
Is Jesus the Only Way?

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
by the Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler,
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I had planned my topic for a two-part Dean's Forum, beginning this Sunday, long before I attended my weekly Rotary meeting on Monday. Sometimes my vocational commitments prohibit my Rotary attendance, but I do try to honor those Monday lunches. And I am sure glad I did this past Monday.

The speaker at the Atlanta Rotary Club on Monday, was Eboo Patel, the founder and president of Interfaith Youth Core. A Muslim from Chicago, Patel is one of the truly outstanding speakers and thinkers on interfaith relations in the United States. The Interfaith Youth Core, whose largest college gathering is in Atlanta, has as its stated mission, "to make interfaith cooperation a social norm."

On Monday, Eboo Patel presented "five pillars of American pluralism." Our nation, he reminded us, is a very fortunate, pluralistic, country. The first pillar, he said, was established among the founders of United States, from George Washington to Thomas Jefferson to Benjamin Franklin. It was George Washington who said, "The bosom of America is open to receive, the oppressed and persecuted of all Nations and Religions; whom we shall welcome to a participation of all our rights and privileges." (Hey! I said all this in my sermon of July 2, 2006! Read it online [here!](#)).

But the second pillar of American pluralism, said Patel, was the African American response to the weaknesses of our country's founders. Slavery, he reminded us, is America's original sin (as many others have said), and even our wonderful constitution counted slaves as only 3/5 a person. However, the African American population of our country came to realize the genius of American pluralism, and that population remained committed to the country.

Two other pillars of pluralism, Patel said, were our American civil religion (and civil society) and the honorable truths of our particular religions themselves. On American civil society, Patel noted the amazing number of Roman Catholic hospitals and schools which have healed and taught so many in our country (including himself, a product of Roman Catholic schools). On the truths of our religions themselves, Patel summarized quite nicely Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan; the Samaritan, he reminded us, was a person of another religion. Jesus was demonstrating the ethic of service by using the example of someone from another religion.

Eboo Patel concluded his presentation by saying that the fifth pillar of American pluralism was us, the individuals of good will and the common good in that room. We stand up for others, in faith and in friendship.

Well, it turns out that I was planning already to speak about Christianity and other religions this coming Sunday in the Dean's Forum. What a joy, then, to have my spirit stimulated by Eboo Patel! I commend his work to you, and even his latest book, *Sacred Ground*, even though I have not read it yet. His spirit and his commitment are good. He represents the best of good faith and the common good, and I salute him.

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