached “about twice weekly” in chapel and imbued ceremonial events like convocation and commencement with Methodist piety (Phillips: 4). As scholar, he served as the first acting chair of the Department of Religion and taught Bible courses that every undergraduate was required to take all eight semesters (Curtin: 1). As administrator, he ramped up the chapel requirement to mandatory daily attendance and extended Sabbath services and Sunday school (Archives 1900).

Meanwhile, Kilgo courted the support of tobacco mogul Washington Duke. While historians have argued that increasing dependence of academic institutions on the philanthropy of business moguls eroded Protestant establishments, the Dukes clearly used their influence to preserve close institutional ties with their beloved Methodist Church. The endowment the Dukes established in 1896 increasingly dwarfed the Methodist Conference’s annual appropriations to the school, but Washington Duke specifically stipulated that his

family's gifts would be redirected to the Methodist Conferences should Trinity ever disaffiliate from the church (Gallagher 18-21).

Both Washington Duke's and President John Kilgo's successors continued to reinforce this strong Methodist identity while simultaneously pursuing the aggressive expansion from a regional college to a national university that would eventually precipitate its distancing from its Methodist roots. In their statement on the "Aims of the University" in the 1924 constitution, James B. Duke and President William Preston Few enshrined the institution's persistent faith in a seamless whole in which evangelical piety, cutting-edge scholarship, civic service, and ecumenical inclusivity reinforced one another:

The aims of Duke University are to assert a faith in the eternal union of knowledge and religion set forth in the teachings and character of Jesus Christ, the son of God; to advance learning in all lines of truth . . . to promote a sincere spirit of tolerance; to discourage all partisan and sectarian strife; and to render the largest permanent service to the individual, the state, the nation and the Church. *Unto these ends shall the affairs of this university always be administered* (Gallagher: 47, emphasis mine).

President Few pursued this strident, expansionist vision of the early 20th century Protestant establishment through the transformation of the Department of Biblical Literature and Religious Education into a world-class seminary engaged in international missions. After years of exhorting the Methodist Church to endow a chair in missionary training, Few eventually persuaded them to sponsor both Edmund Soper and James Cannon III to teach Christian missions and world religions to posts-graduate candidates for ministry and undergraduates, respectively (Methodist Episcopal Church). The expanding reach of the growing university had elevated the salvation of the religious other from a theoretical question to an integral matter of self-understanding and social vision.

Cannon and Soper instituted instruction regarding non-Christian religious traditions through distinct missionary lenses representing the evangelical and ecumenical² forms of Protestantism that would permanently divide the Protestant establishment. Cannon's introductory missions course "presented the whole program of Christianity *in opposition to* non-Christian civilizations" and served as a "recruiting ground from which missionaries will be reared up" (emphasis mine). In contrast, Soper's upbringing on the Tokyo mission field and over twenty years of professional and personal engagement with religious others motivated him to offer a more self-critical and reflective approach grounded in sympathetic comparative study of non-Christian religions and interrogation of Christian bias. Nonetheless, Soper maintained that while tribal and national religious traditions may have served past needs,

² Here I follow David Hollinger in employing "ecumenical" rather than "mainline" or "liberal," as I concur that "ecumenical" "has proven the least confusing way to distinguish [this] family of Protestants . . . from the fundamentalist, Pentecostal, holiness, and other conservative persuasions within American Protestantism that came to be described collectively as 'evangelical,' even though the latter term had earlier denoted a much greater range of Protestant orientations" (21). I find the term particularly useful here as it was these Protestants' ecumenical stance that signaled their willing compromise with emergent secular and pluralist paradigms in contrast to evangelicals' resistance.

Christianity constituted the only universal tradition adequate for a rapidly shrinking world (141-55).

Both approaches were conspicuously represented on campus by students themselves through the mainline Young Men's and Women's Christian Associations (YMCA/YWCA) and the militant Student Volunteer Movement (SVM) mobilized by the "watchword: the evangelization of the world in this generation." Duke sent sixteen students to the North Carolina SVM conference in 1926, more than any of the other twenty-nine colleges represented. Duke SVM members canvased their campus with colorful posters and printed propaganda exhorting students to mission fields all over the globe:

The heart of the Christian message is missionary in its nature . . . The true missionary does not wait until reaching a foreign soil to share his experience of Christ . . . He who will not venture is belittling God (Archives 1928-29).

In contrast, the YMCA/YWCA took the "soft sell" approach to recruitment, which afforded them wider bandwidth and considerable support from the university. Each incoming freshman was presented with a "Trinity Y Handbook" which opened with a message from President Few encouraging students to be involved in YMCA/YWCA activities, including the "Voluntary Study Committee" advertised on page 14:

Among the most important world movements of this age is Foreign Missions . . . We are proud that more and more students each year are studying in the voluntary classes about missions, but a still further extension of this work is needed (Adams).

In hindsight, it is remarkable how well these militant and mainline organizations and scholars worked together. William Hutchison has argued that such "opposing forces could collaborate because the principal common enterprise, converting the world to Christ, seemed more compelling than any differences; but also, because they shared a vision of the essential rightness of Western civilization and the near-inevitability of its triumph" (1987: 95). This missionary thrust clearly illustrates the persistence of a formidable Protestant establishment on campus well into the 20th century. But missionary engagement with religious others and their traditions sowed the seeds of pluralism that would set this Methodist institution on an ecumenical trajectory of gradual distancing from its evangelical roots and increasing accommodation of religious others.

In the mid-1930s, there was a palpable shift from the old "non-sectarian denominational" identity to an ecumenical, "interdenominational" identity in which Protestant privilege, proto-pluralism, and secular structures were reframed to reinforce one another. Mainline leaders at Duke and elsewhere increasingly justified their privilege based on liberal Protestantism's "universality" and superior self-abnegating ethic through gestures of progressive inclusivity toward secular scientific knowledge and religious minorities. Critical reflections on engagements with religious others on colonial mission fields forwarded by popular novelist Pearl Buck and Harvard heavyweight William Hocking precipitated a decisive shift from proselytization to "no strings attached" social missions and helped launch the nascent interfaith movement. At Duke, ecumenism overwhelmed evangelism. The SVM disbanded and the YMCA/YWCA dissolved its foreign missions committee (Archives 1930-40). For the

first time, chapel attendance became voluntary and sermons preached there became more broadly inclusive than confessional. For example, liberal Methodist preacher-scholar Lynn Harold Hough's sermon at Duke Chapel's dedication christened it as a "monument of that authority and learning for which the university stands . . . wide enough . . . to give every human being who comes through its walls a home for [our] highest ideals . . . whatever our religion, or lack of religion" (Hough: 10-11).

Campus culture did not become religiously privatized so much as liberalized. Protestant structures were expanded and elaborated as the university grew and bureaucratized, but they assumed an ecumenical form seemingly compatible with emerging paradigms of proto-pluralism and academic secularism. Methodist leaders made the Duke University Church (DUC), occupying the newly completed chapel, expressly interdenominational and established the Office of Religious Activities (ORA) to more adequately represent the growing range of religious identities, including Catholics and Jews. The office began hosting an annual Brotherhood Day Banquet, bringing together "roughly thirty" representatives from each of the Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant traditions for "one of the outstanding events of the year in campus religious life" (Cleveland: 5). President Few characterized this shift as both a reclaiming of the original interdenominational identity of Union Institute and a progressive reorientation "in line with the spirit of the age" (Few 1935).

On the other hand, Protestantism remained powerfully established on campus through the mid-century revival, a reality obscured by the "writing on the wall" approach taken by scholars asserting the early ascendance of a secularist or privatized paradigm. A survey of student religious identification from 1939 reveals that although there were small but significant minorities of Catholics (196, nearly 7%); Jews (89, or 3%); and "Nones" (67, 2%), the four largest denominations (Methodists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and Baptists) still claimed over three-quarters of the student population. When we compare this survey to one of the population of the Women's College in 1953, it seems that diversity may have decreased in the coming decades (Sampley). Moreover, despite occasional interfaith gestures, religious life structures continued to exacerbate Protestant predominance. Throughout the 40s and 50s ORA staff solicited students' participation in the mainline Protestant worship services at Duke Chapel through mailings and personal invitations extended to unaffiliated students to "come in for a conference . . . [to] discover means for helping them grow in their religious experience." Efforts to involve each student in the mainline programming of the ORA and DUC were apparently successful, as voluntary participation reportedly reached record highs. Such active recruitment sent a clear message to religious minorities that Duke was a decidedly Protestant culture. At the dawn of the 1960s, the three university-funded religious life positions were staffed by mainline Protestants, two of them ordained Methodist ministers, and all six recognized campus chaplains represented mainline denominations (Archives 1959). Clearly, the Protestant era of Duke lasted far into the 20th century, although it evolved to accommodate secular and pluralist forces.

The 1960s marked a pivotal turning point; academic secularism, cultural upheaval, and baby boomer youth culture permanently fractured the apparently seamless ecumenical paradigm. At Duke, a civil war erupted in the early 1960s between the old guard seeking to preserve the institution's Methodist and regional identities – represented by President Hollis Edens and the Methodist-dominated Board of Trustees – and the new guard pushing to pursue

the path of secularization undertaken by elite national institutions whose ranks they aspired to join – led by university administrator Paul Gross and the Endowment Board. The latter pushed to reformulate the “Aims of the University,” garnering wide support among the faculty, several of whom called for the elimination of the required Bible courses and questioned “why any university should have such sectarian concern” (Milford). The battle ended in a stalemate: leaders in the Gross-Edens controversy were forced to resign their posts and the religion requirement was modified but retained. Gross’ secularist faction would ultimately win the war: the religion department was overhauled toward greater academic sophistication and confessional neutrality, the religion requirement eliminated a decade later, and the administrative influence of the Methodist Church was steadily curtailed (Jeffers).

Secular influence echoed throughout the student body as the 60s progressed. Students helped erode Protestant establishments by vying for more freedom of ideological expression in the classroom, lobbying to dismantle heavily gendered *in loco parentis* social regulations, and calling for the diversification of the student body, including intentional counterbalancing of southern over-representation (Student Perspectives: 30-47). A comprehensive study of campus life conducted by students in 1969 found that, although 70% of students reported active participation in their home congregations, “less than half” attended church or chapel even “occasionally” while at Duke. Only a small minority were actively involved, while most students were “indifferent,” critical, or hostile to religious life programming. Moreover, conservative Christians charged that the ethical humanism preached at Duke Chapel effectively forfeited a primary platform for Protestant witness in the face of ascendant secularism (Student Perspectives).

Meanwhile, tensions emerged between the Protestant establishment’s paradoxical pretensions to both pluralism and exceptionalism, opening a widening chasm between liberal ecumenicals and conservative evangelicals. Duke University Parish Ministry increasingly integrated an expanded Catholic ministry into its mainline chapel worship in the wake of Vatican II and welcomed “all other persons and religious groups interested in a cooperative ministry.” The United Christian Campus Fellowship, later known as the Duke Christian Unity, formed in 1968 as an ecumenical initiative “*for all people*” [emphasis original] grounded in the notion that “all groups must be involved in coming together to love each other *irrespective of theological convictions* [emphasis mine]” (Archives 1974). The group engaged contemporary cultural and political controversies in a manner that aligns with David Hollinger’s characterization of ecumenical Protestants’ self-interrogation of ethnocentric and sectarian beliefs and practices. Flyers from the period advertise events focused on raising awareness about the sinful consequences of American imperialism and Western colonialism, including the Vietnam War, nuclear proliferation, and hunger in Sudan. Furthermore, values clarification and identity exploration groups targeting African-Americans, women, and agnostics encouraged a privatized approach to religion. In hindsight, we can see that ecumenical efforts toward sympathetic dialogue with religious, racial, and secular others emerged out of the security of Protestant predominance and helped usher in the pluralism paradigm of the postmodern era that would mitigate it.

This ecumenical project of self-interrogation alienated evangelical parachurch groups like InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, Campus Crusade for Christ, and the Navigators, prompting them to employ an array of methods to make an exclusivist interpretation of Protestant

theology salient in the university's intellectual marketplace. These evangelicals conducted market research surveys of students' religious attitudes and needs, sponsored visits by conservative Bible scholars and itinerant evangelists, and distributed publications offering biblical perspectives on contemporary moral and social issues. Such efforts self-consciously engaged the emerging secularist and pluralist paradigms. For example, through mass mailings and a "Faculty Forum on Religious Life," InterVarsity eagerly sought allies amongst an increasingly secular faculty to defend evangelical theology in the positivist terms of academic debate:

We . . . are concerned that the claims of Jesus Christ be presented on campus . . . that all persons shall know the way of salvation. Biblical Christianity stresses not only a personal relationship with God but also that *the Christian faith is intellectually defensible based on historical data* (DiPasquale and Wilkins, emphasis mine).

Similarly, promotional materials aimed at students exhorted authentic Christians to engage the diversity surrounding them without accepting the allegedly relativizing logic of pluralism: "Once there was a university and everybody came . . . There were agnostics, Jews, atheists, followers of the occult, some with Christian backgrounds . . . and a few who believed in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord" (Archives 1972). The latter were encouraged to train for the "battle" for the secular campus by participating in Bible studies and worship and inviting "non-Christians into their communities [to] share Christ with them." This rhetoric reflects an assumption made explicit in a 1981 CCC report: "college unfortunately is a place where many Christian students lose their faith or begin to radically question its validity" (Broggi). This sense of alienation from the increasingly post-Protestant cultural establishment ironically provided a countercultural appeal that stimulated considerable growth amongst evangelical groups in the context of the post-60s backlash (Smith; Putnam and Campbell), sustaining Protestant witness on campus through bottom-up resistance to academic secularism.

Pluriformity, Protestant Privilege, and Secularization: The Contest over a Diversified Campus' Culture

Douglas and Rhonda Jacobsen refer to the turn of the 21st century as the transition to a pluriform era; they acknowledge that "this new, foggy pluriformity did not emerge overnight," but can be traced back to the social upheaval of the 1960s, the gradual diversification of the student population in the wake of the immigration reforms of 1965, and the reemergence of religion as a global political force in the late 1970s. At Duke this proto-pluralism of the late 20th century emerged through interactions between the top-down ecumenism of the liberal mainline leadership, the increasing secularity of students and faculty, and expanding student representation of religious minorities pushing toward a more fully inclusive pluralism.

Jews had long been the only non-Christian religious group to enjoy organized representation through Hillel, founded in 1937, as well as participation in interfaith events like the Brotherhood Day Banquet, but many continued to feel alienated by Protestant hegemony. As their numbers grew, Jewish students pushed for more equal representation and founded an extracurricular religious education program in the early seventies called the Free Jewish University of North Carolina, a joint venture of the Duke and UNC Hillel chapters. In 1978,

Jewish representation fragmented along cultural lines comparable to those dividing Protestants. Liberal Jewish students who did not feel represented by Hillel formed the Duke Jewish Forum, a more secular alternative geared toward contemporary social and political issues (Dwyer and Odell). In the same year, freshman Jeremy Glaser demanded

the university take steps to either declare [the High Holy Days] as University holidays or to take such measures as are deemed necessary so that no Jewish student is denied the class and lab time that he is forced to miss through this general University indifference to his beliefs (Hoffman).

John Fein, then Vice Provost and Dean of Trinity College, balked at the proposal, arguing that “the academic calendar does not take any religious holidays into account” (despite the month-long break centered around Christmas) and that it would be impossible to broker agreement on observances among all represented religious groups (Hoffman). Hillel continued to press for equal accommodation through a letter to the faculty on behalf of Jewish students requesting that allowances be made for absences and, if possible, that make-up times be offered for any important assignments that must be held on the holidays.

The gradual, steady increase in the number of immigrants and international students from non-European countries further diversified the student population, precipitating the establishment of the Muslim Students Association in 1960 (MSA, a.k.a. the Islamic Association or IA) and the Baha’i Club in 1974. Despite the ascendance of interfaith ecumenism, these minorities outside of the Judeo-Christian tradition had to struggle mightily against entrenched prejudice. IA leaders were compelled to defend Islam when the 1979 Iran hostage crisis prompted unidentified Duke students to lynch a dummy with a representation of the Quran in its hand in a conspicuous spot on campus. IA leaders published an official statement decrying the “sick-minded group [that has] used the political crisis between the two countries to create tensions between Muslims and non-Muslims,” demanding the administrators hold the perpetrators responsible, and vowing to defend Islamic values “even if it costs them their lives” (Archives 1979). Clearly, such strong language reflects the besieged stance of a minority group that felt their standing on a historically Protestant campus was extremely precarious.

Minority religious communities’ struggles for inclusion pushed the university to take greater responsibility for facilitating the religious expression and development of an increasingly diverse student body. Many of the elite private research universities Duke sought to compete with thoroughly disavowed their historical Protestant affiliations in the name of secular neutrality, but Duke’s Methodist leaders sought to maintain their privilege while simultaneously embracing pluralism.

Devout Methodist President Terry Sanford’s hiring of Will Willimon, a rising star in the Methodist Church, to be the Minister to the University in 1984 represents the persistence of an increasingly insecure Protestant privilege. “Your job,” Sanford pronounced, “is to do your best to make the Christian faith credible to some really smart young people” (Willimon interview, October 25, 2012). This concern with credibility reflects the ascendance of a secular academic paradigm through Duke’s transformation from a regional Methodist college to a selective national research institution, but the old guard’s influence could still be felt through the continued predominance of white male Protestants in the alumni and administration. As a child of the 60s, Willimon recognized tensions between his Protestant privilege and the

ascendant secular and pluralist paradigms that had remained obscure to his predecessors. “[By the time] I worked in Duke Chapel, it was the symbol of the hegemony of Protestant Christianity over American life,” Willimon quipped, referring to it as a “dinosaur” (interview).

Within a year of Willimon’s arrival, Sanford retired, and Willimon’s twenty-year tenure would span the presidencies of both Keith Brodie and his successor Nannerl Keohane. Both personally secular, these presidents embraced multiculturalism, prioritizing the diversification of the faculty and student bodies through trailblazing initiatives, including the mandatory “A Vision for Duke” bias-interrogation workshops for incoming freshmen and the Black Faculty Resolution. This stance led them to downplay Duke’s Methodist identity and critique the privileged position Protestantism continued to hold on campus as an obstacle to inclusivity. Consequently, the staunchly Christian “Aims of the University” were abandoned in favor of a new mission statement framed in secular terms (Marsden: 421-22). This consequential shift led Willimon to engage the postmodern mood and employ caustic irony against his secularist opponents in the ongoing contest for the campus culture. When an African-American woman serving in the Methodist ministry and as a resident advisor for undergraduates was asked by administrators to terminate her Bible study due to a perceived conflict of interest, Willimon attacked what he perceived as hypocrisy in a university that advertised itself as an inclusive arena for ideological debate. “Can you say the word ‘university?’” he asked sarcastically. “I’ll be damned if I’m going to sit here and let you make religious people the one group that isn’t able to get into the fun and mix it up” (interview). This perceived hegemonic secularism motivated Willimon to pursue a more uncompromising ministry as a “missionary in a non-Christian culture.”

While playfully characterizing himself as a belligerent opposing the secularist establishment “using any means necessary,” Willimon had to embrace pluralism as administrator of an increasingly diverse array of student religious organizations. For most of his tenure, the chapel basement housed a multiplicity of campus ministries before separate facilities for Jewish, Muslim, Catholic, Presbyterian, and Methodist organizations were constructed. Willimon valued how this intimate arrangement facilitated interreligious dialogue, cooperation, and, when conflict emerged, reconciliation among both chaplains and student representatives. In 1993, he oversaw the revision of the procedure and policy for the official university recognition of campus religious organizations which mandated all “recognize and affirm the reality of pluralism at Duke University” and are “respectful of the faith and beliefs of all other individuals and groups.” “Door-to-door solicitation” and the “harassment of individuals to promote the interests of the group” were grounds for de-recognition (Archives 1993).

On the other hand, the policy required organizations “to recognize the Dean of the Chapel [Willimon] as the authenticating agent for recognizing religious groups” (Archives 1993). Willimon’s theological orthodoxy and willingness to confront secularism endeared him to evangelical parachurch leaders, who accepted the ban on proselytization and became formally incorporated into official religious life structures for the first time, but non-Protestants obviously experienced such oversight somewhat differently. Willimon recalls being chided by President Keohane for describing Duke Chapel as a place of “interfaith hospitality” because of the implication that the “powerful are welcoming the powerless.” He retorted, “Well, that’s probably how it feels to be a Muslim on this campus” (interview). While

Willimon's response may indicate complacency concerning power disparities, it also reflects self-consciousness regarding the reality and consequences of privilege notably absent among his predecessors.

Considering such structural complexities, Willimon ultimately granted the students credit for achieving a transformative pluralistic dialogue that simultaneously challenged secularism and Protestant privilege, citing a particularly comprehensive illustration involving a student-led teach-in on the quad in response to a racial incident on campus:

The kids planned everything. And this young African-American woman gets up and says "alright, we're ready to begin. Let us pray." And she led this prayer in Jesus' name! This was followed by a Buddhist who spoke about being in touch with the world. And then a Muslim got up and led us in this long Muslim prayer, in Arabic and then English. Then the President of the Interfraternity Council gets up and starts screaming that he is possessed by a demon of white racism . . . "Oh God, who will deliver me from this demon?" Then a woman sings a spiritual a cappella. And the Episcopal campus minister leans over to me and says "don't you just hate it that we live on this godless secular campus?" And I said "wow the kids don't seem to have gotten that memo have they?" (interview).

For Willimon, this incident represented a pluralistic revival among Generation Xers rebelling against the vapid secularity of their baby boomer parents. Despite his stridently Christian theological commitments, he perceived God at work in students expressing a diverse array of religious commitments in the face of an aging liberal administration to facilitate a broader, deeper discussion. "God can use this," Willimon asserted, adding provocatively, "I thank God that I wasn't here in 1950 when we were powerful" (interview). For this Methodist bishop, the challenge of negotiating persistent Protestant privilege amidst secular and pluralist paradigms seemed better for faith itself than the assumed compatibility of previous generations.

After Willimon's departure, structures reinforcing Protestant privilege and pluralism were decoupled, allowing for distinctive representation through expanded university investments in religious life. Sam Wells, Willimon's successor as Dean of the Chapel,³ delegated oversight of the diverse array of religious organizations represented on campus to Christy Lohr Sapp, a theologian of religious pluralism. Over the past decade, Sapp has expanded interreligious dialogue and cooperation through the Interreligious Council and joint service initiatives. The Dean of the Chapel position, now occupied by African-American Baptist Luke Powery, is no longer primarily focused on ministry to undergraduates, but rather pastoring the multi-generational congregation of Duke Chapel, teaching in the Divinity School, and serving as a kind of theological ambassador for the university through scholarship and public speaking

³ Willimon had successfully lobbied for a permanent change in title, arguing that "minister to the university" was inappropriate in a post-Protestant era when many students had no desire for a "minister."

engagements. Meanwhile, Jewish and Muslim students have acquired their own centers, led by multiple full-time chaplains⁴ staffed by the Office of Student Affairs.

The landscape of university-sponsored religious life has shifted significantly from exacerbating Protestant privilege to more equally supporting Duke's increasingly diverse religious communities. Yet, Protestant privilege persists through conspicuous symbols, including the official Duke seal's prominent cross and motto, *eruditio et religio* (knowledge and piety), and the architectural dominance of an imposing cathedral at the heart of the cruciform quad.

The responses of 246 Duke undergraduates to the 2013 Campus Religious and Spiritual Climate Survey (CRSCS) (Rockenbach and Mayhew) suggest that contemporary Duke students experience the simultaneous influence of all three paradigms, with pluralism permeating co-curricular programming, secularism predominating in the classroom, and Protestantism looming largest symbolically in institutional and cultural heritage. Survey results show the impact of initiatives aiming to diversify the campus population and pluralize religious life programming, registering above average levels for "pluralism orientation,"⁶ "structural worldview diversity,"⁷ "provocative experiences with worldview diversity,"⁸ "informal engagement with diverse peers," and "transformative impact of college on worldview."⁹ Pluralistic encounters often prove difficult; students reported above average levels of "negative interworldview engagement,"¹⁰ "divisive psychological climate,"¹¹ and "insensitivity and coercion on campus."¹² Results may be interpreted as tension between secularist and religious

⁴ Several observers have noted the Protestant privilege embedded in the title "chaplain" that retains universal status in academia, the healthcare system, and the military. While these communities may prefer to refer to these leaders as rabbis and imams, respectively, I use the university title to highlight that the hiring of these religious leaders is an explicit effort to achieve equivalency regarding a position long afforded to Protestants.

⁶ "Captures the extent to which students are accepting of others with different worldviews, believe that worldviews share many common values, consider it important to understand the difference between world religions, and believe it is possible to have strong relationships with diverse others and still hold to their own worldview."

⁷ Defined as "perceptions of the proportional representation of various religious and non-religious groups on campus."

⁸ "Captures whether students have had challenging or stimulating experiences with people of different worldviews."

⁹ "Measures the degree to which students feel their religious or spiritual worldview may have changed due to their overall college experience."

¹⁰ "Measures the negative quality of students' interactions with peers from other religious or spiritual traditions."

¹¹ "Refers to the degree of conflict or separation that exists between different worldview groups on campus."

¹² "Reflects the frequency of insensitive comments or behaviors directed toward different worldview groups."

worldviews as much or more than between particular religious traditions. Respondents reported significantly lower levels of “curricular or faculty-led religious and spiritual engagement,”¹³ suggesting that different religious perspectives may not be welcome in the classroom.¹⁴ The Duke survey showed that non-religious students are rated as the most accepted group on campus by a wider margin compared to sixteen other schools surveyed.

The survey findings report that Christians (52.8%) constitute a “worldview majority,” although the inclusion of Catholics and Orthodox Christians suggests that Protestants retain only a plurality rather than a majority. Furthermore, results indicate that the ascendant secularist and pluralist paradigms subject conservative Protestants to exceptional scrutiny. Compared to other institutions sampled, Duke students reported significantly lower levels of acceptance of and appreciative attitudes towards Evangelicals and Mormons, groups rated the least warmly of all. In contrast, acceptance and appreciation levels for Jews, Muslims, and Atheists were significantly above average. While the *adhan* compromise and powerful symbolic vestiges like the chapel, divinity school, seal, and motto testify to persistent Protestant privilege, the CRSCS results suggest that contemporary students feel the force of the pluralist and secularist paradigms more immediately and forcefully.

Conclusion: Towards a More Inclusive Interactive Model

This historical case study helps make sense of a particularly palpable moment of incongruence between Protestant, pluralist, and secular paradigms at Duke. Outside observers aligned with each of the paradigms lamented the *adhan* controversy as a disaster for oppositional reasons, missing an opportunity to critically engage both the divergences and convergences between the respective constructions of pluralism fundamental to each of their arguments. Crucial differences notwithstanding, Franklin Graham, Christy Lohr Sapp, Richard Hays, and secular journalists explicitly recognized the right of all members of the Duke community to freely express their religious commitments, as well as the fact that the *adhan* carried implications for Duke Chapel’s status as a historically Protestant sacred space. Shared reference points were utterly obscured in news coverage of the controversy, but many members of the university community benefitted from the opportunity to explore them. Hundreds of non-Muslims showed up for the compromised *adhan* to hear Duke’s Muslim community testify to its shared faith. Later, students and faculty packed a Divinity School lecture hall to hear a panel that included Islamic Studies Center Director Omid Safi, secular humanist and cultural anthropologist Diane Nelson, and Protestant theologians David Marshall and Luke Bretherton, each representing distinct and often contravening viewpoints. There were opportunities for ardent pluralists to cast visions of interreligious unity, Protestants to voice concerns regarding the integrity of sacred spaces, and secularists to offer analyses of controversies in terms of power, privilege, and freedom of expression. Everyone was welcomed, treated with respect, and confronted the palpable tensions between these distinct

¹³ “Refers to how frequently students engaged in academic pursuits addressing religion and spirituality.”

¹⁴ This interpretation is informed by historical context, personal observations, and additional data that did not achieve statistical significance (due in part to a small sample size), including above average ratings on “need to conceal worldview” and below average ratings on “space and support for spiritual expression,” and “attitudes toward integration of religion and spirituality in higher education.”

perspectives. Safi best captured the spirit of this candid, inclusive dialogue in his frank but inviting address to the diverse audience: “You are here and you belong wholeheartedly. If we are not able to have these kinds of open conversations in a university, where are we supposed to have them?” (*Duke Today*).

This case is as instructive for scholarship on religion and higher education as it is for religious dialogue on campus. The seemingly contradictory literature reviewed in this article’s introduction highlights important realities regarding Protestant privilege, secularist exclusion of religious perspectives, and pluralist engagement with religious diversity, as well as historical shifts in the balance of power between these three paradigms. Authors are generally subject to a tendency to emphasize the predominance of a single paradigm to the point of obscuring the coexistence of others. The result is that relative differences are rendered absolute: we become insuperably separated from those of previous generations by determinative historical context, and the differences between conservative Protestants, inclusive pluralists, and strict secularists are ossified and exaggerated. Often, such simplified presentations shore up our most deeply held commitments – be they grounded in confessional faith, multiculturalism, or positivism – at the expense of competing priorities. This case study shows how individuals and groups joined by a common institution responded to a shared problem: how should communities in pluriform societies balance (a) the honoring of a majority religious heritage, (b) fostering an inclusive environment where religious minorities can do the same, and (c) creating power structures that are fair to all, regardless of these differences.

Leaders representing Islam, secular humanism, and conservative and ecumenical forms of Protestantism created space in the wake of the *adhan* controversy to offer and receive resources for thinking through the problem of sharing sacred space. In this same spirit, I propose an interactive model of the relationship between religion and higher education that incorporates the insights of critics of Protestant privilege, exclusive secularism, and the limits of constructions of pluralism to analyze the contingent ebbs and flows that shape contested campus climates throughout time and space. Whether public or private, institutions originally built by Protestants for Protestants inevitably reflect peculiar proclivities that privilege Protestant forms of faith, subtly and explicitly. Interrogating such biases is a crucial part of realizing a fully inclusive religious community on campus. On the other hand, the emergence of the secularist paradigm out of this predominantly Protestant context often subjects the dominant religious tradition to exceptional scrutiny, resulting in feelings of marginalization among conservative Christians exacerbated by a sense of lost privilege (Moran, Lang, and Oliver). Similarly, the powerful influence of ecumenical Protestantism on the pluralism paradigm may result in limits of inclusion regarding those perceived to be exclusive – not only the evangelicals that ecumenical Protestants defined themselves against, but also adherents to minority traditions maintaining conservative boundaries around gender, sexuality, and authority (Mir: 31).

This case study illustrates how the dynamic interaction of these three paradigms is conditioned by a host of institutional identity factors, including religious affiliation, geographical location and reach, relative prestige, and the composition of the student body in terms of race, class, and gender. Awareness of these complexities engenders appreciation of how the relative strength of these three paradigms will vary between institutions, within institutions, and even within individuals’ experiences of them. Thus, instead of talking past

one another, asserting competing characterizations regarding what the relationship between religion and higher education is and ought to be, we can share in a critical dialogue regarding the wide variety of responses to a persistent paradox from which we all have something to learn.

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