

# Duke Chapel, Then and Now

by Mark Tooley

In December, the dean of the chapel at Duke University in North Carolina, along with the school's president, announced that same-sex "weddings" could be celebrated at Duke's imposing Gothic chapel. The announcement came as somewhat of a surprise: Duke is affiliated with the United Methodist Church, which officially disapproves of same-sex unions. Moreover, the dean is William Willimon, a United Methodist minister who is usually an ally of evangelicals within his denomination. Duke will now join the ranks of Harvard, Yale, Stanford and other prominent universities whose chapels are open to homosexual "weddings."

According to Duke's reasoning, "diversity" on Duke's campus requires toleration of same-sex ceremonies conducted by religious denominations that do not oppose them. Potentially, this could include services led by clergy from the United Church of Christ, the Unitarian Universalist Association, some Jewish groups, and perhaps a few others. Most Christian clergy would be forbidden by their own denominations from conducting such ceremonies, including any clergy from the United Methodist Church.

"It is not, in our opinion, a matter of the Chapel approving or disapproving of this liturgical innovation, but rather a question of how much religious diversity we should accommodate," explained a statement from Willimon and Duke's president, Nannerl Keohane. Willimon had previously opposed same-sex ceremonies in the chapel. He now says that allowing the ceremonies "in no way legitimizes these unions from a United Methodist point of view."

The recommendation from Duke's Committee to Explore Blessing of Same-Sex Unions admitted the chapel's "rootedness in specifically Christian tradition." But its statement notes that many of its committee members believe that it is that very tradition that mandates the chapel's offer of "hospitality" to same-sex couples who "seek support in pursuing their faith development." The committee generously promises that no clergy will be compelled to perform homosexual "marriages" if their consciences preclude it.

Most of the verbiage from the chapel's dean, the university's president, and the Same-Sex Unions Committee presumes that Duke Chapel is a crossroads of interfaith, social, and sexual diversity. Duke officials grudgingly admit that it is primarily a Christian church. But their definition of "church" is noteworthy. For them, the chapel, as a church, is assumed to be a religious marketplace where there is a cacophony of divergent voices, with no single unifying message but tolerance. There seems to be no thought that United Methodists have a right to ask others, in an ecumenical spirit, to refrain from activities that Methodists (and almost all other Christian churches) would consider abhorrent.

Duke's current vision of its chapel, not surprisingly, is quite different from the vision offered by the chapel's founders. The sermons from its 1935 dedication ceremonies still make for fascinating reading. For its founders, the chapel was not to be a debating hall, or a laboratory for social experimentation, but preeminently a pulpit of Christian proclamation and truth. A current Duke website describes the chapel's founding ceremony as "interfaith." But the documents from that day show only Christian hymns, Christian prayers, and Christian sermons.

The world of 1935, amid the Depression and the rise of both fascism and communism, seemed to be engulfed in secularism and paganism. Nearly all the speakers at the chapel's dedication portrayed it as a spearhead for reclaiming a waning culture for Christianity.

In a statement that would not be expected from President Keohane, then-president B.R. Lacy declared:

The chapel says to the world that here God has the preeminence and that all life should be lived under His shadow, within the sound of His voice, and under the influence of His beauty and holiness.

Duke's 19th-century founders, along with the 20th-century tobacco heirs who endowed it with money and a new name, envisioned the university as a Christian center of higher education, under the tutelage of the Methodist Church, with the chapel at the spiritual center of that Christian oasis.

"This chapel must speak of Christ," President Lacy insisted, and "its simple ceremonies of our Protestant faith [must] center in the open Word of God . . ." He

imagined a "thousand voices" within its walls reciting the Apostles' Creed. In contrast to young people elsewhere in the mid-1930's who were following Mussolini, Hitler, or Stalin, he saw the chapel leading Duke's students to "Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord." They would "form a deathless loyalty and a glowing love for Him who gave Himself to reveal the Father's heart and to bring all men under the Father's reign."

As St. Paul appealed to the younger Timothy and Titus of his day, Duke Chapel would make disciples for the Lord—or so Lacy hoped. "It is for this we pray as in this high day this chapel is dedicated to God." Duke's president, along with the other speakers, portrayed the chapel as a seedbed for future generations of Christian scholars who would conform a fallen world to the will of the Triune God.

The Right Reverend Edwin Penick, in his sermon at the dedication, saw in the chapel's dominance of the campus skyline the hope that God's truth would guide the university.

A Christian pulpit, set up in the center of such a university as this, calls not for mere approval of the life of Jesus or pious recommendation of the principles of His teaching, but for an intrepid demonstration of how that life may be emulated, and specific directions as to how His teaching may be applied to modern life.

Penick saw Duke Chapel as sounding the "passionate crusader's call" and "rallying men to standards of righteousness against disintegrating social forces."

Like other speakers, Penick saw the Gospel proclaimed in Duke Chapel as part of a coherent presentation of God's truth throughout a Christian university. The various departments and courses were not to be unrelated or pursuing separate "chaotic" paths; each was to be a spoke of the wheel of God's revelation. "May God abide in this holy place, and the Spirit of Truth keep the message and usages of this chapel, like light, pure and undefiled," he concluded.

The Reverend Willis Richard Cullom of Wake Forest College, a Baptist institution, saw the chapel as a sign of hope against the "well-organized spread of secularism." It would aid in "capturing and subduing to Christ and His ideals the new civilization which is emerging from the shattered ruins of the old." The

chapel would help to determine whether the common culture would be “inspired by Christian or pagan conceptions of the meaning and purpose of human life.” As the “heart of the university,” it would proclaim “eternal verities” and insist that “Thou shalt have no other gods.”

Lynn Hough, then-dean of Drew Theological Seminary in New Jersey, delivered the main dedicatory sermon:

The cathedral on the campus is the perpetual witness to the imperial place of religion in human life. . . .

The cathedral on the campus embodies in stone, the very genius of the Christian religion. . . . The cathedral on the campus is a summons to men to find the synthesis of all experiences in Jesus Christ.

“By and by not only here, but about the United States and out over the world the influences of this chapel will be felt,” Hough concluded confidently. “It will give gracious inspiration to spiritual pilgrims, and it will speak its deepest word to those who have been captured by the incredible love of Jesus Christ.”

These were (justifiably) mighty and soaring words to describe a towering stone edifice in which the figures of biblical heroes and heroines are engraved, as well as the heroic visages of Methodist luminaries John Wesley, Francis Asbury, Thomas Coke, and George Whitefield.

When the first same-sex ceremony is celebrated in the nave of Duke Chapel by the bold Unitarian or United Church of Christ clergyperson who claims that dubious honor, the frowning faces of those evangelists, along with the downcast eyes of Duke family members memorialized in marble, will ponder the scene beneath them, as their spiritual legacies and philanthropy are betrayed. They will also understand that Duke Chapel has—as the dedicatory sermons prophesied—become a spiritual beachhead. But now that beachhead does not face outward from the church into the world, but inward from the world into the church.

“And if there ever comes a day when Christianity has waned in power, men will come into buildings like this and say: ‘What majesty of thought lived in the mind of man before it was flung out in this magnificent nave,’” sermonized Lynn Hough at the chapel’s dedication.

And they will go back and listen

again to the words of Jesus, and they will go back to the long centuries of Christian history, and the old faith will once more command their minds and dominate their conscience and bend their will to its purpose.

The words of Jesus have not been silenced in Duke Chapel. Orthodox sermons can still be heard on Sunday mornings. But the power of Christianity has clearly waned during the rest of the week and around the campus. Perhaps, some day, Duke Chapel’s divinely inspired architecture will remind the university administrators more forcefully of the One to Whom the chapel still belongs.

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## Hate for Hate’s Sake

by Aaron D. Wolf

Radical feminist art has found a new home in Rockford, Illinois—or at least, you might think so, if you went to Rockford’s Riverfront Museum Park on April 6. There, in Rockford’s ever-evolving “cultural corridor,” you could view the works of “cultural critic” Mary Ellen Croteau, which included a Mason jar full of pickled—er, it was titled “Men I Have Known.”

Croteau, a fiftysomething feminist with a Cheshire-cat grin and horn-rimmed glasses, gave a slide-show presentation of her work entitled “Imagining Women: Misogyny through the Ages.” Two of her pieces—“Madonna and Child” and “The Annunciation”—were featured in the local Gannett paper. The former is a knock-off of Sebastiano del Piombo’s 16th-century masterpiece of the same name; Croteau has given the bambino a sex-change operation, and both “Mary” and “Jesus” are now Asian. Even more stunning is her “Annunciation”—Gabriel has the face of Randall Terry, who holds a dead fetus; this time, Mary stands pointing away from him (as in “There’s the door”), cocksure and with her other hand on her hip.

Croteau hails from the Windy City east of Rockford, where she received training at the Art Institute after her husband left her and their children high and dry in 1973. Having become pregnant by a heretofore unnamed man, she was “forced” to have an abortion. In the absence of Jerry Springer, who had not yet arrived on the scene in Chicago, she turned to high art to express her rage. A victim (so she says) of date rape as a young coed, she had been nursing a hatred for all things patriarchal and Christian for several oppressed years.

Rockford must be nurturing some hatred as well, since its taxpayer-supported Riverfront Museum Park played host to this antichrist of pop art. The campus—just two blocks away from *Chronicles’* headquarters—is owned by the Rockford Park District, a governmental body separate from the City of Rockford. Bewildered by an eternal desegregation lawsuit, white flight, and the highest property taxes in the United States, Rockfordians are quick to point to the Park District as one of the city’s main attractions, and they allow themselves to be taxed even more to maintain the parks, golf courses, and “cultural corridor.” One question remains: Are the taxpayers of Rockford really that eager to spend their time (and money) wallowing in anti-Christian bigotry?

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## LIBERAL ARTS

### WHAT WOULD JESUS DO?

“Boston artist Rob Surette brings Jesus to life through dramatic painting illustrated to beautiful music. Watch in amazement as Rob, who is covered with a wide spectra of splattered paint, rhythmically hovers about while painting incredibly realistic mural-sized portraits of Jesus in the time it takes for only two songs to play. Rob’s performance is done as an expression of love for Jesus, and each of his Prayer-Paintings capture Christ’s tender Spirit in their own way. Interleaved with motivational words and inspirational testimony, this one-hour performance starts off with great suspense and builds to a dramatic climax.”

—from a press release for “Prayers to Painting,” an art exhibition at a Catholic high school in Stamford, Connecticut.