

OpenTheo

Pluralism in a Polarized Age: Navigating Our Deepest Differences Together | John Inazu & Eboo Patel

October 8, 2020



The Veritas Forum

A conversation between John Inazu (Washington University in St. Louis) and Eboo Patel (Interfaith Youth Core), moderated by Chiara Cordelli (University of Chicago) about navigating and respecting our differences in society while seeking common ground. From the stage at the University of Chicago. Please like, share, subscribe to, and review this podcast. Thank you!

Transcript

Welcome to the Veritas Forum. This is the Veritas Forum Podcast. A place where ideas and beliefs converge.

What I'm really going to be watching is which one has the resources in their worldview to be tolerant, respectful, and humble toward the people they disagree with. How do we know whether the lives that we're living are meaningful? If energy, light, gravity, and consciousness are a mystery, don't be surprised if you're going to get an element of this involved. Today we hear a conversation between John Inazu of Washington University in St. Louis and Eboo Patel of Interfaith Youth Core, moderated by Chiara Cordelli of the University of Chicago.

A discussion titled Pluralism in a Polarized Age, navigating our deepest differences together at the University of Chicago's International House. I just wanted to ask, what is your somehow ideal, social ideal for an healthy but also realistic form of pluralism in a often divided and conflictive society like contemporary American? We may think I assume pluralism is very demanding way as form of almost civic friendship and cooperation among religions and religious and non-religious groups, but also very minimally as mere tolerance, almost like avoidance of each other. So what's your view of pluralism, your understanding of pluralism and what does it fall in this spectrum somehow? As a starting point, what pluralism is not? The French philosopher Rousseau said, "It is impossible for men to live at peace with those who think they're damned."

And so pluralism has to reject that premise and say, "No, we have to figure out a possibility even across the biggest and most difficult differences." So part of the answer descriptively is naming authentically and accurately what our differences are and not pretending to paper over those differences.

And then, and I'll let Ibu run with this in a minute, but I also think in some ways, and we might disagree a little bit on this, but in some ways it is a pretty low bar and a pretty low threshold so that tolerance looks a lot closer to a kind of endurance or coexistence than a kind of idea where, I mean, especially in university campuses today, we sometimes hear tolerance mean acceptance and embrace of everything I am and what I believe. And that's actually, I think that's philosophically impossible, but it's also just not who we are as people. And so I think as a starting point, pluralism means a kind of endurance across difference, and then from there we can work up because I think as human means aspirationally, we can see each other as far more than people to endure, but people who we can actually see more fully as human beings with whom we can learn and encounter and live together.

That's the aspirational version, and we'll complicate that, I'm sure. So you all are super somber, and we haven't even said that much, so generally, John and I have been doing this together for some years now. People get somber like midway through, you all were somber at the beginning.

It's cold out there. I know, right. So I'm going to do this in three parts to unsombre you about being with an animal story about pluralism.

I'm going to do an abstract framework, and I'm going to do a real life example. Here's my animal story. I read this in Mark and Marty's *The One in the Many*, and it's actually, I think, through Schopenhauer, but he said that porcupines invented pluralistic civil society.

One night, it was really, really cold, so the porcupines huddled together, and when they woke up it was a bloodbath because their quills had pricked each other. Well, the next night it was really, really cold, and they knew what had happened the night before, so they spread far apart, and they woke up and some of them had died because they had frozen to death. And the third night they figured out how to get just close enough to give each other warmth without pricking each other to death.

So, because a fancy philosopher came up with that, I didn't sound like a fool telling you an animal story, but I actually think that that is a really interesting metaphor for civil society, which is to say, how can groups, how can individuals and groups with identities that are not just different, but that whose expression is sometimes a violation of the other identity? I'm going to say that again, right? The expression of some identities is a violation of other identities. Muslims, for religious reasons, slaughter vast quantities of goats, rams, and cows on Eid as a commemoration of God replacing Ishmael on the rock

with the ram. The taking of animal life in that way is a deep sacrilege to large quantities of Buddhists, Jains, and Hindus.

What Muslims do as a virtual requirement of their faith is a deep violation of the essence of faith's which belief that any life created by God is sacred and should not be taken. So, how do you live in a society where it's not just John likes Duke basketball and I wish the line I would get back on track after like three decades of sucking, right? It's a much more, it's much higher stakes than that. So, and if I see our kind of abstract definition of pluralism, which is very close to John's confident pluralism, is respect for identity, which means that we know, I know that you are going to do things as a part of your identity that is a violation of my identity and you have a right to do those things.

So, if you believe in a post, in a figure that is a revealer post the Prophet Muhammad, you get a right, you have a right to do that. Even though as a Muslim, I believe that revelation stops at the Prophet Muhammad. So, respect for identity, whether I like it or not.

Number two is relationships between different communities and number three is a commitment to the common good. So, my concrete example is I think US hospitals get this pretty close to right just about all the time. And the reason I use a hospital as an example, like five blocks west of here, right, or three blocks west of here, is because there are lots and lots of entities where there are diverse religious identities in interaction, but where religious identity, there isn't that much at stake, right? So, on an athletic team, for example, typically there's not a ton at stake, right? But in a hospital, people are, people with different religions have different interpretations of what a particular ailment is.

Somebody with uncontrollable shaking might be diagnosed and Western medicine is epileptic, but in the monk tradition might be viewed as being prepared for a shaman. Right, that's a different interpretation of the same physical condition. There are different interpretations of death.

Typical Western definition, the brain scan goes flat, you're dead. That's not the case in some evangelical understandings, in some orthodox Jewish understandings, in some Buddhist understandings, which is much closer to breath-based, right? So, all of those things are in the mix over there three or four blocks away, and generally speaking, people make it work. So, I think that I'm an ethnographer.

My big question isn't like what happens in Plato's ideal and can we go find cases for it? It's more like, show me something that works and let's extract principles from that. Just maybe you want to ask a question of clarification about this idea of respect for other people, identity which I think relates to your understanding of endurance somehow. Because it seems that on the one end, pluralism for being a lasting project has to have a sort of psychological basis of a certain kind.

I have to care enough about you and you have to care enough about me in order to just avoid being completely intolerant. But then as you say, my near expression of identity, even a very well-intentioned one, I don't want to offend you. I'm just going about my daily business, but I can do something in order to express my own identity that offends you or deeply whoons you.

So, the conflict is very deep. And so, how can in this situation of deep conflict where this mere free expression of one's identity can offend others in a deep way become palatable with the formation and maintenance of the sort of sociological, psychological basis that there seem to be essential to maintain pluralism over time? Maybe you can provide example or from your experience or practices that could provide some solutions to this problem. Right, it's a hard problem to address.

I think it begins with as much as we can working to separate people from the ideas they hold. And so as a Christian, I can say, I believe as a theological matter, every human being I encounter is created in the image of God, which then is a starting point for my interaction with that person. And so, I think, really, if I were a really good Christian, I could carry that all the way to every person I encounter.

It becomes hard for me, and I think a lot of people at the limit. So, if you encounter the Nazi on the streets, which is no longer a hypothetical, right, there were Nazis on the street in Charlottesville, and there are people who look back at you and say, I reject your humanity or your right to exist. At that point, do you separate the person from the idea? It's very hard to do, and I think I'm not maybe great at putting that into practice.

But I also think that most of us are not Nazis, right, and most of us today in our political discourse quickly get to the point of thinking that somebody opposed to us is so evil that that line between ideas and in person is conflated. And I think that's actually not doing the hard work that we're called to do to make those distinctions. And I think for most people, when we think about how we interact at a place like this or with people who disagree with us, when we actually get down to it, we disagree about really important matters.

And we think that if we had a long coffee with a lot of people in this room, we would find issues that we think the other person is morally an error and deeply harmful and gravely, maybe even evil ways. And yet, we still work to see that person as a human being, and maybe we still carpool together or take classes together or find elements of common ground. And I think that, especially in today's society, that initial hard work is something that we can all strive to do better before we get to the limit cases.

So there was an article the New York Times a few weeks ago about, it's not separate, it was most art, I think, the city in Bosnia and Herzegovina with a Muslim fire department and a Catholic fire department, where Muslims go to school from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. and Catholics go to school from 4 p.m. to 9 p.m. So literally, different civic Muslim nightclubs,

Catholic nightclubs. It's not a hot conflict, right? There was a hot conflict in the area 30 years ago in the mid-1990s. Not a hot conflict, but totally separate civic and civic recreational government institutions.

What I think is the great genius of American life is that we have a set of civic and quasi-government institutions like schools that bring people from diverse backgrounds together in ways in which the common good is extremely concrete and practical. So raising money for the lab school, if you're part of the lab school, you can disagree on a whole range of things, right? On really, really weighty matters, but you're going to participate in that fundraising effort. And I think that's an athletic team, a hospital, like I said, I think is for me the most interesting example because cosmic identity issues are at play all the time, right? This person, you know, person in room 12a is an organ donor, and when that person passes away, we need to make sure to get that we need to see if the heart can be transported over there, right? Well, a person in bed 12b is a Muslim, and she believes if she is not buried within 24 hours or so of dying, her soul will not go to heaven.

And you have a medical staff who is taking care of those opposing views. My organs should be used to keep somebody else alive. And my organs are removed from my body, my soul doesn't go to heaven, right? You have a medical staff who's taking care of those at the very least different, in some cases opposing views, who also have identities at stake, right? Who also have a view on what happens to a soul after it dies? Who should be an organ? We should have more Asian American organ donors, et cetera, et cetera, because of the special needs of that population.

I just made that up. I know that that's the case when it comes to blood donation. You see what I'm saying? So the fact that those issues are alive in that practical setting, but there are enough things that keep people focused on common practice.

I think that that is, if you were to transport a human being from 3 or 4,000 years ago and show them a typical, urban or suburban American hospital and just list off the different language, ethnic, religious, racial, national groups present, I just think that they would be absolutely astounded. Are you kidding me? These people aren't all killing each other over some blood feud. They're instead saving people's lives together, right? So I think that that's a huge part of the American genius and actually a double part of that is that a good number of those hospitals were started by single religious communities.

In some cases, because people from those faith communities, Jewish hospital and Louisville, right? A variety of Catholic hospitals were not getting properly served because of a particular prejudice of an era. So they built a hospital to take care of the needs of a population that was experiencing prejudice, and that hospital went from a place whose initial mission was to serve largely Jews or Catholics to a place that has become remarkably plural with very, very little tension along the way. Okay, so you've done this

move twice now and I want to push you a little bit here.

You've started with local examples in discrete institutions, the hospital or the lab school, and in both of those cases, I'm not sure you want to call it the common good in some cosmic sense, but you can find common ground and the efforts needed to save lives or to educate students. But then my question is, can we scale this up? As a political matter, pluralism is a real challenge for us as a country right now. And how do you, I mean, you might be able to sustain your diverse community focused around fundraising at the lab school, but what about the school five miles away that is underserved and under-resourced? And are those people also your neighbor in part of the pluralistic experience or is that for them to figure out and what do we do when we move outside of Chicago to the state of Illinois or to the country as a whole? Is it scalable or is the pragmatic focus on the local only ad hoc in case by case? So it depends what you, so one reference point of what's happened in the last two years in America is that racism is rampant, misogyny is rampant, it's in the White House, all of which I believe, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, right? And how could we have turned the clock, how could we be living in the cultural stone age after all the progress we supposedly made? The second way to think about it is we had a political revolution and almost nobody fired a shot.

By which I mean to say that we take so much for granted in the United States when it comes to stability, when it comes to wake up and go to work the next day, when it comes to how we expect daily life to go, that in a way we don't realize the miracle we live in. Right, and so I, one way to think, this doesn't mean things can't get better, but the fact that we have a common school district called Chicago Public Schools, and that there is a common body which discusses funding for them, by which a significant amount of our deliberation about how that school system should go, I think is, is, what if we started by saying this is in itself an astounding step forward, how do we make it better? And if the reference point, I'll say this again, is most are, which is if you're a Muslim and the Muslims at the Muslim fire department aren't there that day, the Catholic fire department is not going to show up, right? The point that I'm making is, is that's, that, if that's the reference point for how most of, of most identity communities and most of human history have functioned as opposed to a diverse and intertwined participatory democracy. I think we look at the current, we begin from a different place.

I'll leave it here with this thought though, but I do, I share many of your aspirations, but I wonder if we're presupposing quite a bit about who the we is right now in American society. So there's zip codes in this city, for example, where if you called the fire department or called the police department, they might not show up. So what does it mean when, and that might not be a religiously based difference, but when you have a lack of access to basic resources, or is the we really encompassing of the pluralistic experience in the United States, or is it to a subset of people who look a lot like you and me, where for all of our differences we have quite a bit in common in terms of our education, our social class and other sorts of things.

So it seems like as a political matter, the more we nuance who the we is in this country, the harder the question gets. Yes, so and as you've written about really powerfully, your grandfather was in an internment camp, and you're on stage at the University of Chicago. And my grandparents would not have been able to come to this country because of racist immigration policies between 1882 and 1965.

So in a way, part of what we're kind of arguing about is which story, what's the narrative frame that in which we are speaking, right? And I think that what I want to put on the table for discussion purposes, in part, I mean, like honestly, you and I could do this tomorrow night. We actually might be doing it tomorrow, like for all we know, and we can just literally switch characters, right? Because part of what we're doing is a set of mental exercises. What I want to put on the table is what does it look like to view what we are thinking about as a narrative of progress and asking what's the next step instead of a narrative that is somehow a narrative of loss or deficiency.

There's better words for that in a narrative of progress, right? And so much of this is what your reference points, so if you read Sapiens by, you all know a Harari, and your reference point begins with like 20,000 years ago and how most of humankind live for most of human history, then you think of a diverse democracy and what we have created here. I mean, it's like literally God's miracle to think that people from different religious communities with different views on where the soul goes after it dies, different ideas of where to draw the line in the Middle East or when a life begins are performing heart surgery right now and saving somebody's life. Right, so that is not a statement, I mean, you know, me, right? Like that's not a statement of complacency.

That is a question of how do we frame the place that we are, how do we understand the place that we are in in order to get to the place where we would like to go? Since you mentioned the case of hospitals and the case of the lab school, I want to remain on the local level and ask a question about University of Chicago and what is the role of universities in the University of Chicago? Of course, it's just one, but in participating in this project of continued building, you know, this thing called pluralism. And I'm wondering for two reasons, I mean, first we might think that I don't know what you think about, there might be different things that can be done or should be done depending on the ethos of a university. So there are universities like Notre Dame with strong religious ethos, University of Chicago always praised itself for more, you know, sort of neutral, very strong defense of free speech.

So do different universities have different maybe obligations or different responsibilities when it comes to pluralism. And also if you have some idea about as someone who teach political theory, political philosophy sometimes have to teach really hard questions like abortion, gay rights and these questions that are very divisive in the classrooms. So I just wanted to ask, do you think teachers and you know, you know, university in particular should be allowed to bring their religious beliefs or not, of course, forcing

religious beliefs on others? But to bring their religious perspective as a way of framing maybe the issues they talk about, should the university be a place for these sorts of exchanges or should be more a neutral sort of sphere? Yeah, so Ibu and I taught a class just last year, pluralism in the university, you know, it was a great class to teach and a lot of these kinds of questions come up.

One of them I think is what is the nature of the institution and what does it in terms of its own purpose and values, what does it allow or disallow in terms of the debate on pluralism. I do think as a general matter though, and in a place like this one, that we want to work hard to dialogue authentically across deep differences because if we can't figure it out in a place like this, I'm really worried for the rest of the country. I mean, you're in a place where you're around a group of people for several years, hopefully with faculty who are guiding you through really good and hard questions, and you are relatively speaking safe and well off, so you have your basic needs met to have these conversations.

And if you can't figure out and with guidance and help with the luxury of time in this location how to do this, then it's not going to get easier in the next phase of life or when other challenges come along. So I do think this is a tremendous opportunity, you know, places like yours and mine and others to have this enterprise of common engagement and dialogue and teaching. And then I think from the faculty side, I think a good teacher is going to ask hard questions and push as an educational matter to get people to think critically across a range of issues.

I don't think we should overemphasize this kind of detached neutrality though because we all bring our own baggage into the classroom and I think it's impossible whether you're religious or not impossible to distance yourself from your own set of normative commitments and beliefs. So the best we can do is be really good at teaching well and having a community around us to hold us accountable to these kinds of questions and standards. And I find even though I have very clear views and commitments on a lot of issues that are controversial and so forth, I think I've done successful teaching when it's not clear exactly what my view is in a particular matter because my point in a certain class is not to convince someone of the correct institutional policy, it's to help someone argue both sides of a really hard issue.

And so I think there are ways to do it but I don't always think we rise to the occasion as much as we could. Yeah, so the best book on this is *Confident Pluridism*, my favorite book on this. And here's another one about John's book, right, is that he says when, if in the case, for example, of Hastings College of Law, Christian Legal Society case, right, Hastings College of Law, correct me when I get the sides wrong on this, a particular Christian organization, which people here belong to, right, said it is part of our identity to have these kinds of doctrinal commitments, right, including on sexual practice.

And the law school said you have to allow people from a range of identities, including sexual identities, to be part of your organization at every level. Am I getting the basic deck right here? More or less, there was also a religious exclusivity provision that said you have to be Christian to be part of this group, so a Muslim or a Jew could not be part of it. So doctrinal requirements that involved a range of things, including sexual practice.

And the Supreme Court rules in favor of the law school and says the law school can tell an identity group that it can't have those kinds of identity requirements effectively, right? And John's point is, if you want a pluralistic society, you want a range of identity groups to be able to flourish. And why doesn't Christian Legal Society get to be its own identity, right? I hold with that, and I think that there are some interesting challenges. So for example, there are often multiple Christian organizations.

In fact, I feel like there were 30 people at dinner earlier, and there were 22 Christian organizations represented. [LAUGHTER] But what happens if there are many smaller colleges where there's only a single Muslim student group? And what happens if it doesn't allow she is? Right? So Hastings College of Law, and if I was the president of Hastings College of Law, I would say Christian Legal Society gets to be Christian Legal Society, but I get to hire a vice chancellor of student affairs that is going to proactively help gay Christians find a place for to be open, happy, safe, out gay Christians, right? So you get to be who you are. You have all the rights and privileges and citizenship, but I'm going to put my thumb on the scale over here for these folks, right? That's how I would respond to it.

But what do you do with a smaller group that ate Muslims at the Hastings College of Law, and let's say, we don't have Shia, we don't invite Shia thieves. We won't pray behind a Shia Imam, and she has can't run for the presidency. And by the way, there's two Shia's on this campus, right? I think that that's a really interesting and challenging situation because there isn't a practical solution.

And I'm always, you know, I'm a nonprofit guy, I'm an ethnographer, I'm always looking for the practical, like, let's not argue about it in theory, sorry, you have C folks, right? Where does it work in practice? Pluralism works in practice in hospitals, right? Where does it work in practice? Having said that, and this is something I think we also agree on, I think that we think that there is great danger for a coercive authority, whether it's the state at the high end of coercive authority, you know, with police and military powers and taxation powers, to a university to intervene in an identity group, right? And to say, this is how you have to be. I think it is broadly a strength of American democracy. In fact, I think it's the genius of American democracy that identity groups start associations that sometimes build themselves into civic institutions that make a significant contribution to the United States.

So I actually have an order-name story which John is sick of hearing, but I think you

might enjoy because you just mentioned order-name. I should I will. So, you know, I'm in this country because of order-name, because an order-name lets, admits my dad, this kind of wayward, is smiling Muslim immigrant from India to its MBA program in the mid 1970s, right? That's how my family comes to this country.

And in my, like, you know, kind of a politically radical phase of my life, I'm kind of railing against, you know, like how white and Catholic Notre Dame is. And it's like 90% white and 90% Catholic, right? And I'm like, you know, do these people not get the diversity memo, like this whole thing, right? At some point my dad stops me, he's like, hey, they didn't have to let me in. I was like, well, actually, you're right, right? This is a university started by French Catholic priests in 1831, and the Indiana countryside for the principal mission of nurturing young Catholic boys in its tradition.

Didn't have to let them in, right? And it did. And I actually think that that's a really interesting set of -- what do -- how do we understand -- civic institutions founded by identity groups that initially started with the principal purpose as the continuity of identity. So I'll give you a concrete, challenging case.

And what's the name of the adoption agency in South Carolina? What's -- anybody know this case? Mars Hill, something like that? So the adoption agency in South Carolina, that by all accounts does great work in helping kids from tough backgrounds find foster care and get adoption. And one of the questions they ask is, what church do you go to? And if it's not one of the right churches, you don't get considered. And there's a lawsuit filed by a woman who goes to a Catholic church, not one of the right churches, and she says, I'm a perfectly fit foster parent.

How come they're not allowing me to be a part of this ecosystem, this family? And the response by the adoption agency is, we are an arm of a church, and part of what we do is identity, continuity for the church. It's not a general social service. How should we think about that? And I'm not just talking in a legal framework.

I'm saying, is this a virtue in a plural civil society? Is it a virtue? Is it a civic good that there is an adoption agency who views its mission as a civil society? Is it a civic good that's a civic good that's a civic good that's a civic good? Is it a civic good that's a civic good that's a civic good? Yes, I mean, whether it's a civic good or not, it probably depends on your theory of what's good and what's best benefit analysis in some ways. But I think that there are plenty of faith-based organizations that would actually be the opposite, right, and they would say, big tent, like we're here to serve the public and a broader public. And so as important as your question is, another equally important question is when government authorities misconstrue what their premise of what religion is in the first place.

And what they're able to give you from a different state is a state legislature that tried to enact laws governing a whole sphere of nonprofits, but they wanted to exempt churches,

but they said, by church we mean only people that serve their own flock completely, which misses the core identity of a lot of evangelicals and Catholics and others who want to say, actually, our whole point in being here is to welcome other people in. So we're not going to exist until, I mean, we're here to evangelize, right, and we only do that when people come through the door and so that the character of the institution itself is outward facing and it's not just the four corners of the church, but it's what you do outside of the church, it's what you do, engaging with others, inviting people in. And so in that context I think we can over-describe in the other direction, right, and assume that a whole lot of church-based people are just insular.

When, in fact, I think we might find that quite a few of the social service sector and the institutions that populate that sector are actually quite expansive in terms of who they serve. You give the hospital example, so many of the religious hospitals that are not saying you can only come in here for cardiac treatment if you're, you know, the particular denomination, that doesn't happen and so there's a, in the other direction, I think there's probably far greater examples of those entities that are willing to be open arms. And so going back to your original question, if it were the case that we had a whole lot of these adoption agencies that were shutting down the adoption resources in a particular state, that might be a real concern.

I see that as mostly a thought experiment and not what actually happens in most states. And I think one of your earlier questions, Kiara, is why doesn't it happen, right, and I think one response to that is the civic response that we've given, but you use the word psychological, right, which is are there psychological modes, which is to say not necessarily part of a civic institution, not the kind of common, practical common good plus medical ethics of a hospital, right, like if I'm a heart surgeon and voted for Hillary and you're a heart surgeon and voted for Trump, medical ethics does not allow me to say I won't, I won't do heart surgery with you. Like there's actually a set of rules on this kind of stuff, right.

So what about in, what is, what is it that governs individual relationships? So I'll give you my favorite example of this is my wife and I go out to dinner and we're running out the door at seven o'clock at night, babysitter comes in and I yell up to my kids and say don't forget to pray before bed. Okay, my kids are eight and eleven and they don't really like praying before bed, right. So do I tell the babysitter, make sure my kids pray before bed? You see what I'm saying? Like in the same way I would say make sure my kids eat their fruit tonight and I would expect the babysitter to do that.

Why do I think it is a reasonable expectation to say to my babysitter, make sure my kids eat their fruit tonight or clear their plates, but I would not say to her, I'm talking like what is my psychological disposition? I would not say to the babysitter make sure my kids pray. And then I go another step and I say what, what if I did say that? I looked at the babysitter and I said just make sure they do it and my babysitter said what religion are

you and I said where is Smiley, I'm in a Smiley Muslim, my kids are Smiley Muslims, my wife is a Sunni Muslim and the babysitter said I'm Catholic and I can't do that. Like I'm happy to babysit for you and keep your kids safe, but I will not be a party to not casting his versions on.

I'm just saying let's just say Catholic or Jewish or whatever, not Muslim. Or make it more interesting, sorry I'm a Sunni Muslim and I'm not going to help, I'm not going to facilitate your kids saying a form of Muslim prayer that I think is invalid, which is the Smiley Dua. Right, so that is not a civic institution, that is a personal relationship and it could happen 80% of the time a babysitter comes to the door of a family, make sure my kids pray, why isn't it a common problem or some versions of this, right? And I think it's because generally speaking there are modes of behavior in which depending on the locale we front dimensions of identity and we de-emphasize dimensions of identity.

Well so that's a pretty positive spin on the thought experiment, but I'm wondering what about what you expect me to do, the eternal optimist, yes. But what about the, I mean another way to think about that exact scenario is maybe you are more influenced by your American identity or your upper middle class Chicago identity than you are by your Muslim identity. I knew the yuppy thing was going to come out, has it been an hour yet? In the same way that I think a lot of American Christians are more influenced by the American part than the Christian part and when it comes to the demands.

I mean so another way to think about your scenario is maybe if you can't, and I'm not trying to create the whole story around your own faith commitments, but maybe it's if you can't find the babysitter that's going to pray with your kids you don't go out because your religious identity and commitments trump whatever it is that would take you out to have the non-religious babysitter there or to put in the other direction, the evangelical kid who soccer practice or soccer game commits conflicts with church maybe decides I don't get to play in that game. Do you do that? Do I do that? Yeah. Thanks for putting me on the spot.

You just put me on the spot. I know. So yes, I mean but with the quick caveat that how I'm trying, this is being recorded, my kids are, my kids are really wonderful and gifted in lots of dimensions not necessarily including prayer all sports.

No sports. So. I don't know if you're going to be like, we're great on the soccer field player.

But so the point is it maybe it cost me a lot less to say you can't go to the basketball game because we're going to church because maybe in my context the game just doesn't mean as much but if my kid we're on a select team the pressure might be greater but I think the, so we do say we're not going to, you can't play in the basketball game because we have church but we could, we could go through a whole other series of, I mean do we go on the family vacation and miss church. The answer is yes right in

the summer we will, and so is that prioritizing the American ideal of family vacations above church maybe I mean it's I think it's a question worth raising. I find that a lot of in my Christian circles a lot of people are willing to bow to all kinds of other demands and commitments except for the ones that the church asks of them.

So I will miss youth group if I've got a test the next day where I will miss church because of the game or I will, I mean if the sports team says I've got to sign a contract to be part of the team I'm all in but if the church says commit to us it's harder and so I do think I'm probably in a lot of context we as much as we would like to say our faith identities lead our decision making sometimes it's the other way around and maybe it's just a caveat for me to say we skip the sports games because it's not a high cost to my family. So I've been thinking about a part of this a lot right which is so there's a I've got a couple friends at NYU the Imam and Rabbi there and they take their students to New Orleans and they do the service trip right and the Jews like they make it a kosher kitchen and they wash it all the pots with boiling hot water and clean the kitchen in a particular way and the Muslims are like man you all are hardcore. And the next day the alarms go off at like 4.30 in the morning and the Muslims are up for fudger prayer and the Jews are like you all are hardcore right and my friend Yehudan haled are like telling the story with pride right and I'm like yeah and I have just why is it good to be hardcore and what I mean by that is is there a different and equally good way of understanding Christian commitment that would include not going to church for other goods at certain times.

Well I mean the answer I think has to be yes or else we're into utter legalism right if there's no counterfactual right you have to go to church even at the cost of saving your neighbor's life no right so there's going to be some some examples there but I think probably the challenge for I don't know a lot of American Christians is exactly the opposite which is what is the cost right what is your faith costing you it's I think it's a lot that question is easier to answer in places where your ability to practice your religion in public means that you could be arrested right or could face death and I think in the American context probably because largely of our Protestant cultural heritage it's it's a little too easy sometimes to function as a Christian I think it's probably it's probably harder to pull this off as a Muslim in America and certainly if outwardly you're you're identifying or visibly showing yourself as a Muslim today. So I think the idea of a faith that is less hard is probably not the challenge for a lot of American Christians. I'm trying to I mean this is the first time like putting my finger on this question right so it's not coming out exactly right but but I guess what I'm wondering is is you pose you're saying the American identity by which you mean this set of other things that we do take tests go to music classes go on vacation go to play sports etc etc that wins nine out of ten times over Christian identity which is going to church right that that's a lot more than going to church right that's just one discrete example right but but but but in the in the game of like time like doing X versus Y. I guess what I am wondering I'm wondering this out loud right because this has been a very significant debate in you know Muslim circles

for the last couple of decades right which is basically how much are you willing to sacrifice for your faith which is similar to the language that you used and an interesting other way to think about it is how much does your how much does your faith adapt by which I don't want to add a value judgment there right but but how much does your faith adapt to different contexts and so I'm part of a of a darika in Islam the ismai li darika for which adaptation is a part of the tradition and what the the imam of the time will say is if you are not able to come to Jamath Khan if you're not able to come to congregational prayers take your tasbi out and pray the names of pray the name of God or the prophet or the imams and it's I'm realizing something about one of my own psychological dispositions which is until not very long ago I kind of would dismiss this as as this is this is a way that that I can get away with things right that that that other values and commitments in my life frequently come above going to congregational prayers as opposed to thinking this is actually a part of the genius of the tradition which is that it adapts to different times and places and that's not unique to the asma li tradition that other traditions method of circuit riders during westward expansion were like you know what doesn't have to be a building we come to you right and and the reason I bring all of this up is because part of the American genius is identity communities change in adaptation to changing civic realities much of which has to do with diversity yeah but sort of I mean yes but I mean that also led to the institutional legitimization of slavery by the American white church for example we're just adapting to the context of that there are very bad applications of that of that principle but I also think that in part of my understanding of Christian faith is about formation and lived practices and that is going to require an intentionality around both your own practices and how you transfer those to your kids and the rest of your community and if so yes to some adaptation but if you're always adapting or if you're always fudging the rules then it's hard to know how to make a lasting impression of the practices on your relevant community so I'll give you again I hate that this is recorded but I will confess to you in this in this crowd that Lent is always a time in my life when I'm kind of glad to remind myself that I'm not Catholic and I don't actually have to do Lent fully in that way and I don't have to give something up and and you know maybe my better self would just give up something more costly during Lent as a reminder of what that liturgical season is and I try to focus very deliberately on that time of the calendar year and yet I'm not giving something up and there's part of me that thinks if I were more intentional about giving something up or instantiating that that it would probably be more meaningful to my life but I have a long way to go and just as a very silly sad example of how far I have to go I did one year successfully give up drinking bourbon for Lent and that was the time period when I learned about Scotch and so I think that I still have I still have ways to go in that particular spiritual practice Thank you so much this was really really thought provoking and enlightening I guess I'm wondering a little bit Dr. Inazu made reference to certain religious groups that see it as part of their mission to be outward focused and expansive and I'm wondering what your perspectives are on for example Christian ideals of evangelization in a pluralistic society is this something that's because it's uncomfortable

for some people we should be more self-conscious about how we do it or is it something that a pluralistic society kind of fosters what is its place or what is its what do you see is the balance I guess between trying like believing something so deeply that you want to share it with other people and yet also being very respectful of the freedom and the different opinions of others That's a great question and this this gets to it there are versions of pluralism that will say essentially that are grounded in the kind of relativism let you be you and let me be mean we'll figure out how just to coexist the kind of pluralism that I think we're advocating for is stronger than that and it has to allow for the possibility of persuasion and so my preference is for persuasion over coercion but definitely to allow for persuasion so you know a lot of I was having a discussion with an atheist friend of mine about our differences and in his view all of the differences were just good they made life more interesting or sports differences or food differences but when we got to the difference of belief in God or not believing God that's not a difference that I think as a Christian is a good thing and so I want to be able to persuade right and I want I mean I have lots in common and I would be delighted if he became a Christian and we don't actually have that discussion right good luck good luck yes but you know but I've got you know transcendent resources on my side we're not done yet but I think so you know in a very serious way these differences matter right and it's not like we're pretending that we're just going to exist in a state of only talking about the things we agree on and avoiding the differences but it also means we don't always lead with the differences and I think so to your question of versions of faith that are evangelistic I mean be be smarter and wiser about how you do it right you're not in a culture anymore we can just kind of stand on the street and shout your culture of pendants that's not going to be very effective for one and so can you understand context and friendships and relationships in a way that you know start a conversation and where that conversation goes is sometimes beyond you but as a cultural or legal matter I think absolutely we have to protect the space not just to hold our own views but to dialogue and work to persuade across difference and to make sure that you can hear me.

Thanks for the review for being here tonight my question is what in your experiences have been the greatest stiflers of fruitful pluralism and perhaps the most insidious of them that are difficult to really pinpoint. So I think in the in the circles in which I run which are large largely higher ed progressive diversity circles the idea that there's only one definition of social justice and that when somebody mentions the word social justice everybody in the room nods and knows what it means without a recognition that oh boy you know different identities a Catholic and a Reform Jew are likely to have two different definitions of justice and the question of abortion right so the idea that there's only one definition of justice and that there are only certain identities which are which are welcomed to be registered only in certain ways right so while I am I would describe myself as a diversity progressive I dislike that when it becomes an orthodoxy that suffocates others I would like it to be a view that is in conversation with other views right which is why I think that Christian legal society should be allowed to be at the Hastings

College of Law and as a diversity progressive if I was the dean of that college or the president I would hire a vice chancellor of student affairs who had his or her thumb on the scale for gay Christians right so you get to exist I want to make sure that these people feel open a firm supported free we live in a broader society that's still pretty homophobic and I would come to a really challenging question around for example a Hindu or a Hindu group that said you know we're basically for Brahmins or a Muslim group that says we're basically only for Sunnis because you don't have the practical option of hey let's just have three of these right having said that frankly I think it is it's not illegitimate for a Muslim group to say this is for a certain kind of Muslim because this is what we believe Islam is right so part of the challenge of this is respect for identity is I mean it's it stops at Nazis right but generally speaking it says yeah you get to have that view of Islam I disagree with it but but you get to be a Salafi right and it doesn't come from nowhere like it's got a proud history do you see what I'm talking about right and and that view excludes others but what else is in identity community except a community that says this is what it means to belong and this is and other people don't right and I think that part of the challenge of kind of diversity progressive is right now which I say as a broadly speaking as a part of that broad worldview is it's it's challenge with the recognition that there's a range of legit identities that fall outside of its general purview and that part of the definition of identity community and I'd be interested in any disagreement or discussion of this is some people belong and other people don't I would maybe expand the point to just to say that the problem of echo chambers exists across the board it's radiate it's ideologically neutral in that sense and that there are echo chambers everywhere and I find the pluralism discussion hard when somebody just assumes he or she knows the entire landscape and isn't open to alternative views and this of course is exacerbated on social media so one of the massive challenges to the experiment of pluralism is Twitter right it's going to get worse unless we figure out alternative ways to communicate with people who are different and if we avoid the caricatures and the quick dismissals of really complex people and complex issues and then I'll also say that in speaking sometimes to primarily Christian audiences I find a massive impediment to pluralism is just this fear narrative this this this worry that the big bad secular university is going to corrupt your kids or that if you find yourself in the presence of Muslims somehow your faith will be shattered and I don't know where this comes from exactly but it's out there and it's out there quite strongly in some parts of the country and it seems completely antithetical to how I understand the gospels and the Christian message right in Jesus going to places of lots of diversity and lots of places where you won't always certain who you're going to find or what the situation would be like and so it seems to me that Christians of all people should be leading the way into some of the spaces and instead we have a fear narrative that's governing a lot of our communities at the risk of saying too much on this I think that Mrs. Apropos of where we are right so much of what I do wrong right now on Twitter or on my blog I think to myself like my PhD advisor told me to never do this right and what I mean by that is I actually think that I really good cure too much of the disease that John talks about which is echo

chambers homogenous thought bubbles etc is good academic practice what do I mean by that gather reasonable amounts of representative evidence right never assume correlation is causal do not assign intentions to the people that you're studying don't tell them why they did what they did be extremely suspicious of the intentions they assigned to their own actions be enormously judicious about coming to conclusions do not study the world do not tell people you're studying the world and instead report on your world view right like basic things that people learn at universities here is how you find representative evidence here is how you are very careful about conclusions here is how you use language in a way that's enormously judicious these basic things I think are extreme like I think to myself like what my PhD advisor was in love with a soft version of Karl Popper Karl Popper said that as the only way to prove your theory is to proactively be looking for cases that contradict it you can't prove a theory by finding additional cases of its existence right so as soon as you have a worldview or a theory of the world you have to be on the hunt for things that contradicted as opposed to more cases that illustrated like basic you learn this in your second year at the University of Chicago in any research oriented class like in my mind I'm like how is it that I'm making these mistakes like my advisor was like here's how you don't get a doctor at Oxford right thank you very much for the talk is very informative I just have a question also kind of jumping off the discussion of social media one thing I'm thinking about when I'm looking and reading like news reports different newspapers is the way that stories are framed so for example the New York Times reporter Dan Levin recently put on Twitter feed based based on the hashtag expose Christian schools to try to get reports and responses from people that have attended Christian schools what their experiences were like and he said this was a neutral thing and in his final report he published nine stories that were both positive and negative but the hashtag itself that he used to gather the stories connotes very negative things about Christian schools and there are other frame effects like coming to Catholic school and so on so forth so how exactly should we be thinking about the framing how exactly should we be counteracting that as citizens in a more pluralized society as media is more and more widespread yeah that's a good so hard question I suppose I would start with don't give up on the very good journalists are out there so right now the media as an institution is under siege and this is true of you know your start up blog all the way to the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal and in terms of revenue models and institutional health the media is in trouble and embedded in that media there are bad actors and good actors but there are a lot of really good journalists including ones that would maybe disagree with you on a lot of fundamental matters and I think the one worry I have is that the increasing partisan nature of social media and how we experience the media cast against a lot of journalists all to the bad and one thing we need to be doing now is finding the good journalists even the ones we disagree with and saying you're doing good work because it's an important part of our civic experiment having said that there are examples of I think journalists that either act in bad faith or unthinkingly purport to do a nuanced unbiased story that actually reflects tremendous bias and so there I think there's an educational effort there are ways to have

competing voices out there to counter some of the effects but I think in general you know when you see a hashtag for example that doesn't seem neutral or seems unfair or biased probably the next step is not to respond with the hashtag or anywhere else on social media but just to get off and do something more productive one of the things that I wish I did more of is regularly read writers who I disagree with and admire and think of smartness actually I think thought about this like I the Covenant Catholic Native American elder thing happened and I quickly dashed off a blog that basically represented my worldview and not the world I saw 90 seconds of video and I came to a conclusion about like large swats of people known as privileged white Catholic kids from conservative areas that was perfectly happy doing everything in my PhD advisor told me not to do in dashing off an 800 word blog on that right and I read David French on that situation and he said something that I thought to myself I should be reading this kind of stuff much more often he said I have been in dozens of he said I found it extremely suspect that a group of Catholic boys from a Catholic prep school in this part of Kentucky would go rogue like that on a school field trip why because I've been in dozens of gyms watching my kids compete in athletics in this part of the country and that's not how these schools roll and what struck me about that is because I'm generally speaking part of the broad diversity progressive paradigm I was instinctively willing to assign negative intentions to a group of kids not only who I've never met but whose culture whose like broader communities I don't have any kind of palpable sense of touch with right so it was really interesting to me to come into contact with a writer who's like I know these worlds I'm not a racist and by the way this is what you are saying about these kids is very out of character from what I have observed that doesn't mean it didn't happen but but you know just like if if some is like man there's like seven you know brown Muslim dudes on a corner that are about to cause trouble I'm like dude I'm kind of from this world like they're just you know they're not they're doing something that that I have a sense of what they're doing and it's not trouble do you see what I mean like that was really interesting to me to be like how is it that I I from Chicago I'm willing to like cast judgment on a culture that I don't know that much about as opposed to reading a writer who with whom I might disagree but who I admire whose intellect I admire who's saying I have a different I have a different feel for this community that you do that doesn't mean he's right but shouldn't it be a voice in my head thank you all again for coming to speak to us I've been thinking a lot about the role that interfaith families play in a pluralistic society so my question and I would like to define interfaith more broadly so Dr Patel you described your family as three quarters of smiley at one quarter of Sunni Muslim with your spouse being Sunni so bear your mind nephew you could call me you boom sure it's up so I mean I was just wondering what you guys think the current challenges interfaith families face are and how interfaith families contribute to pluralism and society and how they improve it and make it better yeah I mean it's a great question and I think that they are that they are good for pluralism in the relationships across difference and in the getting to know people from a different background I think that it's very challenging when it comes to the continuity of an identity community I go to Jamath Khanah with my

kids less because my wife has not been this smiley and I go to her parents who it's harder for them to involve and her extended family to involve our whole family in broader South Asian Sunni things because of my smiley identity right it's just it is the content pluralism and I think this is just one of the things that like you have to stare in the face pluralism is a challenge to the continuity of identity communities and in our world continuity of identity communities is connected to salvation right it's it's I think it's really important like well my kids will my grandkids cook and love the same food not that I cook anything but I sure love food right but but like what will they carry on the same cultural practices that I do yeah that that's important but getting to heaven in our world matters a lot more right and so pluralism is a challenge to the continuity of identity communities and guess what there's there's no other like good luck finding a cave in the world where you're going to be able to separate your kids from all other identities so you so this is the world that we have and you have to make it work both the challenges and reap the harvest of of the beauties of pluralism right so I love that that my kids feel you know I didn't I didn't I probably didn't hear the word salam alaykumatala 16 years old I probably didn't enter a muzjith until Oxford right and I love that my kids feel relatively comfortable in both places you know I love that they are more if not fluent at least literate with the breath of the Muslim tradition I think what's interesting about your example too is it's kind of the limit principle of what all of us are trying to figure out in the American experiment so if we leave aside the difficult question of interfaith marriage and just think about close friendships would it not be better if all of us had both close friendships with in faith and close interfaith friendships and so I think for you know for I sometimes talk to Christian students who are you know fill their weeks with seven Bible studies and have all Christian friends which is probably not great for understanding how to live in a diverse society with people of other faiths and then conversely if all you're doing is being out there and you don't have any kind of a faith community to help you with your practices you're you're airing too far in the other direction and pluralism becomes really the thing that you serve in some ways and so I think I think the best practice might be in close personal relationships can you work to have both in different projects and probably for each of us that challenge is going to be harder in one direction or the other Thank you guys again I think one thing that both of you mentioned was kind of we don't need to accept or tolerate Nazis in kind of the context of pluralism and my question was what about like kind of the spectrum to becoming Nazis you know I think a perfect example is inviting or the kind of invitation to Stephen Bannon last year to speak here and like you know we might people different people might have different lines to drawing like what's acceptable and what's not So a couple of us there one what I wanted to say and what I just want to reinforce is again I think from a from a Christian theological premise if every single human being is created in the image of God that means actually that line is not one that we can draw I'm saying I personally find it very hard to think about befriending a Nazi maybe just because it doesn't sound like a good use of my time but I'm some some ways I'm in some ways inspired by the people who do and there are stories of right Nazis who change their views and I think that's a good a

net gain for the world when you have one less Nazi who's changed his views about human beings but I but it is it is a hard question practically speaking about how you how you move toward friendship or relationship or how you start to endorse a privilege something so I would say this is a bit unrelated but it's maybe a point worth making. I think in the university context if you want a wide range of thoughtful commentators across an ideological spectrum there are a ton of people out there right on any issue I can we can collectively point you to all those people and you don't actually need to go to the bomb throwers or the people who are so outlandish that you invite simply to make a scene or to get publicity or something like that so I think in college campuses today when you hear kind of stories over and over again of people who are either because they're content or their presentation and delivery is so far afield from what most of us would consider any kind of academic norm I think the real response there is just to ask ourselves as an academic community what are those people actually contributing to our discourse and if you want to have a robust debate about immigration or mass incarceration or something else then bring thoughtful people to have that debate on academic terms but I don't think we need to I don't think we need to kind of head toward the path of Nazism to have sort of academic freedom thrive in in the world that I am in so Martin Marty said in the beginning of his book when Fates collide said that European map makers in the Middle Ages they would they would have maps where they would put your up unsurprisingly at the center and everywhere else they would draw the words here be monsters right and I actually think that that's a greater that is the bigger problem than the danger of of a Nazi winding up at your dinner table is imagining monsters where they don't exist right and and and I would just like I believe in innocent until proven guilty which is to say that every once in a while a guilty person gets I would rather live in a system where every once in a while a guilty person gets let let go rather than innocent person put into jail which is obviously not the system we live in but that's the ideal beyond a reasonable doubt innocent until proven guilty right I would rather assume you're a good dude and you wind up being a Nazi then assume you're a Nazi and that wind you wind up just having some differences with me and I think we live in a world right now where we're pretty quick to assume that folks are Nazis I think that that is probably in the world in which I live that's the single biggest threat to diverse democracy is the quickness by which we're like two wrong moves in your Nazi right it's I think that that's craziness right I'm about you know I'm toying with writing a piece titled is this is this the Van Jones era right to the wrong moves in your a Nazi right it's I think that that's craziness right I'm about you know I'm toying with writing a piece titled is this is this the Van Jones era right so Van Jones Van Jones could have been the Luke Skywalker of the resistance right you all know what I'm talking about right so so you know it's been he's been on the kind of political and civic activist scene for 25 years he starts an activist organization Oakland 25 years ago which which is about police misconduct and wrongful wrongful incarceration etc etc he becomes a CNN commentator about 10 years ago how happens to be a personal friend so I know some of the background of this and in election day he looked us up on YouTube he gives like the

most famous three minute speech that month where he's basically like you know you teach your kids to be nice you teach your kids to be fair and then this guy goes ahead and wins right so Van Jones is all set up literally be the Luke Skywalker of the resistance right like fist in the air leading leading the charge and instead he's spent a lot of time behind the scenes putting together a criminal reform bill with the Koch brothers network right so is it the case that like what we ought to be doing is not finding ways in which our disagreements make me think of you as a monster but instead finding ways to bracket disagreement and find common ground and get things done right and will we look back on this era and think to ourselves the people with their fists in the air you know saying if you deny my humanity I write you off the planet kind of stuff right that that they're the people who really threatened the diverse democracy and the people who are like you know what in this crazy polarized time I'm gonna find ways to work with people with whom I can't stand on most things right but we're gonna get this done together that's you know it feels to me like that that is a big part of what pluralism requires is those kinds of folks if you like this and you want to hear more like share review and subscribe to this podcast and from all of us here at the Veritas Forum thank you