



Introduction

On the highest ground in town, center campus, neighbor to the Firestone Library, stands the Princeton University Chapel. On sunny days its stained glass windows are radiant with biblical stories along with glimpses of heroes of literature, philosophy, science, and education. The great south window pictures Christ the Teacher. The building can accommodate two thousand people and is the site for major university ceremonies and services. On Sundays a Protestant ecumenical community, then, later in the day Catholics, followed by Episcopalians, gather for worship. When not in use for weekday services, weddings, funerals, concerts, or plays, often one finds a scattering of individuals listening to an organ practice, quietly praying or reflecting. In times of crisis, tragedy, or concerned protest, it has been the site on campus to come together. Every campus tour includes the chapel.

The fourth of the buildings used for worship and assembly at Princeton,¹ the chapel stands as sign and symbol of Princeton's religious heritage. By the 1970s, two and a quarter centuries after the school's founding, the chapel—together with the Office of Dean of the Chapel—had, however, also become sign and symbol for questions as to the role of religion at Princeton. Furthered by the demographic shifts created by World War II, moderate changes in the composition of the university had been taking place since the dedication of the chapel and the establishment of its deanship in 1928, but the pace of that change picked up rapidly from the 1960s through the '70s. When I was an undergraduate in the mid-1950s, the student body was all male. There were but one or two black undergraduate students and few "others." Jewish students strove largely to assimilate as Princetonians and Americans or they could expe-

¹ On other Princeton worship spaces and as the definitive book on the present building, see Richard Stillwell, *The Chapel of Princeton University* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971). Or one can go to the website of Princeton's Office of Religious Life and then to "History of the Chapel" to find links to a self-guided tour and an extensive audio tour.

rience either a subtle to overt anti-Jewish prejudice that was also part of Princeton's heritage. Although growing in numbers, even Roman Catholics were another distinct Princeton minority.

By the late 1970s the student body at Princeton was edging toward being half female. While racism was still a significant issue, African Americans, Asian Americans, and other "minority" groups were noticeably represented in the classroom and many undergraduate programs and activities. With this diversification had also come changes in the religious make-up of the campus. In the 1950s, more than three out of four students were active or nominal Protestant Christians, mostly affiliated with "mainline" denominations, largely Episcopalian and Presbyterian, then Methodist, Congregationalist, and Baptist, fairly much in that order. There were the Catholic and Jewish minorities with a few Unitarians, those of other denominations, and 3 percent or so who declared no religion. By 1979 the mild post-World War II religious revival of the 1950s that had seemed to strengthen mainline Protestantism in America had faded. There were now more Jewish and Catholic students and more from "evangelical" Christian groups and predominantly black churches. At that time it was largely the international graduate students, with a scattering of international undergraduates, who brought their Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, or other faith traditions with them. Perhaps just as significantly, a number of students were less formally religious. They, with their parents, had passed through the Vietnam War and its "pro" and "anti" movements, some exposure to "death of God" debates, and an era of challenging authority and established views. New modes of contraception had contributed to the questioning of traditional teaching regarding sexual standards and morality and the very purposes of human sexuality. "Going to church," and particularly to mainline Protestant churches, in order to belong in American society was less important socially and intellectually. A growing sense of individual rights and decision-making autonomy (often encouraged by Protestant thought) made religious faith and church attendance, especially among the educated classes, more a matter of choice than a norm. While some family religious background was still part of the lives of a majority of students, they might describe themselves as more "spiritual" in their values and beliefs. If pressed further, a number of students might say they were "questing" as far as any religious belief and practice were concerned, though such a quest was not necessarily high on their youthful agendas. Some would claim agnosticism; a few would admit that they leaned toward atheism.

What was true for the student body as far as religion was concerned was more evident with regard to the faculty. While Princeton's administrative and particularly its service staff had long been more ethnically, racially, and religiously diverse than the rest of the university, the faculty of the 1950s had looked a lot like an older version of the student body. Although less likely to profess any active faith, they often had a Protestant background if not practice. A number of the younger ones had served in the military or allied public service during World War II, and there were foreign refugees from that conflict, a small number of them at the Institute for Advanced Studies. While slower to change than the student body in terms of race and gender, the faculty of the late 1970s now had considerably more Jewish members, a few representatives of faiths other than Christian or Jewish, and a yet larger number of members who might describe themselves as spiritual and/or secular and nonreligious.

For over two hundred years the College of New Jersey and then Princeton University had been seen as providing encouragement for the beliefs and values of a form of Protestant Christianity. Although having a complex relationship with the Presbyterian Church, every president of Princeton until 1972 was either a Presbyterian clergyman or the son of one. Christian students who matriculated at Princeton could find an officially welcoming environment for their faith aspirations along with the opportunity to put their values into practice in service and worship. Were it requested, pastoral care in terms of counseling about faith questions or personal matters could be provided.

If, however, Princeton—heading into the 1980s and beyond—was to be a welcoming and supportive community for a more diverse religious, spiritual, and secular student body and faculty, how could it best do this? After providing a historical context for the role of religion at Princeton in chapter 1, chapters 2 and 3 of *Keeping Faith at Princeton: A Brief History of Religious Pluralism at Princeton and Other Universities* tell the story of the changes that took place at Princeton and why. What, we shall ask, were some of the opposing arguments? Then how were they responded to in institutional, ethical, and even theological terms? How were the new policies implemented and received through the next decade? In a final chapter we shall look at religion and religions at Princeton today.

While this is a narrative of institutional policies and religious beliefs and issues, it is also—to use a religious term—an incarnate story as well. It is about buildings and money, and it is particularly about people and their personalities, cultural attitudes, beliefs, and aspirations. In this per-

spective important parts of the story can be told firsthand because I was there at Princeton, first as an undergraduate and then as the dean of the chapel through much of the 1980s. Later I served as a trustee of the university, chair of the trustees' Student Life Committee, on the advisory board for the Center for the Study of Religion, and even returned for a short stint as interim dean of religious life and the chapel in 2007. I have been privileged to know, work, and sometimes pray with five presidents of the university and two previous deans of the chapel and my successors in that position. I have also been able to discuss significant issues with other figures involved in the decision-making and implementation process—faculty, students, trustees, and university staff—and to talk with a number of them about this study.

This story of the role of religions at Princeton is one microcosm of religion in America. But Princeton has hardly been alone among institutions of higher education in the passage from determined and hope-filled Christian beginnings—fully entwined with enthusiasm for the values of education—through years of Protestant hegemony, then the changes brought about by the influx of new immigrants to America, wars and economic cycles, and growing forms of secularism in this yet (in terms of numbers of professed believers and public rhetoric) quite religious society. With permutations due to particular histories, geography, personalities, and institutional mission, many colleges and universities experienced the shifting forces of demography, new knowledge, economics, and societal and pedagogical values that caused presidents and other administrators—trustees and faculty, too—to wonder and sometimes ask questions about the roles religious belief and practice could best have in their institutions. In times of growing religious pluralism—in a country in which religions have the power both to divide and sometimes link people together in a sense of common society²—how best, they may well ask, can our school provide for the religious and spiritual needs and aspirations of students while also protecting the rights and integrity of many in the campus community with little or no religious faith? Although more militant forms of secularism may lead some administrators to want to exclude religion from the academy, more inclusive academic thinkers may also ask how the school could be a setting for learning and understanding among religions and philosophies of life for students who are to be citizens in a religiously

² This is the theme and thesis of the comprehensive overview of Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010).

pluralistic society and world? How in these matters do we represent ourselves to prospective students, alumni, and other constituencies?

One can, for instance, see Yale University beginning to think about questions of pluralism and the place of religion in response to William Buckley's youthful diatribe *God and Man at Yale*, and then to William Sloane Coffin's prophetic ministry during the turmoil of the 1960s. Harvard had to negotiate President Nathan Pusey's 1950s efforts to give faith a greater role, while an early '70s committee charged to answer the question, "How can Harvard provide appropriate recognition to the diverse religious needs of its community while still maintaining the vitality of the traditions and programs associated with Memorial Church?" disbanded, frustrated by "the sharp divisions of opinion that exist throughout the Harvard community concerning the questions under review."³ Decades later it may seem surprising to many that there should be controversy regarding a university's support of any particular religious beliefs, but there were thorny questions and some soul searching, and echoes of these concerns continue to be heard.

The questions had and have no ready-made answers, and, in some cases, the best response may have seemed a kind of institutional drift with the changing circumstances and times—not always an unwise response with issues that can be as volatile and, on occasion, hard fully to understand as those of religion. In other cases, however, while necessarily keeping an eye on their competitors for students, faculty, and funding, colleges and universities have been more deliberate in making alterations or more far-reaching changes in their support for religion as it has moved from once being at the core of the school's mission to be regarded more as a voluntary curricular matter and an extracurricular service offered to its community of students and scholars.

Thus, while Princeton provides the paradigm for this study, there is occasion in the trajectory of its story to note something of the changes that have taken place at peer institutions in America. In chapter 4 overviews are provided that focus on seven private universities selected because of Princeton's and my own interaction with them. Incarnate with their own personalities, buildings, and constituencies, these briefer narratives offer context and perspective for the Princeton story while being of interest and instructive in themselves. In their similar and different ways each institution has become not only a window on religion and

³ See chapter 4.

religions in America today but also a significant setting where people of different faiths, little or none, can learn from and about one another. We are still discovering whether that learning and sharing can help lead to better understanding among religions and can foster cooperation and service in a nation and a world that greatly need such understanding and informed care.