

**Interfaith Cooperation and the Entrepreneurial Enterprise**  
**for**  
***Business Storytelling of Entrepreneurship***  
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**Introduction**

Why include an article on religion in a publication about entrepreneurship? Isn't religion declining and secularization on the rise? Aren't we evolving, eventually, toward a world without religion? Were sociologists right about this so-called secularization theory? Due to the long-term decline of religion and the rise of the religiously unaffiliated in Western Europe and the United States,<sup>1</sup> scholarly opinion affirmed the 'secularization theory' until recently. Famed sociologist of religion Peter Berger championed the secularization theory in his widely respected book, *The Sacred Canopy* (1966). By the late 1980's, however, Berger (2012) reported that his mind had changed.

Berger's change of mind is supported by data, particularly with reference to a declining share of the world's population by the religiously unaffiliated. A report from the Pew Research Center (2015) predicts that, by 2050, "Atheists, agnostics and other people who do not affiliate with any religion – though increasing in countries such as the United States and France – will make up a *declining* share of the world's total population" (emphasis mine).

What about the U.S.? The United States, though less Christian—demographically speaking—than in previous generations, remains quite religious (Putnam and Campbell, 2010). The two most significant religious changes in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries have been the rise of the 'nones' (religiously unaffiliated) and the rise in religious diversity. Before the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965, religious diversity primarily meant a diversity of

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<sup>1</sup> Though the religiously unaffiliated are on the rise in the U.S. and the Christian share of the population is declining, religious diversity is increasing. If we think in terms of all religions, not just Christianity, the U.S. remains, according to social scientists Robert Putnam and David Campbell, a very religious nation. See Robert Putnam and David Campbell (2010), *American grace: how religion divides and unites us*. New York: Simon and Schuster: 7.

Christian denominations. Now, any large U.S. city includes Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, Buddhists, Jews and more in addition to Christians and persons who are religiously unaffiliated.

Consequently, after his change of mind, Berger concluded that modernity does not secularize but, rather, pluralizes (1996). Religious pluralism,<sup>2</sup> in the sense of diverse religious communities and individuals living in close proximity to one another, brings risks and opportunities. Regardless of one's personal religious perspective, entrepreneurs ignore religion and religious diversity at their own peril. In business, education, health care, government, social entrepreneurship, and so on, we have to be able to navigate religious diversity if we are to work effectively in the contemporary world.

This article focuses on the promise of religious diversity against the threat. The threat is real, to be sure. Religious differences are a source of conflict, division and, in the worst cases, violence. But the entrepreneurial spirit calls us to find ways to bridge religious differences to create interfaith understanding and cooperation. Bridging these differences can, with the right leadership, have a positive impact on the broader society (the bystander effect), not just religious communities or individuals. Ashoka founder Bill Drayton (n.d.) wrote, "Social entrepreneurs are the essential corrective force. They are system-changing entrepreneurs. And from deep within they, and therefore their work, are committed to the good of all."

Following the introduction, the paper begins with an analysis of religious pluralism. Clarity is needed because there are several uses of the term 'pluralism' in religious studies and in popular interfaith efforts. I describe a dominant version of 'theological pluralism' and then move to 'civic pluralism'. I argue that civic pluralism and the social capital it engenders is fertile soil for social entrepreneurs to cultivate and grow interfaith understanding. Then, using Marshall

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<sup>2</sup> I will give attention to a more robust definition of pluralism advocated by Diana Eck and Eboo Patel in the next section of this paper. For the present purposes, 'pluralism' is simply referring to increased diversity and proximity.

Ganz's (2008) concept of leadership through public narrative, I proceed in three steps: the story of self, the story of us, and the story of now using the interfaith story of Eboo Patel, founder of Interfaith Youth Core, as an example. Story functions as a powerful entrepreneurial force for social change. This paper tells part of the story of interfaith cooperation and invites readers to utilize the power of story to construct bridges with the religious 'other'.

## **Pluralism**

*Pluralism is not diversity alone, but the **energetic engagement with diversity**.* (Eck, 2006)

Although pluralism seems to be a straightforward term, its usage in religious studies and interfaith relationships is sufficiently ambiguous to warrant clarification. For many people, especially scholars of religion, pluralism refers to John Hick's (1973, 1989, 2004) pluralistic hypothesis or some version thereof. In popular terms, Hick's hypothesis can be described by the metaphor of a mountain with different trails that all lead to the same peak, the 'Real'. Hick's preferred metaphor was a Copernican revolution in the religious solar system; religions that previously understood themselves to be the center of the solar system could become aware of being just one of many coequal planets revolving around a central sun (the 'Real') (1973). While one may agree or disagree with Hick or these metaphorical expressions, the assumption that the term 'pluralism' inevitably refers to Hick's hypothesis is a dubious assumption and, as argued below, counterproductive *as a guiding model* for interfaith engagement.<sup>3</sup>

In contrast to Hick, scholars like Diana Eck of Harvard and Eboo Patel of Interfaith Youth Core use 'pluralism' to refer to civic engagement across lines of religious difference whether there is, so to speak, one mountain or a whole mountain range. For the sake of interfaith discourse and engagement, they make no *a priori* assumptions about the same mountain peak,

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<sup>3</sup> Hick's theological pluralism is open to Follett's (1919) critique of political pluralism, namely that it risks absorption into the other. As we will see below, Eck and Patel's civic pluralism transcends this critique.

water source, or sun/solar system; instead they seek to create a space where people can come to the table, so to speak, with their different convictions and perspectives (Eck, 2006; Patel, 2012, 2016). This civic space, Eck argues, was intended by the founding fathers in the U.S. The founding fathers “deliberately created a civic space that would not be dominated by their own faith or any other.” (Eck, 2007). One’s personal religious convictions may or may not include Hick’s theological pluralism or some variation thereof but, for Eck and Patel, Hick’s perspective is not the model through which interfaith encounter should operate. Eck explains, “The new paradigm of pluralism does not require us to leave our identities and our commitments behind, for pluralism is the encounter of commitments. It means holding our deepest differences, even our religious differences, not in isolation, but in relationship to one another” (2006). Let’s call Hick’s view “theological pluralism”<sup>4</sup> and the Eck-Patel view “civic pluralism.” (Eck, 2006, 2007; Patel, 2016).<sup>5</sup> The argument herein is that civic pluralism should be the model by which interfaith encounter operates. This argument is based on unique roles for theological and civic pluralism, respectively.

The distinction between these two forms of pluralism is crucial for productive interfaith engagement and, consequently, for entrepreneurial aspirations. Although a few interfaith interlocutors are beginning to use the terms ‘theological pluralism’ and ‘civic pluralism’, complete clarity of terms remains a goal, not an achievement. Alas, interfaith activists who

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<sup>4</sup> Note that theological pluralism can refer to any number theological projects that seek to deal, from a theological perspective, with religious diversity. In other words, Hick is not alone. Hick is simply, as far as I can discern, the most well-known and serves as an example for this essay. See also Waters (2016).

<sup>5</sup> Eck does not specifically use the terms ‘theological pluralism’ and ‘civic pluralism’. Instead, she titles two sections of her essay as follows, “Religious Pluralism: Theological Perspectives” and “Religious Pluralism: Civic Perspectives.” The conceptual result, nonetheless, is a distinction between civic and theological pluralism. Similarly, Patel, in *Interfaith Leadership*, uses the term ‘pluralism’ to describe what I am calling ‘civic pluralism.’ In professional conversations that are part of a consultation between McMurry University and Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC), Patel’s IFYC staff have occasionally begun to distinguish between theological and civic pluralism to denote different approaches to pluralism.

*intend* civic pluralism will often simply say, ‘pluralism’. The same is true of those who *intend* theological pluralism. In the interest of clarity, readers should note that the primary focus of this essay is *not* theological pluralism. The theological perspective is mentioned solely for the purpose of distinguishing it from civic pluralism. My argument is that civic pluralism is, innately, an entrepreneurial enterprise and should be the posture or model out of which one approaches interfaith engagement.

A possible objection to this perspective could be raised with the following question. What about interfaith engagement when one or more of the participants holds some form of theological pluralism as a deeply held religious conviction? This scenario is to be expected in many, if not most, interfaith settings. It is a core affirmation in the Baha’i faith, for example, and some branches of Hinduism. And it is certainly not limited to these examples. Many Christians involved in interfaith work hold some form of theological pluralism. Shouldn’t theological pluralism have a place at the table alongside any other religious perspective? *Of course it should.* Theological pluralism is one faith perspective among others and thus, like any faith perspective, has a legitimate place at the interfaith table. It is, however, an unstable ‘rule of engagement’.

In terms of ‘rules’ that control ‘language games’ (Wittgenstein, 1973), the author has been in numerous interfaith settings where it became clear that the (sometimes hidden) ‘rule’ for dialogue and engagement was some form theological pluralism. The least tenable expression of this hidden rule is a watered-down version of the pluralistic hypothesis that says, “all religions are true” and carries the presumption that anyone who is truly committed to interfaith work will hold this view. On the contrary, the present contention is that the role of theological pluralism is to be one faith perspective among others, having a legitimate place at the table, but not setting the rules for the whole ‘game.’

Civic pluralism—not theological pluralism—should set the ground rules for interfaith engagement; it should be the overall paradigm through which engagement is entered. This is due to the fact that theological pluralism presumes others are connecting to the same ‘Real’ through their religion *whether these religious others agree that this is the case or not*. A story clarifies this point. A Buddhist and a Christian were discussing their understandings of heaven as mystical union with God and of parinirvana. The Christian insisted that the two are the same, just expressed differently in the clothing of diverse cultures. After some dialogue and explanation from each, the Buddhist respectfully said, “I really think we are talking about two different realities.” When the conversation ended and the Buddhist departed, the Christian leaned to someone nearby and said, “We are really talking about the same thing. She (the Buddhist) just doesn’t know it yet” (Waters, 2016).<sup>6</sup>

Hick’s version of theological pluralism and similar pluralistic perspectives not only make positive claims about one’s own religion, but—like the Christian in the story—about other religions *even if the adherents of those other religions disagree*. My argument is not against theological pluralism *per se*. But, while theological pluralism is one faith perspective among others, civic pluralism, is a paradigm or model for interfaith engagement. It provides more space for genuine disagreement and respect for the difference of the ‘other’, whereas theological pluralism, while it allows for exoteric differences, assumes an *ultimate* sameness (the ‘Real’, the ‘mountain peak’) among religions.

### **Civic Pluralism: Eck**

In contrast to theological pluralism, civic pluralism, understood as a form of social entrepreneurship, is open-ended; it accepts the religious ‘other’ where they are regardless of

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<sup>6</sup> This story is not original with me, but I cannot remember the original source of the story. See also Mark Waters (2016).

similar or different views of ultimate reality. Eck (2006) provides four aspects of [civic] pluralism, though she simply uses the term pluralism. She explains that (1) Pluralism is not diversity alone but “the energetic engagement of diversity.” Diversity that is left alone may divide people and create “religious ghettos.” Pluralism, on the other hand, “is an achievement.” Pluralism achieves connection with the religious other. (2) Pluralism is more than tolerance. We can tolerate without knowing anything about the religious other. Pluralism involves *the active seeking of understanding “across lines of difference.”* (3) Pluralism is not relativism, but “*the encounter of commitments.*” “The new paradigm of pluralism,” writes Eck, “does not require us to leave our identities and our commitments behind, for pluralism is the encounter of commitments. It means holding our deepest differences, even our religious differences, not in isolation, but in relationship to one another.”<sup>7</sup> (4) Pluralism is grounded in dialogue. Everyone has a place at the table *with* their identities and commitments. Eck’s emphasis corresponds with Ensemble Leadership Theory (Rosile, et. al. 2018) which is organic, shared, and multi-centered rather than singularly-centered and hierarchical (see also ELT on p. 21).

### **Civic Pluralism: Patel**

Patel builds on Eck’s understanding and further develops the concept of civic pluralism. Patel’s (2016) pluralism includes three parts: “respect for identity, relationships with different communities, and a commitment to the common good.”

Patel (2016) makes three assertions about respect for identity. The first is the right of people to “form their own identities regarding religion, or anything else for that matter.” The second is just as foundational as the first, “people have a right to express their identity.”

Religious identity is not only expressed in settings that are inherently religious, it is also

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<sup>7</sup> This is the primary contrast between civic pluralism and Follett’s (1919) critique of political pluralism. Civic pluralism does not lead to absorption in the other.

expressed in the public square through civic involvement. This includes the right to vote or influence public policy based on values derived from one's religious convictions.<sup>8</sup> Finally, respect for identity involves reasonable accommodation. Examples include the accommodation of holidays, dietary restrictions, required prayer times, clothing, and the like. For instance, congress recently changed a longstanding rule forbidding head coverings on the House floor to accommodate Minnesota congresswoman Ilhan Omar who wears a hijab. Similarly, Michigan congresswoman Rashida Tlaib took the oath of office on a Qur'an. These are reasonable accommodations for religious identity.

The second part of Patel's (2016) [civic] pluralism, following respect, is relationship. As Eck (2006) pointed out above, diversity that is left alone can result in people hunkering down in their own religious ghetto. Without relationships across lines of difference, people tend to develop insular mindsets and live in their own echo chambers (Putnam and Campbell, 2010). Engaging religious diversity requires relationships; it requires getting to know the religious other.

Numerous studies have indicated that, when certain conditions are met, actual contact across lines of difference tends to reduce prejudice thereby opening the way for intergroup relationships. This prejudice reduction is not just about the person with whom a relationship is

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<sup>8</sup> This assertion assumes, of course, that the one who is 'exercising' religion in the public square is not, in their *public* role—for instance, a public school teacher, a law enforcement officer, a judge, or a senator—'establishing' or coercing religion. The delicate balance between the free exercise of religion and the non-establishment of religion by the government, while admittedly gray, must be maintained. This constitutional affirmation does not mean, however, that religion should always remain 'private' and has no place in the public square. In terms of public expression, religious identity should be treated no differently by the law than any other identity such as race, gender, or sexual orientation. One is under no more compelling interest to keep their religious identity private than they are to keep any other identity private. Obviously, this whole discussion is treading on the gray area of competing rights, such as a conservative Christian wedding cake baker and a same-sex couple seeking a cake for their wedding. While I personally disagree with the SCOTUS decision in favor of the baker, we cannot resolve this thorny issue in a brief footnote. My underlying point is that the ambiguous nature of free-exercise and non-establishment raises the need for entrepreneurial, interfaith cooperation to a high level. Yale law professor Stephen L. Carter (1993) writes, "The separation of church and state should prohibit the use of the apparatus of government to coerce religious belief, but it must not be made a metaphor for government pressure not to be religious."



developed, but about the whole group that person represents (Allport, 1954, 1979; Pettigrew and Tropp, 2011; Varshney, 2002; Waters, 2018). This phenomenon, called the ‘contact hypothesis’ and later ‘contact theory’ was first proposed by Gordon Allport in 1954. Allport found that four conditions were necessary for contact to reduce prejudice: equal status, common goals, intergroup cooperation, and support of authorities in the context in which the contact takes place. (Allport, 1954, 1979). Later, Thomas Pettigrew and Linda Tropp (2011) conducted a meta-analysis of contact theory data spanning the years from 1954 to 2011. Their analysis covered 515 published studies in 38 countries that overwhelmingly support the notion that genuine engagement with the ‘other’, under the right conditions, reduces prejudice. Interpersonal and intergroup contact, they argue, results from decreased anxiety, increased knowledge, and increased empathy for the other.

The preceding studies dealt with all kinds of prejudice. What about religion specifically? Ashutosh Varshney (2002; Waters 2018) conducted a study of religious conflict between Hindus and Muslims in India. He framed his study uniquely. Instead of focusing exclusively on the question of violence (what causes intercommunal conflict and violence?), he analyzed large swaths of India where Hindus and Muslims get along just fine. He found that the regions of India that were peaceful were characterized by high levels of quotidian and associational relationships among Hindus and Muslims. They served in civic organizations together, they coached youth sports together, they lived in the same neighborhood. The relatively small parts of India that are prone to conflict and violence, he found, had very low levels of relationships across religious lines.

Robert Putnam and David Campbell (2010) found similar phenomena in the United States. They explained their findings through exemplary stories about “Aunt Susan” and “my

friend Al.” Say, for instance, you are a conservative evangelical Christian and your aunt Susan is Roman Catholic. Your church teaches that Catholics are not truly “saved” and, consequently, will not go to heaven. But you are confident that Aunt Susan will go to heaven. Because of your positive relationship with Aunt Susan, this confidence not only applies to her but is transferred to all Roman Catholics. The relationship with Susan reduces your prejudice toward a whole group. Similarly, imagine that you share a hobby with your friend Al. You became friends through your hobby, without regard for or knowledge of the other’s religion. You get to know Al and discover that he is an evangelical Christian. You previously held a skeptical attitude toward this group, but your friendship with Al changes this attitude. If Al is okay, perhaps other members of this group are okay. To Patel’s point, research on intergroup contact supports the importance of relationships in the achievement of civic pluralism across lines of religious difference.

Patel’s third element of civic pluralism is a commitment to the common good. Thus civic pluralism is more than respectful relationships. It is more than mere religious tolerance or tedious interfaith dialogue that, while valuable, may only be of interest to religious scholars and clergy. A commitment to the common good involves a commitment to uphold the principles and structures that are necessary for a civil society. Consider freedom of expression as an example of a ‘common good’. Muslims and Christians, for instance, may disagree about particular religious beliefs or practices but, despite differences, freedom of expression serves the common good of both groups. But what about disagreement regarding what constitutes ‘the common good’? Patel (2016) provides a helpful example.

...this all is made more complicated by the fact that people’s identities shape their vision of the common good. People in favor of gay marriage speak about upholding the common good values of equal rights, dignity, and freedom. People opposed to gay marriage speak of the common good value of how marriage has been understood and practiced in Western civilization for centuries. But both views exist within a broader political community that allows free expression, civic and political associations and an

open legal system, and in a broader society with safe air travel, well-paved roads, and excellent communications systems. All identity communities have a stake in maintaining some version of common good, some notion of health of the whole.

In other words, there may be disagreements on the micro level about the nature of the common good, but the ability to agree on the macro level of common good sustains the micro level despite differences.

Civic pluralism understood as respect for identities, relationships between communities, and upholding the common good provides rich soil for the cultivation of social capital. Social capital, in turn, becomes energy that fuels social entrepreneurship, in this case social entrepreneurship that creates bridges across religious divides and increases interfaith understanding and cooperation.

### **Social Capital**

Social capital, a concept popularized by Harvard social scientist Robert Putnam (2000, 2003, 2010), refers to the value (common good) of our social networks including “norms of reciprocity, mutual assistance, and trustworthiness.” “The central insight of this approach,” writes Putnam (2003), “is that social networks have real value both for the people in those networks—hence, networking as a career strategy, for example—*as well as for bystanders*” (emphasis mine). He illustrates the ‘bystander’ point by noting that, when neighbors know each other, crime rates tend to go down in that particular neighborhood. This reduction in crime benefits uninvolved neighbors (bystanders) as well as neighbors who are intentionally networked.

Further, social capital can function as ‘bonding’ or ‘bridging’ capital (Putnam, 2003). Bonding social capital is the value of an *intragroup* network. In religious terms, a church, synagogue, gurdwara, or other religious body typically exemplifies bonding social capital.

Members of the group are available to each other, support each other, vouch for one another, and can bring their in-group resources together to impact society through, say, service to homeless or support for children who are food insecure. Bridging social capital, on the other hand, involves *intergroup* networks. A relational, cooperative bridge is built across a line of religious difference. Readers will note, as explained below, that bridging social capital is conceptually the same as civic pluralism. To expand the preceding example, if the church and the synagogue join together to combine their efforts for the homeless or food insecure children, they have ‘bridged’ their social capital for a larger purpose.

Although this larger purpose—e.g. help for homeless people or help for food insecure children—has significant value, the bridging of social capital also has value for the broader community in-and-of-itself, short of overt service initiatives. The argument herein is that bridging between religious groups helps society through the bystander effect in addition to any direct service that the bridged groups may contribute to the larger community. This assertion is supported by the data reported by Putnam and Campbell (2010), Varshney (2002), and Pettigrew and Tropp (2011). I used their work above to shed light on contact theory (or the contact hypothesis). The contact they describe is the construction material for the ‘bridge’ that adds value to social capital. Varshney’s work, in particular, demonstrates that bridged social capital contributes to the broader community through the bystander effect due to decreased conflict among religious communities and, when conflict does arise, it is resolved without violence. Social entrepreneurs, whether personally religious or not, can therefore make positive changes in society by leading efforts to bridge social capital between and among religious groups and individuals.

The reader has likely noticed that the achievement of the kind of civic pluralism that Patel (2016) describes is the same as bridged social capital when it is applied to religion. Civic pluralism as defined by Patel and bridged social capital as defined by Putnam (2003) are, in other words, synonyms when applied to religious people and communities. Moreover, bridged social capital *is a form of* social entrepreneurship (Johannisson, et.al, 2007). Both social entrepreneurship and bridged social capital are expressions of civic pluralism. The job of the social entrepreneur in religion is to bridge social capital (create civic pluralism) and, further, to lead in cultivating that capital for the common good. Or, in the language of Johannisson, et. al. (2007), the social entrepreneur replaces a dominant religious narrative—characterized by conflict—with another, better, narrative.

### **Bridging Social Capital as an Entrepreneurial Enterprise: The Story of Eboo Patel and Interfaith Youth Core**

The public narrative<sup>9</sup> of Eboo Patel— An Ashoka Fellow, a Rhodes Scholar with an Oxford PhD in Sociology of Religion, and founder of Interfaith Youth Core—illustrates the power of storytelling to create change. Marshall Ganz’s (2008, 2009, 2012) “story of self, story of us, and story of now” will frame Patel’s story. Ganz, a veteran of the United Farmworker’s Movement and Rita E. Hauser Senior Lecturer in Leadership, Organizing, and Civil Society at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government knows the power of stories to empower leadership and enact change. The story of self is the story of one’s calling, the story of entering a particular arena of social entrepreneurship. For Patel, this entrepreneurial calling is interfaith work.

According to Ganz (2008), the story of self not only allows others to understand the storyteller, it also inspires them to discern their own calling—their personal story—and to lead in the same

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<sup>9</sup> “Public narrative” was developed by Harvard’s Marshall Ganz (2008, 2009, 2012) as a form of leadership that brings together the story of self, the story of us, and the story of now into one compelling narrative.

area. Next, the story of us is the story of the values and aspirations of one's community. These stories express the values that one appeals to when inviting others to become changemakers. Finally, the story of now encapsulates an urgent challenge and a call to action in the face of this challenge. The basic plot of a good story, according to Ganz, is a challenge, a change, and an outcome.

### **The Story of Self**

*My story is important not because it is mine, God knows, but because if I tell it anything like right, the chances are you will recognize that in many ways it is also yours. — (Buechner, 1991).*

Patel's (2010, 2012, 2018) story and the story of his work through Interfaith Youth Core<sup>10</sup> are told through three books by his own hand. While the "self, us, now" typology overlaps among the three works, they essentially follow the typology as follows. The story of self is expressed in *Acts of Faith: The Story of an American Muslim, in the Struggle for the Soul of a Generation*. This is followed by *Sacred Ground: Pluralism, Prejudice, and the Promise of America*, which tells the story of us. 'Us', in the broadest sense, is America characterized by religious freedom and the promise of the First Amendment and it is also the story of Interfaith Youth Core. Finally, the story of now is narrated in *Out of Many Faiths: Religious Diversity and the Promise of America*. I confirmed this typology in email correspondence with Patel. I would add, however, that another of his books, *Interfaith Leadership: A Primer* (2016), is also the 'story of now' in that it is a call to action, specifically a call to college students, faculty, and staff to become interfaith leaders—social entrepreneurs for interfaith understanding—in their communities.

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<sup>10</sup> Interfaith Youth Core originally used the word 'corps', but changed to 'core' to emphasize the power of coming together and building-outward.

As a young man, Patel developed a passion for social justice. Among several influences, three in particular seem to have stirred and focused this passion, his father, Catholic activist Dorothy Day, and his Muslim grandmother in India. On a weekend trip home from college, Patel had a conversation with his father during the halftime of a football game. His college training as a resident assistant and his involvement in campus activism had made the younger Patel especially sensitive about and defensive for oppressed identities. On this occasion, as Eboo lectured his father about oppressed identities, his father responded, “for all your talk about identity, you’ve never once mentioned the dimension of identity driving world affairs....Religious identity, Eboo. Religious identity. That’s what people are killing each other over these days” (2012). Patel noticed the same omission in leadership training at university. Every possible identity was addressed except religious identity (2010). This insight from Patel’s dad initiated ‘rhizomatic’ learning on the part of the younger Patel (Rosile, et. al. 2018). In other words, among the many human identities, religious identity has its roots entangled with everything. The young Patel began recognizing the need to address religious difference, especially in the university setting. In his passion for social justice, he realized that religion can be a force for good or evil. He became obsessed with building bridges rather than walls among different religious identities. Social justice was and is the driving force in Patel’s entrepreneurial initiatives.

Another major influence was Dorothy Day (1897-1980), cofounder of the Catholic Worker movement and Catholic Worker Houses of Hospitality (Allaire and Broughton, n.d.). These houses offer the opportunity to live in community, work together for justice, and benefit from the mutual support of sharing life together. Day’s story is a lesson in social entrepreneurship in and of itself. She focused her work on restorative justice for the poor and

oppressed, on those whom society often deemed “undeserving.” Though social activism, she sought to change the “filthy, rotten system” that keeps people in poverty and queried, “Why was so much done in remedying social evils instead of avoiding them in the first place (Patel, 2010)? Her legacy lives on in 207 Catholic Worker Houses around the world, building both bonding and bridging social capital (Putnam 2003).

Patel (2010) learned about Day in college and eventually started volunteering at St. Jude’s Catholic Worker House in Champaign, Illinois. On his first visit, residents offered him supper and he stayed for a visit. At one point he asked who was on staff at the house. The response captured his imagination. “That’s not the best way to think about this place,” he was told. “We’re a community. The question we ask is, ‘What is your story?’” Patel’s story is that he became involved with St. Jude’s and came to understand their work from the inside out. He (2010) writes,

Here is what I had been seeking for so long: a vision of radical equality—all human beings living the abundant life—that could be achieved through both a direct service approach and a change-the-system politics. For so long, those two things had existed in separate rooms in my life—a different group of friends , a different way of talking for each. Here was a movement that combined them. Finally, the two sides of myself could be in the same room.

Although Patel probably would not have used the words “social entrepreneurship” in college, Day’s work provided him with a vision of this kind of changemaking that would later impact the development of Interfaith Youth Core. (Implied here is the idea that social entrepreneurship, changemaking, bridging social capital, and civic pluralism express the same dynamic concept.) Moreover, the Catholic Worker House approach to leadership instilled in Patel a style of leadership that is comparable to Ensemble Leadership Theory (Rosile, et. al. 2018).

Patel’s next lesson came during a trip to visit his grandmother in India in his early 20’s (2010). Like many late adolescents and early adults, he questioned his family’s faith (Ismaili



Muslim) and experimented with other possibilities. It was his grandmother who continually instilled the family faith in Eboo. He awoke one morning during this visit to find a strange woman in the living room of the apartment. She was frightened, disheveled, and wearing a torn nightgown. His grandmother explained that she had been abused by her father and uncle. She came to his grandmother's home until she could find a safe place to send her. Eboo was worried. "Mama, what if these crazy men, this father and uncle come looking for her? Do you think it is safe to keep this woman here? ... This is crazy. You can't just take strange women into your home...." His grandmother pointed out that Eboo was twenty-two and she had been taking in abused women for more than twice that long, forty-five years.

She gently took a box of polaroids, thumbed through the pictures, and began telling her shocked grandson about many of the women through the years. She had helped them gain access to education and to find jobs. "Why do you do this?" Eboo exclaimed. Her response made a lasting impression. "I'm a Muslim. This is what Muslims do."

These narratives and others braided together in the young Patel's life to focus on radical equality as work for social justice (change-the-system politics) and direct service. This merger of justice and service emerged under the influence of heroes like Dorothy Day and were given content through the conversation with his dad (religious identity) and with his grandmother (his own Muslim identity).

His 'calling' (Ganz, 2008) became more focused during his Oxford years through a dizzying array of influences from his Jewish friend Kevin, to respected Catholic monk Brother Wayne Teasdale, to an audience with His Holiness the Dalai Lama, who didn't attempt to convert him to Buddhism but, rather, told him to be a good Muslim. These connections among others deepened his growing interfaith commitment. His experience was preparing him to

replace a dominant discourse about religion with another, more humane, narrative (Johannisson, et. al. 2007).

His supervisory professor at Oxford, Geoffrey Walford, surprised Patel saying, “You should get your doctorate in a topic that will actually hold your interest and ideally connect with your career. That means one thing if you want to be an academic and another thing if you are going in a different direction” (2010). The surprise was that this Oxford don was willing to supervise a student who might not devote his life to academia. He was “basically encouraging me down a career path of social change and offering to help me get a doctorate on a topic that interested me on the way” (2010). Patel’s Oxford experience would contribute to his social entrepreneurial passion. After explaining that he (Patel) was thinking about the relationship between religious identity and interfaith cooperation, Professor Walford encouraged him to research recent developments in Ismaili religious education. Patel’s social commitment and his academic interest merged in a synergistic way.

During his time at Oxford, while researching Islam and becoming ever more involved in interfaith activism, Patel re-affirmed the faith of his family, the Ismaili Shi’a Muslim tradition. His faith identity and his calling to be an interfaith activist came together. He remembered, “As I had come to terms with my brown skin, with my Indian heritage, with my American citizenship, I realized that I was now facing and understanding the part of myself that was both first and final: I was a Muslim” (2010). Then, not long thereafter, he connected his faith to his interfaith activism. “It was the ethic of service and pluralism in Islam that I felt most enlivened by and most responsible to. Starting the Interfaith Youth Corps [later ‘Core’] gave me the chance to put that ethic into action, to feel worthy of the designation, ‘Muslim’” (2010).

The reason for the “youth” in Interfaith Youth Core resulted from Patel’s observation that much of the violence, whether perpetuated by someone claiming the Islamic faith or by a white nationalist claiming Christianity, was enacted by young people—typically, but not exclusively male—between the ages of eighteen and thirty. What if, Patel thought, this same age demographic could be harnessed to use religion for good ends and, in particular, to build bridges between communities of different faiths (2010)?

Every time we read about a young person who kills in the name of God, we should recognize that an institution painstakingly recruited and trained that young person. And that institution is doing the same for thousands, maybe hundreds of thousands, of others like him. In other words, those religious extremists have invested in their youth programs (2010).

Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC) was to be an institution that did the opposite. It would rise out of an entrepreneurial spirit to bring college students together to learn, serve, and build bridges across religious and worldview divides.

IFYC began internationally, wherever Patel was invited to travel. One of the early initiatives was at the 1999 Parliament of the World’s Religions held in Cape Town, South Africa. I have taken students to three Parliaments, 2009, 2015, and 2018. These events typically have between 8000 and 10,000 participants representing 100’s of religions and spiritual traditions from around the globe. The first Parliament was held in Chicago in 1893. Among the many speakers, Swami Vivekananda of India mesmerized the crowd as he spoke from a Hindu perspective about the inherent connections—indeed the unity—of religions. He was the first Hindu that most in the crowd had ever heard or met. The next Parliament would not occur until 1993, again in Chicago.

The 1999 Cape Town event occurred on the heels of the Truth and Reconciliation Movement in South Africa, the reconciliation initiative led by Anglican Archbishop Desmond

Tutu following the end of apartheid. After all, the Afrikaner had misused religion as a way to support apartheid. Now religion could be used for healing following this bitter divide.

While the Parliament is a grand offering to the world, its primary deficiency is that, like other interfaith dialogue initiatives, it has too often been middle-age and older academics and clerics talking about religion. While the Parliament began with an entrepreneurial spirit, it risked becoming a gray haired echo chamber. Patel and Parliament organizers set out to remedy this deficiency. Patel and youth from countries around the world led the youth program at the 1999 Parliament. As registrations of young people poured in, a common theme emerged: they wanted to *do* something, to provide service in the recently apartheid-free South Africa. This was more than interfaith dialogue. It captured the core of IFYC values still practiced today, “intercultural encounter, social action, and interfaith reflection” (2010). When people of various faiths serve together around common values, they develop the trust that enables them not only to talk civilly, but to build bridges among faith communities.

At one point during the Parliament, a group of 25 of the youth were invited to give a presentation to the Assembly of Religious and Spiritual Leaders who had gathered there. This group included His Holiness the Dalai Lama (2010). I suppose that Desmond Tutu was likely present as well. The scene was electric. “Instead of standing up at the microphone and voicing platitudes about peace, we encircled the room and made commitments of concrete action: working for the rights of the poor in Britain, building a network of young religious leaders in India, moving forward with a program that destroyed guns in Brazil” (Patel 2010; Rosile, et. al. 2018). My point for the in telling about these students at the Parliament is that social entrepreneurship is about changemaking; it goes beyond dialogue and definitely beyond platitudes. While interfaith dialogue can be helpful, it is the change, leadership, and service that

goes beyond dialogue that is truly entrepreneurial. IFYC has tended to emphasize young people of different faith and worldview backgrounds serving together first—and thereby getting to know each other and connect around shared values as well as providing genuine service to the community—and moving toward dialogue after the experience and camaraderie of having served together. This approach represents an expression of “entrepreneurship, democratic action, and the cultivation of solidarity” described by Spinoza, et. al. (1997). This approach is also a clear change from the default interfaith dialogue that has tended to be middle-age and older professionals (academics and clergy) engaged in talk about religion with little resulting change or action.

Today, Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC) specifically focuses on college students in the United States. They describe themselves as a national non-profit working towards an America where people of different faiths, worldviews, and traditions can bridge differences and find common values to build a shared life together. IFYC provides support and leadership training for over 600 U.S. college and university campuses and have developed a network of over 100,000 aspiring interfaith leaders (IFYC website, n.d.).

IFYC’s approach to training and sending out college students to be interfaith leaders is an example of Ensemble Leadership Theory (Rosile, et. al. 2018). As Rosile, et. al. explain, ELT is collective, relational, shared, dynamic, social, and multi-centered (2018). These leadership descriptors align perfectly with IFYC’s philosophy and actions. They hold a national Interfaith Leadership Institute in Chicago annually along with numerous regional institutes. Students return to their local campuses from training (thus multi-centered, shared, and relational) on the ante, the bet, that they can lead campuses from their current interfaith narrative to a new narrative that brings understanding and collaboration among people who orient around religion differently.

They fill the gap (Johannisson and Olaison, 2007) between what interfaith is and what it can become. Moreover, IFYC is, in effect, the “integrator” (Follett, 1919) that brings leaders together for training and supports them, in a non-hierarchical manner, as they go back to lead on their campuses.

In summary, the story of IFYC is a story of social entrepreneurship. Spinosa et. al. (1997) describe entrepreneurship as identifying anomalies in dominant narratives and creating counter narratives—I would also add movements—to change the dominant narratives and resultant actions. In Patel’s story of self, two core anomalies were, first, that universities tended to address every kind of identity related diversity and inclusion issue except religious identity. And, second, extremist groups carefully recruit and cultivate young people. IFYC provides a counter narrative and movement to this anomaly by recruiting and cultivating young people for good ends. Thus, Patel and IFYC are a counter narrative and counter movement to each of these anomalies.

### **The Story of Us**

*The traditional form of Western scholarship in the study of [religions] was that of an impersonal presentation of an "it." The first great innovation in recent times has been the personalization of the faiths observed, so that one finds a discussion of a "they." Presently the observer becomes personally involved, so that the situation is one of a "we" talking about a "they." The next step is a dialogue, where "we" talk to "you." If there is listening and mutuality, this may become that "we" talk with "you." The culmination of this progress is when "we all" are talking with each other about "us." (Smith, 1959).*

The story of us, for Patel, is the story of American democracy and religious freedom. He is fond—rightfully so—of telling the story of Moses Seixas, an American Jew who, in 1790, sought reassurance from George Washington that Jews in America would not be harassed and would be accepted as full citizens. Washington’s response is profound.

The Government of the United States ... gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection should demean

themselves as good citizens.... May the children of the stock of Abraham who dwell in this land continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other inhabitants—while every one shall sit in safety under his own vine and fig tree and there shall be none to make him afraid (Patel, 2012).

Previously, when Washington was still general of the Continental army, he castigated commanders when he discovered that troops had burned the pope in effigy. Washington wrote, "...to be insulting of their Religion, is so monstrous, as not to be suffered or excused; indeed instead of offering the most remote insult, it is our duty to address public thanks to these our Brethren" (Patel, 2018).

Upon the signing of the treaty with Tripoli in 1791, John Adams said, "As the government of the United States of America is not in any sense founded on the Christian Religion—as it has in itself no character of enmity against the laws, religion or tranquility of Mussulmen [Muslims]— ...it is declared by the two parties that no pretext arising from religious opinions shall ever produce an interruption of the harmony existing between the countries" (Patel 2018).

The United States was founded on the values of civic pluralism in matters religious. Patel elaborates on this claim with an appeal to Michael Walzer in *What it Means to Be an American*. Walzer explains that, since the time of the Greeks, political theorists believed "that diversity and democracy do not mix well together." Democracy, they thought, works best with uniformity. But, Walzer asserted, "The great exception to this rule is the United States" (Patel, 2018).

Again, we're faced with an anomaly (Spinoza, et. al. 1997). Namely, the disconnect between historic American ideals and values and the religious and identity based divisions, vitriol, and sometimes violence that plague our nation today. "We are a nation," Patel writes, "whose creed speaks of welcoming all communities and whose practice has too often crushed them" (2012). He quotes Malcolm X who said, "We didn't land on Plymouth Rock, Plymouth

Rock landed on us” (2012). But the anomaly has also been resisted, particularly by those most hurt by it. “People who knew the whip of the slave master in Alabama, the business end of the police baton on the South side of Chicago, people who could have easily called our nation a lie, chose instead to believe America was a broken promise and gave their bodies and their blood to fix it” (2012).

Patel cites Muslims who endured vitriolic and sometimes deadly anti-Muslim sentiment in the years following the 9/11 attacks. These are Muslims who continue to believe in and work for the “promise of America” (2012). Then he speaks of others who are marginalized, but continue to believe in and work for America’s promise. He explains,

I had been so consumed by the rampant Islamophobia of 2010 [the Ground Zero Mosque backlash] that I had completely missed the bigotry others were suffering around that same time. Yes, we Muslims faced an ugly strain of intolerance, but nothing like what the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community had suffered—torture in the Bronx, bullying so severe that it led to multiple suicides (2012).

It was the very people who faced their own marginalization who stood in solidarity with Muslims. “Our allies included Evangelical Christian ministers, hip-hop moguls, Jewish comedians, gay atheists—the list goes on....You cannot ask from others what you are unwilling to give. (2012)”

Patel and IFYC focus on giving, leading, training, in order to revitalize the promise of America. “[Civic] pluralism is not a birthright in America;” he writes, “it’s a responsibility” (2012). Since civic pluralism is a form of social entrepreneurship, one could paraphrase Patel by saying that social entrepreneurship in the arena of interfaith understanding is an American responsibility. I’ve heard Patel speak numerous times. Inevitably, he mentions the story of America, the story of us, as a high calling of civic pluralism. He doesn’t spend a lot of time, if any, doing “comparative religion.” He talks of America, quoting forefathers from memory, and



in so doing he inspires listeners to build bridges across lines of religious difference, and other kinds of difference. He calls listeners to embrace “a wider sense of ‘we’” (2018). That “wider sense of ‘we’” leads us to the story of now.

### **The Story of Now**

*Whoever fights for hope, fights on behalf of us all. Whoever acts on that hope, acts in a manner worthy of a human being* (Tracy, 1987).

The story of now is a call for action (Ganz, 2008, 2009, 2012). In the now, we live in the tension between our current reality and the new narrative—thus the new reality—we want to create (Fritz, 2003). The new narrative isn’t completely separate from current reality but, with the right leadership, emerges from it. It is a call to action that can be expressed as ‘antenarrative’ (Boje, 2014). Boje defines ‘antenarrative’ in a two-fold manner. It is ‘prior to the new narrative’ and it is an ‘ante’, a bet. The spirit of Patel’s ante—his bet—is expressed in the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. who said, “We must learn to live together as brothers [and sisters] or perish together as fools.” When it comes to religion, a failure of heart, of spirit, or of a pluralistic vision may, indeed, lead to perishing together as fools. Social entrepreneurs are changemakers who are called to take the high road that helps us to live together as brothers and sisters.

Patel’s call for action is two-fold. First is the practical action of equipping college students, faculty, and staff to be interfaith leaders who, in turn, impact the national community. Second is the more abstract and broad action of bringing America together around a ‘civil religion’ (2018). The first call to action became clear in the previous two sections, the story of self and the story of us. Patel’s and IFYC’s work is a call to action and, thus, a story of now. The second, ‘civil religion’ and its relationship to ‘us’ (America) needs some explanation. In effect, Patel is putting up an ante, making a bet, on civil religion (Patel 2018; Boje 2014).

Patel appeals to sociologist Robert Bellah to describe civil religion. “Bellah spoke of it [civil religion] as the ‘religious dimension’ of the ‘political realm’ and the ‘founding myth’ of our national community” (Patel, 2018). Neither Patel nor Bellah are referring to ‘a’ religion in a traditional sense, as if there could be a national religion, nor are they suggesting the so-called mixing of religion and politics. Rather, they are talking about sacralizing national symbols; providing rich symbols for founding myths. “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses.” Or, again to quote George Washington, we are a nation that “...requires only that they who live under its protection, should demean themselves as good citizens” (2018). Versions of this and other founding myths<sup>11</sup> sometimes capture the public imagination.

Religious language has given the United States some of its most enduring symbols (‘city on a hill’, ‘beloved community’, ‘almost chosen people’), and it is the source of a significant amount of the nation’s social capital and the inspiration behind many of our most vital civic organizations (universities, hospitals, and social service agencies, for example). This is not an unalloyed good. In a diverse society, symbols, networks, and institutions can just as easily be mobilized in the service for violent conflict as inspiring cooperation” (2018).

In addition, religious communities—if united through bridging social capital (Putnam and Feldstein, 2003)—have the cumulative clout to influence a national myth, a civil religion. Social capital is the value of social networks. Bridging social capital involves social capital that stretches across different communities for the common good (e.g. Muslims, Christians, and Jews working together to uphold freedom of religion or to reduce poverty). Patel believes that social capital can be utilized to bring people together under a new civil religion. Conversely, a new civil religion can create new bridging social capital. This is his ante.

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<sup>11</sup> “Myth,” here, is not used in the popular sense of “a story that isn’t true.” Rather, it refers to a symbol, story, or narrative that reveals truth and inspires, regardless of historical veracity. George Washington’s honesty about chopping down the cherry tree, though historically dubious, nonetheless provides a positive myth about honesty.

For the skeptical reader, an example may help. Many think of ‘Judeo-Christian’ as part of America’s founding myth, or perhaps the founding myths of Judaism and Christianity. It is if ‘Judeo-Christian’ has always existed. It hasn’t. Rather, ‘Judeo-Christian’ was an invention of the late 1920’s and early 1930’s. Anti-Catholic prejudice and vitriol emerged from just beneath the thin fabric of society during Al Smith’s 1928 presidential bid. Smith was the first Catholic to run for president. In response to the vitriol an interfaith organization, the National Conference of Christians and Jews (NCCJ), sought to define “animus toward Catholics and Jews as un-American” (2018). Through their ongoing work, extending beyond World War II, ‘Judeo-Christian’ became the social construct of American civil religion. A World War II story that contributed to the Judeo-Christian narrative was the story of the four chaplains (2018). As the USS *Dorchester* was sinking after being struck by a torpedo, four chaplains (two Protestant, one Catholic, and one Jewish) gave up their life jackets to frightened sailors. Then they locked arms and gave their lives to the ocean, “each with the prayers of his own religion on his lips” (2018). Interfaith leaders recognized the power of this story. “They wrote articles about the Four Chaplains...had a postage stamp made in their likeness...and built the Chapel of the Four Chaplains at Temple University in Arizona” (2008).

All this and more culminated in the unifying Judeo-Christian narrative, a narrative that is not tenable theologically (note vastly different understandings of Jesus by Jews and Christians). It is equally dubious historically given the history of antisemitism and pogroms of Christians against Jews. But, as a national narrative, it worked. It is not a religion, but it embodies civil religion as a (retroactive) “founding myth” of American democracy.

Patel wants to help create a new civil religion, a new national narrative that encompasses not only diverse religions, but all of American diversity. “The central argument of this essay,” he

writes, “is that the defining dynamic of America is diversity.... But, it is important to recognize that the various identity groups that were drawn ... to this land and collectively created a country are themselves made up of a variety of smaller identity groups” (2018).

The work of civic pluralism (bridging social capital) is Patel’s life project and that of IFYC. Eck notes that civic pluralism is not diversity alone, but an achievement (2006). It is entrepreneurial in that it tackles the current narrative, notes the anomaly between what is and what could be (Spinosa, et.al., 1997) and begins—through college students the community of the willing, and bridging social capital—to create a new, transformative narrative. As yet, it is not clear what this narrative, this civil religion, will be. But it will be consistent with the American spirit that invites the world to “give us your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free” and provides safe space for all these identities, and those already here, to create a home. The achievement of civic pluralism is, by nature, an entrepreneurial enterprise. Patel’s story isn’t finished, but “whoever fights for hope fights on behalf of us all... whoever acts on that hope acts in a manner worthy of a human being” (Tracy, 1987).

## **Conclusion**

Ganz (2009) characterizes the plot-line of a story as a challenge, a choice, and an outcome. The stories of Patel, IFYC, and America embody a challenge to cope in a civil manner with diversity, they offer a choice—Islamophobia, xenophobia, homophobia, etc. or creating space for the other. And, if space is created for the other, an outcome: fulfilling the promise of American democracy. In these divided political times, this may seem nearly impossible. Certainly, we’ll never reach 100 percent. But entrepreneurial endeavors are never 100 percent; they are never perfect. Rather, they involve entering a struggle while wagering on an intended outcome. The future is ... bright. The future is ... dark and foreboding. The future is up to each

of us. As idealistic as it may sound, a new civil religion may be one mechanism to deliver us to a bright future, at least brighter than the present chaos in which we live.

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