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Growing Religious Diversity in South Carolina: Implications for the Palmetto State

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In a guidebook attempting to explain the South to "new Southerners," a handful of scholars residing in the South—many of them Yankee transplants— give advice to those new to the region on how to adjust to life in the land of grits, pine trees and sweltering summers. As they try to explain to those new to the region what exactly it is that makes the South different from the rest of the country, each author inevitably touches on the subject of religion. Known throughout the country as the "Bible Belt," the South is a region where religion plays a vital role in the everyday lives of its people. Paul Escott advises his readers, "When Southerners ask strangers what church they attend, their intention is not to pry but to be friendly…In many Southern communities, church is a major center of social activity as well as worship."[1] Indeed, this concept of the South as intensely religious and overwhelmingly Protestant has been an element of the South's distinctiveness for much of the region's history. In 1974, North Carolina sociologist John Shelton Reed remarked in *The Enduring South* that "the most striking feature of religion in the South is that the region is, and has been since antebellum times, monolithically Protestant."[2]

While historically there is a great deal of truth to these observations, there have always been those in the South who did not attend church. The other side of the Southern stereotype is the "redneck," a holdover Confederate rebel who'd rather be hunting and drinking beer than attending church, though even the redneck will usually give lip service to "the good Lord" and often uses the word "Christian" as a synonym for the adjective "good" or "compassionate," showing the hegemony of Christianity in the region. Escott argues that "lack of experience with non-Protestants accounts for many Southern comments on religion."[3] Increasingly, however, in the late twentieth and early twenty-

first century, Southerners are coming in contact with more "good" and "compassionate" people who are not Christian, but have meaningful commitments to religions other than Christianity. Thirty years later, John Shelton Reed's "monolithically Protestant" South of 1974 is no more. Certainly, Protestant Christianity still reigns as the dominant religious and cultural presence, but a small and ever-growing minority of Buddhists, Hindus, Jains, Muslims and Sikhs, not to mention the often-forgotten historical presence of Bahà'ìs, Jews, Native Americans, pagans, and African-Americans who have retained traditional African religious practices, are challenging the dominant Protestant hegemony in the South as in other areas of the United States.

South Carolina's reputation as a stronghold for Baptists and Methodists still holds true to a large extent; according to a July 4, 2003 article in *The State* newspaper (Columbia), the four religious groups with the largest membership numbers were the Southern Baptist Convention, the Baptist Education and Missionary Convention, the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church and the United Methodist Church.[4] Perhaps surprisingly, the fifth-largest group listed was the Roman Catholic Church, ranking higher than Lutherans, Episcopalians, and Presbyterians.[5] These large numbers in the Catholic Church are most likely due to the influx of immigrants from Latin America in recent years, where the population is predominantly Catholic. The Hispanic population of South Carolina more than tripled between 1990 and 2000, growing 211 percent from 0.88 percent of the state's population to 2.4 percent.[6] However, besides its plethora of Christian traditions, South Carolina is also home to well-established groups of Baha'is, Jews, and a variety of so-called "earth-based traditions," including practitioners of Native American spirituality and traditional African religions and a variety of self-identified

pagan traditions, including Wicca. New arrivals within the past thirty years have included Buddhists, Hindus, Jains, Muslims, and Sikhs.

Deep Roots

Native Americans

Of course, the groups with the oldest religious ties to the state are the various Native American nations, who still have a small presence in the state today. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, 13,718 South Carolinians, or 0.3 percent of the state's population, identified themselves as "American Indian or Alaska Native."[7] The number rose to 27,456, or 0.7 percent of the state's population, when taking into consideration those indicating more than one race.[8] "500 Nations," a national Native American resource website, lists fourteen Native American tribes or nations in South Carolina, as well as an "intertribal empowerment group" in Columbia.[9] Only one of these tribes, the Catawba Indian Nation, is federally recognized.[10] According to Barbara Morningstar Paul, a Native American of Lakota descent who now lives in South Carolina, the state government does not recognize any of the South Carolina tribes. She said the chief of the Waccamaw tribe has been leading an effort to obtain recognition for the South Carolina tribes, and a bill has been introduced in the state legislature toward this end.[11]

Paul said many of the traditional spiritual practices of the Native American tribes of the state have been lost due to Christianization, as is the case with most Native American communities in the United States. She said some groups do have their own ceremonial activities, but for the most part the population is majority Christian. However, there is some retention of traditional American Indian beliefs among the Native Americans in South Carolina; Paul said most all the Native Americans she has spoken

with in South Carolina hold the belief that all beings are sacred because they are all creatures of God, and therefore all related to one another. They also continue to hold a reverence for the sacredness of "Mother Earth" and believe that human beings cannot "own" land, since land belongs to the Creator.[12] Many of the Native American tribes in the state hold pow wows and cultural gatherings, which Paul said were not considered to be ceremonial events, but she said one could see "threads" of traditional American Indian spiritual practices at these events. For example, the participants in the dances and drumming wear traditional ceremonial-type dress, and the participants "bless the circle" before they enter it to dance. For many Native Americans, cultural and spiritual practices are not separated. "We dance as part of prayer," Paul said.[13]

African-Americans—Christianity, Islam, and traditional African religion

The African-American population, which at the 2000 census represented 29.5 percent of the state's total population, is the basis for another historical encounter with pluralism.[14] About 20 percent of the Africans brought to South Carolina in the slave trade were from the Senegal-Gambia region, an area where Islam was predominant, so some of the state's earliest residents were African Muslims.[15] However, most of the Africans brought to South Carolina were from the Congo-Angola region of West Africa.[16] These Africans brought many of their religious traditions with them and retained some of these beliefs even after most slaves were converted to Christianity. An example of this retention is found among the Gullah people of the South Carolina sea islands near Charleston and Hilton Head Island. A "folknography" study of the Gullah people in 2001-02 by Charles W. Jarrett and David Lucas, two sociologists from Ohio University, reported that although most Gullah people attend Baptist or Methodist churches, many of

them also hold the general West African belief that the human being is composed of three principles—body, soul and spirit.[17] At death, the soul departs, but the spirit remains on earth.[18] The Gullah interviewed by Jarrett and Lucas spoke of their belief that the spirits of their ancestors still inhabit the costal areas of South Carolina, Georgia and Florida, and interact with their descendants on a daily basis.[19]

More recently, a more overt and self-identified expression of traditional African religion came to South Carolina in 1973, with the founding of an independent Yoruba kingdom in Sheldon (fourteen miles from Beaufort, near Hilton Head). King Efuntola Osejeman Adelabu Adefunmi I, a Detroit-born African-American who rejected his Baptist upbringing to reclaim his African religious roots, founded the kingdom, known as Oyotunji Village.[20] King Adefunmi traveled to Nigeria in 1972 and was initiated into the Ifa priesthood, after which time he moved most of his existing Yoruba temple membership in Harlem, New York to rural South Carolina to establish a community based on ancient Yoruba kingdoms in Nigeria.[21] The leaders of the village are known officially as the African Theological Archministry, Inc., and received a state charter in 1980.[22]

In addition to these groups, the Baptist Education and Missionary Convention of South Carolina and the African Methodist Episcopal church, both predominantly African-American Christian organizations, are the second- and third-largest religious bodies in the state, respectively. (Only the Southern Baptists claim higher numbers.)[23] In fact, the combined number of members in these two predominantly African-American groups (726,512) almost equals the number of members of the predominantly white Southern

Baptist Convention (730,000).[24] Even if Baptists and Methodists do dominate the state, these denominations are by no means monolithic.

Judaism

Another group with a long historical presence in the state is the Jewish community. It is perhaps a little-known fact that Charleston was one of the largest centers of Judaism during the colonial era and is home to one of the four oldest synagogues in the United States.[25] The burgeoning Jewish community in Charleston declined after the colonial period. Currently, there is a small minority presence of Jews in the state. The 2000 Glenmary Research Center's study on Religious Congregations and Membership in the U.S. indicated around 11,000 Jews living in South Carolina[26] (which, according to 2000 census figures, would represent about 0.27 percent of the state's population),[27] with 5,000 of those in Charleston.[28] There are four separate Jewish communities in Myrtle Beach (Conservative, Reform, Chabad, and a Sephardic community)[29], a strong Orthodox population in Charleston, and two congregations (one Reform and one Conservative) in both Columbia and Greenville.[30] The College of Charleston sponsors a Jewish Studies Program, and in 1994, the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina was founded as a result of a panel discussion hosted by the College of Charleston.[31]

Bahà'ì faith

Another little-known fact of South Carolina history is the long presence of the Bahà'ì community, which dates back to 1910 when Charleston native Louis G. Gregory brought the faith to his home state after studying law at Howard University in Washington, D.C.[32] The state's first Spiritual Assembly was elected in North Augusta in 1935, followed by Greenville in 1937.[33] Since one of the key principles of the Bahà'ì

faith is the oneness of humankind and the faith places high priority on the elimination of prejudice, the Bahà'ì communities in South Carolina were racially integrated from the start, a unique phenomenon in a state whose history is plagued by so much racial discord. Louis Venters, a member of the Columbia Bahà'ì community who is researching the history of the faith for his masters thesis in history at the University of South Carolina, spoke of the Bahà'ì community's history of working toward racial unity: "It's not a perfect record of instant racial harmony when you become a Baha'i," he said, "but the point is that in South Carolina, it's just really unheard of in the 1930s for a religious community to, at the local level, say, 'we are not going to have any separate congregations.' So that's something that we're, I think very justly, proud of."[34]

Since 1960, the Bahà'ì faith began to shift its perspective from the local to the global, focusing on expanding the faith throughout the world, and similar focus was seen in South Carolina. The faith began to expand from the urban centers in the state into more rural areas, and African-Americans were found to be particularly receptive to the faith's message in the late 1960s and early 1970s.[35] The largest numerical expansion of the Bahà'ì faith in North America took place in South Carolina during that time period, and current estimates are that between 17,500 and 20,000 Bahà'ìs live in South Carolina, making them the state's largest non-Christian population.[36] Indeed, South Carolina is something of a spiritual center for North American Bahà'ìs, housing the Louis Gregory Institute, a school and training institute in Hemingway (about 50 miles west of Myrtle Beach) and Radio Bahà'ì (WLGI), also in Hemingway, which is the only Bahà'ì radio station in North America and one of only six in the world. In 2002, the Louis Gregory Institute celebrated its thirtieth anniversary,[37] and in 2003, South Carolina opened the first

Bahà'ì museum in North America, in Louis Gregory's childhood home in Charleston.[38] Members of the faith continue to be active in promoting racial harmony, as well as interfaith dialogue, spearheading interfaith efforts in Charleston and several other areas of the state.[39]

Pagan or Neo-Pagan traditions

Although it is possible that there may have always been a scattering of individuals practicing European pagan traditions in South Carolina, there is little documentation of their history. Only within the past five years has the pagan community in South Carolina begun to mobilize, most notably with the creation of the South Carolina Pagan Alliance (SCPA) in 1999. The Witches' Voice, an international networking website for pagans, lists 40 pagan organizations in the state of South Carolina, including a Pagan Student Association at Winthrop University in Rock Hill (near Charlotte, N.C.).[40] The University of South Carolina also has a pagan group, the Student Pagan Inter-Religious Awareness League, which "[p]romotes religious awareness, education, and tolerance of the pagan traditions in the Carolina Community…[and] serves as a support group for the pagan on the Columbia campus."[41] Rev. Matt Russell, a Wiccan high priest and president of the South Carolina Pagan Alliance, said before the alliance was formed, there was no central group to represent South Carolina pagans in the community or serve as a networking base. Even today, he said, there are many practitioners of pagan traditions who are not members of SCPA. He estimated there are around 5,000 pagans statewide, but SCPA has only 500 members, including organizations and metaphysical stores.[42] A metaphysical shop in Lexington (ten miles west of Columbia) called Angelic Whispers sponsored a Witches' Ball at the Adams Mark hotel in Columbia on Halloween in 2003, where

attendance was between 200 and 300 people, ranging in age from seven to sixty. Russell said the event was the single largest statewide gathering of pagans he had seen.[43]

New Arrivals

More recent additions to the religious diversity of the state have come since the Immigration Act of 1965. Immigrants from east and south Asia have established growing communities within South Carolina, as elsewhere in the United States. This "new immigration" is particularly significant for the South, however, since the older immigration waves of the late 1800s and early 1900s virtually bypassed the South.[44] In South Carolina, the 1990 census listed 22,382 people who self-identified as "Asian or Pacific Islander," representing about 0.64 percent of the state's total population.[45] In 2000, 36,014 people identified themselves as "Asian" ("Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander" was a separate category), representing 0.9 percent of the state's population, a 60.9 percent increase from 1990.[46] The subcategory of "Asian Indian" more than doubled, reporting a 114 percent increase between 1990 and 2000, from 3,900 people (0.16 percent) in 1990 to 8,356 people (0.21 percent) in 2000. The total population of South Carolina increased only 15 percent in the same time period.[47]

What are the implications of these numbers for the religious diversity of the state? One cannot assume from the growth of a particular ethnic group that a corresponding growth in a particular religious community will follow. A 114 percent increase in Asian Indians in South Carolina does not mean that the number of Hindus doubled in this time period, since Asian Indian South Carolinians could very well also be Muslim, Jain, Sikh, or Christian, for example, or non-religious. It is safe to say, however, that whatever their religious affiliation, the state's Asian and Asian Indian population is growing at a much

faster rate than the white Anglo-Saxon Protestants, and there is a high probability many of these citizens *are* from Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, Jain, or Sikh backgrounds. Indeed, these religious groups in the state have seen an increase in attendees in the past ten years.

Hinduism

The first Hindu families began arriving in South Carolina in the mid-1960s[48], and by the 1990, there were three Hindu temples in the state. The Hindu Temple and Cultural Center of South Carolina, located in Columbia, was completed in 1984, followed by the Vedic Center of Greenville in 1989. Also in 1989, construction began on another Hindu temple in Spartanburg, about 30 miles northeast of Greenville. The most recent decade saw the installation of the *murti,* or images of the deities, at the Greenville Vedic Center in 1994 and the installation of Mahavir (1992) and Shiva (2003) at the temple in Columbia (the temple's other deities were installed in 1986 and 1989). The Spartanburg temple is currently in the process of installing a *devasthan* and expanding the temple facilities from 8,000 to almost 11,000 square feet. In 2003, the temple in Columbia broke ground on an expansion project, the first since the temple's original construction in 1984, which will provide living quarters for the community's two priests, a full apartment for temple visitors and guests (such as speakers or artists brought to town for special events by the temple) and a separate multipurpose hall and kitchen, as well as an expansion of the size of the current worship hall from around 1,200 square feet to 3,000 square feet.

The Columbia temple is the only location in South Carolina where the *pranapratishta* ceremony has been performed, installing the "breath" of life into the *murti*. After this ceremony, the statues become *vigraha,* or living deities, which then require the constant attention of resident priests. At the temples in the Upstate, members

of the laity supervise most events, such as the evening *aartis*.[49] Individuals from Brahmin families may assist with special *pujas*, but priests from Columbia or Atlanta are usually brought in for such events. Brahmins are called on to perform home pujas, consecrations, weddings and funerals for Hindu families throughout the state. In the summer of 2003, a Brahmin from Spartanburg presided over the wedding of a Jain bride and Hindu groom that was held in the Hyatt Regency hotel in downtown Greenville.[50]

Sikhism

Another group of Indian immigrants, from the state of Punjab, have maintained their practice of the Sikh faith in South Carolina with the construction of a gurdwara in Columbia, completed in 1994.[51] Dr. Malkiat Guram, of the Sikh Religious Society of South Carolina, said he believes his family was the first Sikh family to arrive in South Carolina, in 1967. Before the construction of the Columbia gurdwara, South Carolina Sikhs would sometimes travel to Augusta, Georgia (about 70 miles southwest of Columbia) for worship in the gurdwara there. In 2003, not even ten years after the completion of the gurdwara, the Sikh Religious Society of South Carolina was already making plans for expansion to accommodate the growing number of Sikhs in the state, estimated by Dr. Guram at about 100 families. Plans include the building of a separate structure to serve as a new worship hall, while the old building will be used entirely for classrooms and kitchen space, with the expansion of the kitchen into the old worship hall to provide greater facilities for the preparation of the *langar,* or community meal, served after each Sunday service.[52]

Jainism

Yet another religious tradition originating in India, there are a small number of Jain

families in South Carolina. Although they do not have any physical centers in which to worship, some Jains attend some of the Hindu temples in the area, since the temples in Greenville, Columbia, and Augusta (Georgia) have *murti*s of Mahavir, the founder of Jainism. The largest population of Jains seems to be in the Upstate; there are about twenty Jain families in the Greenville area, with ties to the Greenville Vedic Center.[53]

Islam

Islam in South Carolina has a variegated history, from the early arrival of West African Muslims in the slave trade to the arrival of the Nation of Islam in the 1950s, to the immigration of Middle Eastern and Indian Muslims in the years following the 1965 Immigration Act. The 2003 Columbia Muslim Directory, published by the Columbia chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), lists over 450 households, representing about 1,300 Muslims.[54] While most of these listings are Columbia residents, there are some listings from around the state. The estimated total population of Muslims in South Carolina is around 5,000.[55] The directory lists fourteen mosques in South Carolina, five of which are in Columbia. There are four mosques in Charleston, and one in each of the cities of Greenville, Spartanburg, Clemson and Moncks Corner (near Charleston). The directory also lists two mosques just across the state line in Augusta, Georgia, that many South Carolina Muslims attend. There are also Muslim Student Associations at the University of South Carolina, Clemson University, Furman University (in Greenville) and the College of Charleston. There are two full-time Islamic schools in Columbia, educating elementary school-age children. The Islamic Society of Greenville has an after-school program for children in first through eighth grades in which students are taught Arabic, Qur'anic memorization, and general knowledge about the faith. The

group hopes to expand the program to a full-time Islamic school.[56] South Carolina's only chapter of CAIR was founded after Sept. 11, 2001, and is located in Columbia.[57]

There are Muslims of every stripe in South Carolina, from Sunni to Shi'ite to Sufi. Although most of the state's African-American Muslims who were once involved with the Nation of Islam have since left the movement (with the exception of one congregation in Charleston), there still exists a divide between predominantly African American communities and predominantly-immigrant communities, although there is some overlap between the two. In 2003, the Sufi community in Columbia broke ground on their own mosque,[58] and the international headquarters of the Islamic Studies and Research Association (ISRA), an association with Sufi connections, is also located in South Carolina, in Turbeville (about 35 miles east of Columbia), with a student chapter at USC.[59] While there are no Shi'ite mosques in the state, many Shi'ites meet in homes annually to commemorate the martyrdom of Ali, grandson of the Prophet Muhammad,[60] and the IRSA chapter at USC has also sponsored commemorations of Ali's martyrdom on campus.[61]

Buddhism

Buddhism has perhaps experienced the most recent growth in South Carolina, with an interesting divide between several immigrant communities in the Upstate and predominantly American-born convert communities in the Midlands and the Lowcountry. In the Upstate, there are at least six Buddhist centers, including four in Spartanburg alone (one Laotian, two Cambodian (Theravadan) and one Vietnamese (Chan/Pure Land). There is also a Theravadan center in Greenville, the Carolina Buddhist Vihara, which was originally associated with several Sri Lankan immigrants but is now led by a nun, an

American-born convert who is known as Bhikkhuni Suddhamma. Several Vietnamese Theravadan Buddhist monks living in Greenville are seeking to build a temple in nearby Lyman (a rural town between Greenville and Spartanburg).[62]

In contrast to these largely immigrant communities, where religion is often linked with cultural practices or traditions, the majority of the Buddhist organizations in Columbia are comprised nearly entirely of American converts and consider presenting the dharma to a Western audience as part of their key purpose. Since 2000, the number of Buddhist centers in Columbia has increased from two to five. Of the Columbia groups, the Ganden Mahayana Buddhist Center (New Kadampa), the Columbia Zen Buddhist Priory (Soto Zen) and the Shambhala Center and Dharmadhatu (Tibetan) are specifically focused on making Buddhism accessible to a Western audience. All chants and prayers are in English, and at the Ganden Mahayana center, newcomers are taught meditation techniques sitting in a folding chair rather than on a floor cushion in the traditional lotus position, though cushions are available for those who want to use them. The Zen priory uses Gregorian melodies in its chanting practice, since these are sounds that Westerners typically recognize as "spiritual," according to the priory's resident monk, Rev. Rokuzan Kroenke.[63]

Exceptions to the immigrant-Western dichotomy among South Carolina Buddhists are the Tibetan Buddhists associated with the Charleston Tibetan Society and the Soka Gakkai Buddhists. The South Carolina Dharma Group (Columbia) and its parent organization, the Charleston Tibetan Society, are both affiliated with the Gelupka school of Tibetan Buddhism and are taught by a resident monk from India who holds a geshe degree (roughly equivalent to a Western Ph.D.). Though all teaching is in English,

chanting is done in Tibetan, and some members of the group have begun to study Tibetan in order to read the scriptures in their original language. Although the groups are fairly ethnically diverse, the majority of the attendees are American-born rather than immigrants. However, the group still concerns itself with the particular Tibetan form of Buddhism, including many aspects of Tibetan culture, though almost none of its members are actually of Tibetan descent.[64] The Charleston Tibetan Society is the only Buddhist organization in Charleston with any active and visible presence, although a Zen group does meet on nearby Sullivans Island.

Soka Gakkai Buddhism, which claims about 1,000 followers statewide, owes its existence in South Carolina largely to Japanese women who married American soldiers during the Second World War, but the community is not comprised mainly of Japanese immigrants or descendants.[65] Instead, American-born converts of European and African descent are predominant, with a significant group of Hispanics as well. In addition to these ethnic groups, some attendees are also of Chinese, Indian and Korean descent.[66] The state's only Soka Gakkai center is in Columbia; most members meet in homes for chanting and discussion.

As with Islam, Buddhism in South Carolina is diverse; there are representatives from all major traditions—Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana. In general, Theravada Buddhism is present only in the Upstate with the predominantly immigrant communities, and Mahayana and Vajrayana dominate Buddhism in the Midlands and the Low Country.

Implications for a Pluralistic South Carolina

"Which South Carolina?"

When considering how religious diversity is affecting the state, it is important to

consider "which South Carolina" one is discussing. As evidenced by the presence of the religious communities discussed in this paper, South Carolina is no longer (nor was it ever entirely) "monolithically Protestant." However, the diversity that is present in South Carolina has not reached the popular consciousness. As previously mentioned, Baptists and Methodists are still the dominant religious group, and by the numbers, Christianity as a whole far surpasses any of the non-Christian religious. Cecile Holmes, professor of journalism at the University of South Carolina and former religion editor of the *Houston Chronicle,* says while religious diversity is present in South Carolina, one has to seek it out.[67] Though the "South Carolina" described in this paper is one of immense diversity and there are individuals in the state who are deeply connected to that diversity and engage with it on a regular basis, there is another "South Carolina" that is either unaware of the existence of diversity or hostile toward it. In contrast to the new immigrant population, South Carolina harbors a population of old-line Southerners, many of whom have lived in the state their entire lives. Because the state saw almost no in-migration or out-migration between 1860 and 1950,[68] the older generation of South Carolinians may have a certain idea about who or what the state is and are not used to change.[69]

The (Christian?) Public Square

The influence and importance of religion in the state is seen in certain state laws that most likely violate the First Amendment, but have gone unchallenged throughout the state's history. For example, according to state law, candidates for notary public or governor cannot be atheist.[70] In the state's popular consciousness, long-held assumptions that everyone is a Protestant Christian still hold sway. This can be seen in continuous letters-to-the-editor of local newspapers arguing for the inclusion of prayer in the public

schools or the posting of the Ten Commandments in public buildings. One such incident received national attention in May of 1997 when Dr. Henry S. Jordan, member of the state board of education, proposed the posting of the Ten Commandments in South Carolina's public schools, dismissing concerns for the feelings of non-Christian students with the comment, "screw the Buddhists and kill the Muslims."[71] When a Rock Hill Muslim man wrote a letter asking for Jordan's resignation, Jordan responded with, among other things, "If you are not smart enough to read through the news and see what really transpired from this news event, it is no wonder that you think salvation can be obtained by good works and having faith in Allah."[72] Jordan's comments drew calls for his resignation not only from fellow South Carolinians, but also the national offices of CAIR and Americans United for the Separation of Church and State. Despite this public outcry, Jordan remained on the state's school board until his retirement in 2001.[73]

Many of the state's practices that implicitly assume all in attendance are Christian, such as prayer before council meetings or football games, have been challenged in recent years. Following the 2000 Supreme Court decision in *Sante Fe Independent School District v. Doe*, the state discontinued its widespread practice of having students offer prayers before football games,[74] often "in Christ's name." In a case currently under appeal, a Wiccan high priestess in Great Falls (a rural town forty-five miles north of Columbia) sued the town for opening town council meetings with prayers in the name of Jesus Christ. The federal court ruled in her favor, arguing that it violates the establishment clause for prayers at public meetings to invoke any "specific deity."[75] Great Falls is appealing the case to the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals, and the ruling will affect not just South Carolina, but also the other five states in the Fourth Circuit (North

Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia and Maryland).[76]

It is perhaps the public school system where the touchy subject of religious diversity and religious tolerance has most often surfaced. As previously mentioned, the debate over prayer in public schools is still alive and well in South Carolina, and school administrators and teachers continually deal with questions of school endorsement of religion with regards to faculty "sponsors" or "advisors" to Christian clubs like the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, faculty participation in the annual "See You at the Pole" prayer meetings, and requests from local churches to send a "prayer team" to every school in the state to pray over the school the night before "See You at the Pole" at the beginning of each academic year.[77]

The subject of religion in the school curriculum is also a constant subject of debate, as many parents lobby the school board for the inclusion of Bible classes in the school curriculum. Though most schools do not offer such a course, Union County schools have offered a Bible history class in recent years.[78] The data on how religion is treated in South Carolina's public school system is scarce, since any courses on religion are taught for elective credit, and according to Cindy Saylor, director of the Office of Curriculum and Standards at the South Carolina Department of Education (SDE), the state does not monitor local elective course implementation, establish standards, or provide instructional support for such courses.[79] As a result, no one at the SDE could provide any information about elective courses in Bible history or world religions taught in the state, though State Superintendent of Education Inez Tenenbaum said the state hopes to have better data collection systems in the future.[80] The state curriculum standards do provide for the teaching of world religions in the sixth and ninth grade social studies curriculum,

but this is done within a social studies course, not in a separate course on religion.[81]

For the past six years, however, at least one school in the state has offered a course on “World Religions in Historical Perspective,” taught at Northwestern High School in Rock Hill (near Charlotte, N.C.). The course was introduced in 1997, after members of some local churches approached the school board requesting a Bible course. The school board decided they could not offer a course of the nature requested by the church groups, which would focus solely on Christianity, but the request sparked conversation about the place of religion in the school’s curriculum, and eventually resulted in the introduction of a world religions course, examining the five major world religions—Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism and Islam, in historical perspective[82]—not exactly what the church groups had in mind!

Toni Hendrix, who has taught the world religions course at Northwestern since its inception, said the class has been a great success, with very little controversy. She said the course is always full, and in the past has been offered jointly with Rock Hill High School, Northwestern’s local rival, via distance learning. A history teacher by training, Hendrix had little to no instruction in the religions of the world when she was asked to teach the course starting in 1997, but has since expanded her own knowledge through teaching the class. She makes use of local religious communities, taking students on field visits to churches, mosques and synagogues in Charlotte, bringing in guest speakers from various faith communities, and asking students to speak about their tradition to the class (she mentioned several Hindu and Buddhist students who had done this). Hendrix said she was not aware of any other school in the state that offered a similar course; when envisioning the curriculum for the Northwestern course, teachers and administrators had

to look to high schools in Virginia and Maryland to find a model.[83]

The public schools are an area of immense potential for increasing awareness of the state's religious diversity, if more schools take Northwestern's initiative in offering instruction in the historical study of religion. Partners in Dialogue, an interfaith organization based at the University of South Carolina's religious studies department in Columbia, is considering taking a more active role in advocating for education about religion in public schools. In 2002, Partners hosted one of twelve national symposia on diversity issues sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation and the United States Conference of Religions for Peace (USCRP), choosing to focus on the topic of religion in the public schools. The conference included lectures on federal legal guidelines and a panel discussion among several educational leaders in the state. Dr. Carl Evans, chair of the religious studies department at USC and director of Partners in Dialogue, said at the end of the two-day conference the executive director of USCRP asked Partners if they would be interested in working with USCRP to become an advocate for teaching about religion in public schools. Evans said the group is currently considering this option.[84]

Religious Discrimination or Hate Crimes

In terms of public expressions of religious discrimination or hate crimes, South Carolina's record for the past ten years seems surprisingly clean. Religion writers and other journalists at papers in the Upstate and the Midlands could think of very few incidents in which religious discrimination or hate crimes had made the news in the past decade. There have been a few incidents, such as the rash of African-American church burnings in the early 1990s, motivated by white supremacists and later copycats. There were ten fires in South Carolina, and the phenomenon was seen across North Carolina

and Georgia as well.[85] In 1995, a fire destroyed the Islamic Center of Greenville. Police eventually classified the fire as arson, part of a string of several other arson cases that included burnings of churches and a local strip club.[86] In the wake of Sept. 11, 2001, there was some graffiti drawn on the outside walls of the Islamic Center of Charleston, which Charleston mayor Joe Riley quickly sent a crew to clean up.[87] Other than these few incidents, however, all sources—journalists as well as representatives of the religious communities, reported no other public incidents of religious harassment or violence.[88]

Despite this low level of public violence or harassment and the assessments of reporters that the state "does a pretty good job with tolerance,"[89] some individuals from minority religious communities did report minor incidents of discrimination or misunderstanding. A woman from the Sikh Religious Society of South Carolina expressed frustration at the general public's lack of knowledge about her religion; she said when someone asks her about her religion and she says she is a Sikh, people will respond with something like, "What? 'Seek?' Are you sick?" She also described some incidents in which people had laughed at her young son because of his turban when she took him out in public. She said though her son was too young to understand such incidents, she was worried what the impact would be when he is older. "It hurts, you know?" she said. "Sometimes it just hurts so much and I get really angry."[90]

Some attendees of Masjid Al-Muslimiin also expressed a frustration with lack of knowledge about their religion. One young woman, a college student at USC, mentioned a class she was taking in which she felt Islam was being misrepresented. Another woman said she had had a similar experience at USC many years ago, but when she pointed out the incorrect information, her professor let her present the correct information. "The

professors at USC are pretty open," she told the girl, encouraging her to speak up and correct the misrepresentations.[91] Another woman at the mosque reported that they had experienced some problems with students from the "Bible college" (most likely she was referring to Columbia International University) coming to the mosque and trying to convert the Muslims.[92]

Matt Russell, of the SC Pagan Alliance, also reported difficulties with South Carolinians who "are not open-minded to anything that they've never heard of before."[93] Although he said he had never experienced any discrimination in his ten years as a Wiccan, he said he has received reports of incidents from some of the more rural areas of the state where pagans have experienced harassment. He also mentioned that the metaphysical stores run by many of the state's pagans have difficulty staying open in South Carolina. "The businesses will not stay open here for more than a couple of years," he said. "People are actually afraid to go there."[94]

Of Religious Tolerance, Intolerance, and Exclusivist Theology

The minor incidents of discrimination reported by members of the state's minority religious communities are more likely the result of simple ignorance or misunderstanding than any intentional ill will toward their communities. This kind of encounter is practically inevitable in an area where Christianity is the dominant cultural norm and many people have so little awareness of their religious neighbors. In a state where the majority of the religious population is affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention—whose only association with the word "interfaith" is a section on the website of its partner association, the North American Mission Board, on "interfaith evangelism," with detailed prayers on how to convert members of other faiths[95]—there

will be many whose personal theological views are exclusivist; that is, they believe only their faith can offer salvation to humankind. While such views may be offensive to members of other religions, it is important to distinguish between public religious intolerance and personal exclusivist beliefs. While by most reports it seems South Carolina does not have much of the former, it certainly has a great deal of the latter.

The fine line between exclusivist theology and religious intolerance is one the state constantly has to walk. On one hand, the state must protect the freedom of religion of those who believe that all who are not a member of their faith are "lost," but the state also must not tolerate public expressions of religious intolerance. In some cases, such as the aforementioned Henry Jordan case, exclusivist views can motivate public expressions of intolerance or religious harassment, but it is important to recognize that this is not always the case. There are tactful and respectful ways to articulate an exclusivist theology and there are derogatory and hateful ways to do so. There are plenty of South Carolinians who may feel their neighbors are not "saved," but would never verbally or physically harm adherents of other faiths. Some might argue that merely articulating the belief that people of other faiths are not saved is a "verbal abuse" of those people and an expression of religious intolerance, but that particular opinion should not affect conservatives' rights to believe and practice as their faith dictates. It should also be mentioned that Southern Baptists do not have a monopoly on exclusivist theology in South Carolina, nor do Christians, for that matter. For example, several Muslim organizations also hold similar views that their religion is the only way to God and engage in public *da'wa*—that is, "calling" to Islam—on the streets of Columbia. These people must be taken seriously, and their rights to believe and practice their faith must be protected as well as the rights

of their more liberal counterparts.

Beyond Tolerance?

In the fall of 2001, the Religious Council at Furman University (Greenville) sponsored a week-long colloquium entitled, “Beyond Tolerance: Appreciating Religious Diversity.” For many of Furman’s religiously conservative students, it was too far to move from religious tolerance to *appreciating* religious diversity, and this echoes a sentiment found among many of those with exclusivist theological views. Publicly tolerating the “religious other” is one thing, but appreciating or respecting their religious beliefs is a particular mindset that many feel is contradictory to their faith. (They may make a distinction between appreciating and respecting a *person* of a different faith—which is certainly acceptable and encouraged—and appreciating or respecting that person’s *religion*, which is not seen as acceptable.)

However, there is a contingent of people in the state who *are* pushing for appreciation and respect for religious difference. Several of the minority religious groups have mobilized to promote a more positive image of their faith and demand respect from the public, such as the pagan community, with the formation of the South Carolina Pagan Alliance in 1999, and the Muslim community, with the establishment of a South Carolina chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations in 2001. There are also a variety of interfaith dialogue organizations in the state, many of which are spearheaded by individuals with a commitment to “appreciating” or “celebrating” religious diversity.

In addition to the previously mentioned Partners in Dialogue, which was founded in 1992 and is the oldest interfaith organization in the state, there are also interfaith dialogue organizations in Greenville and Anderson. Greenville Faith Communities United (an

affiliate of the United Religions Initiative) was founded in 1998 by four clergy (Protestant, Catholic and Jewish), with the stated purpose of "celebrat[ing] interfaith understanding, respect, and cooperation in the pursuit of a just society," and Anderson has a "Cooperation Circle" of the United Religions Initiative.[96] The Ecumenical Institute, founded in 1970 at Wake Forest University in North Carolina, has historically focused on relationships between Protestants and Catholics and Jewish/Christian dialogue, but is interesting in expanding its activities to include religions other than Judaism and Christianity. Two South Carolina institutions have joined the Ecumenical Institute's list of sponsors—Furman University and Mepkin Abby, a Trappist Monastery in Moncks Corner (thirty miles north of Charleston).[97] Furman University also has a student interfaith organization, founded in 2001, called Interfaith @ Furman.

The events of September 11, 2001, proved to be an impetus for South Carolinians to seek out knowledge of other faiths, a phenomenon observed across much of the country. Mosques reported an increase in requests from churches for Muslims to come speak about their faith, and immediately following Sept. 11, Governor Jim Hodges asked the State Human Affairs Commission to arrange a series of interfaith dialogue events, which were recorded by South Carolina's public television station and aired on the week of the one-year anniversary of the attacks. The documentary included three interfaith panels, held in Columbia, Rock Hill, and Beaufort. Although the show was entitled "Religious Tolerance After 9/11," the Columbia panel, which was comprised mainly of Partners in Dialogue members, emphasized the importance of moving beyond the word "tolerance" to "respect." "To me, tolerance is not even a civilized word for the religious one," Arunima Sinha, the panel's Hindu representative, said. "Because I can tolerate my

anger, I can tolerate pain. What is there for me to tolerate about Omar [a Muslim panelist] here?"[98] Barbara Morningstar Paul, the Native American representative on the panel, echoed these sentiments. "If I tolerate my brother here, it's cause I've judged him," she said. "And if I have to tolerate him, it means that I've judged that he's 'worthy' of my tolerance."[99]

Clearly, these comments illustrate a very different perspective from many more theologically conservative South Carolinians. It is perhaps a fitting illustration of the "which South Carolina" question that the week the ETV religious tolerance show aired statewide was the same week in which the Jesus Video Project, an evangelical organization based in California, undertook its largest evangelization effort to date, mailing a video about the life of Jesus to every household in South Carolina (with the financial support of many South Carolina churches).[100]

The Future of Faith in South Carolina

Will the dominant image of South Carolina as a state of conservative Christians continue, despite the increased diversity? In his outlook for the future of religion in South Carolina in the 1993 book *Religion in South Carolina,* Charles Lippy argues that because of the vast numerical dominance of Christianity, "South Carolina will remain a bastion of Protestantism, with those of an evangelical cast exerting dominant influence."[101] However, he goes on to say,

> But this does not reflect the whole picture…Religious pluralism is also a continuous strand in the state's religious fabric. Pluralism has many connotations. It may refer, for example, to the variety of Protestant denominations that flourish in the state. Pluralism also suggests that there is a range of religious options not restricted to organized Protestant denominations, to the larger Christian orbit, or even to structured religious groups.[102]

Returning to John Shelton Reed's 1974 observation, is a "monolithically Protestant" religious identity necessary for the perseverance of "Southern identity"? Perhaps not—perhaps "Southern identity" in terms of religion will shift from being particularly devout Protestant Christians to particularly devout Christians, Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists. As David Goldfield observes in the aforementioned guidebook to the South for new Southerners, "Piety is infectious, because even migrants to the region fall into a pattern of regular church or synagogue attendance."[103] Indeed, several members of the minority religious communities commented on the high level of religiosity in South Carolina, and this could actually be a positive thing for their communities. For example, Michelle Gauthier, resident teacher at the Ganden Mahayana Buddhist Center in Columbia and a native Bostonian, had this to say about her experiences leading Buddhist groups in Atlanta and Columbia:

> I find the best thing, actually, about the South is that people here naturally have a lot more faith. Whereas the North, they're more intellectual, more cautious, more reserved, but I find down here people are just so much more open. A lot more "faith-based."[104]

Even if people may have disagreements regarding theology, religion is at least taken seriously by a majority of the state's people. Perhaps in South Carolina and other areas of the famously (or infamously) religious South, the project of pluralism may take a different form than it has in other areas of the country. As Kevin Lewis observes in *Religion in South Carolina*:

> South Carolina, like other states located in the Bible Belt, differs from other regions of the country where talk of religion in public has diminished under pressure of increasing secularization and diversity of religious points of view. South Carolinians encounter, deal with, and talk about religion and its effects daily. Reticence concerning one's guiding convictions and values may be an ingredient of the air breathed elsewhere, but not in South Carolina, where, by tradition long established especially

> in the dominant evangelical communities, South Carolinians wear their religion on their sleeves.[105]

Conversation about religion has always been in the public square in South Carolina, and perhaps it will not disappear as the religious diversity of the state grows. Instead, perhaps the new perspectives will be integrated into the public conversations on religion that have been a part of the social fabric of the Palmetto State for much of its history.

Perhaps the most difficult challenge for the future of religion in South Carolina, however, will be engaging fellow citizens across ideological boundaries. The South Carolinians involved in interfaith endeavors may be of diverse faiths, but most share similar views on the nature of religious truth and pluralism. In many cases, it may be easier for them to engage with these members of other traditions than to talk with their more conservative co-religionists. The real challenge to South Carolina in the twenty-first century, as religious diversity grows and immigration brings non-native Southerners to the heart of the Deep South, will be to avoid the polarization of people of faith into the liberals who would seek to dialogue with the new Southerners and the conservatives who would seek to convert them. This boundary will be perhaps the most difficult to overcome and may prove insurmountable, yet it is the most important division to address if true understanding is to be achieved among South Carolina's many religious communities.

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