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# Bridging worlds: The intersection of religion and entrepreneurship as meaningful heterodoxy<sup>☆</sup>

Brett Smith<sup>a, \*</sup>, Ali Aslan Gümüşay<sup>b, c</sup>, David M. Townsend<sup>d</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Miami University (Ohio), Farmer School of Business, L.I.F.E. Center, Oxford, OH, 45056, USA

<sup>b</sup> Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, Munich, Germany

<sup>c</sup> Humboldt Institute for Internet & Society, Berlin, Germany

<sup>d</sup> Virginia Tech, Pamplin College of Business, Blacksburg, VA, USA

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### ABSTRACT

There is a resurgence in both the advancement and critique of research at the intersection of religion and entrepreneurship. It is precisely because there are important conflicts, tensions, and paradoxes in religion and entrepreneurship that this stream of research is important to the field of entrepreneurship as a source of meaningful heterodoxy. Without grappling with these values and concerns, entrepreneurship scholars are left with an incomplete and possibly emaciated understanding of entrepreneurship. When properly harnessed to build bridges across social divides, the intersection of religion and entrepreneurship is an important source of fresh, new, and heterodox insights into the processes through which entrepreneurs strive to transform organizations and society through entrepreneurial action and an emerging subfield of entrepreneurship research.

*“Then the celebrated god himself stepped onto the platform*

*Reserved for artists*

*And declared in a loud voice*

*Right in front of my sweat-drenched friends and students*

*That he had just been afflicted with an illumination and now*

*Had become religious and with unseemly haste*

*He provocatively clapped a moth-eaten cleric’s bonnet*

*on his head*

*Fell lewdly to his knees and shamelessly*

*Struck up a saucy hymn, thus offending*

*The irreligious sentiments of his listeners, some of them*

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<sup>\*</sup> Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [smithbr2@miamioh.edu](mailto:smithbr2@miamioh.edu) (B. Smith).

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Mere youths.  
 For the last three days  
 I haven't dared show my face  
 Among my friends and students  
 I'm so  
 Embarrassed."

- "Embarrassing Incident" – Bertolt Brecht

## 1. Introduction

The resurgence of interest in scholarship at the intersection of religion and entrepreneurship illuminates an important but understudied phenomenon that connects numerous cultures, communities, and credal systems around the world (Smith et al., 2019; Block et al., 2020). As recent studies note, more than 80% of people in the world identify as religious, exercising their beliefs through a rich and diverse range of religious practices across numerous social and cultural systems (Pew Research Center, 2015). Entrepreneurship scholars have increasingly recognized the importance of religion to entrepreneurship (Smith et al., 2019). Over the past few years, a growing number of studies have been published in top-tier FT 50 management and entrepreneurship journals (Ganzin et al., 2020; Gümüşay et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2021, 2022, 2023; Smith et al., 2021; Cucchi et al., 2021; Xu et al., 2022). Entrepreneurship scholars have also created a new academic research conference to connect researchers in this nascent field of inquiry ([www.liferesearchconference.com](http://www.liferesearchconference.com)). Core academic journals in the field have taken notice of these trends and launched a special issue on religion and entrepreneurship (Janssen et al., 2021). Although these efforts are still in the early stages of development, scholarly investigations at the intersection of religion and entrepreneurship offer important insights to entrepreneurship scholars regarding one of the most important institutional, cultural, social, political, and even economic forces shaping the human experience.

Yet, despite the important progress of this work in recent years, scholarship at the intersection of religion and entrepreneurship remains limited for several key reasons that illuminate fundamental misunderstandings, misgivings, and misinformation on both sides of the religion and entrepreneurship conversation. For some scholars, the invocation of religion and religious beliefs in a scientific field creates a type of the 'embarrassing incident' Brecht so powerfully describes in the snippet of poem in our epigraph. The intersection of religion and entrepreneurship provokes powerful responses from religious adherents as well. In these cases, entrepreneurial work (i.e., Ramoglou and McMullen, 2022 in press) represents the siren's song of *secular* work (cf. Ashforth and Vaidyanath, 2002) – a self-interested pursuit of 'worldly ambitions' that conflicts with one's sacred obligations to a transcendent higher power (Longman, 2008).

At times, both religious leaders and scholars critique the bridging of religion and entrepreneurship as a problematic type of syncretism which undermines the power and purity of religious beliefs and practices (cf. Sigalow, 2016) or infuses commercial practices with unnecessary moral baggage (Joas, 2014). Recent studies in the field of entrepreneurship express similar concerns with the connections between religion and entrepreneurship, and laud the important decentralizing (Patel and Wolfe, 2022) or deinstitutionalizing role of entrepreneurship as a type of secular work (Hunt and Ortiz-Hunt, 2017). These are important critiques that should be taken seriously by entrepreneurship scholars and practitioners alike who work at the intersection of religion and entrepreneurship.

However, in our view, there are important, alternative ways to bridge these divides at the intersection of religion and entrepreneurship (hereafter R&E). Informed both by our personal experiences as well as scholarly pursuits, we view the intersection of religion and entrepreneurship as a potent source of 'meaningful heterodoxy' (Pidduck and Tucker, 2022). In recent work, Pidduck and Tucker (2022) argue that "entrepreneurial actors are the embodiment of heterodoxy—deviation from accepted or orthodox standards or beliefs." Although they recognize that "heterodoxy in itself is by no means a sole precursor or complete synonym for entrepreneurship in its entirety" they argue that "the tensions, paradoxes, and juxtaposition of ideas, people, and resources underpinning heterodox thinking can indeed help shed considerable light on the discovery, enactment, evaluation, and exploitation of the opportunities" through entrepreneurial action. We agree. In our view, it is precisely because there are important conflicts, tensions, and paradoxes in R&E that this stream of research is important to the field of entrepreneurship.

Mindful of these conflicts, tensions, and paradoxes, the purpose of this study is to examine R&E as a source of meaningful heterodoxy in entrepreneurship research and practice. To accomplish this goal, we build on extant research – including both supportive and critical perspectives – to bridge dynamic and complex tensions inherent in R&E to "(generate) novel and valuable ways of solving problems" (Pidduck and Tucker, 2022: 1).

## 2. The intersection of religion & entrepreneurship

The transition of religion from the periphery to mainstream entrepreneurship research as a meaningful heterodoxy raises important questions about what is distinctive about the intersection of two components: entrepreneurship and religion. Entrepreneurship can be defined as "a scholarly field that seeks to understand how opportunities to bring into existence 'future' goods and services are discovered, created, and exploited, by whom, and with what consequences" (Venkataraman, 1997: 120). As a relatively new field of study, it focuses on opportunities, entrepreneurs, and consequences of entrepreneurial action (Shane and Venkataraman, 2000; McMullen and Shepherd, 2006).

Unlike entrepreneurship, the study of religion dates back many centuries but debate continues about its definition (e.g., Greeley, 1982). Religion can be regarded as “systems of meaning embodied in a pattern of life, a community of faith, and a worldview of the sacred and what ultimately matters” (Schmidt et al., 1999: 10) and includes the “feelings, thoughts, experiences, and behaviors that arise from the search for the sacred” (Hill et al., 2000: 66). This definition recognizes religion's multidimensional nature (Mathras et al., 2016), its unique set of practices and values in the search for the sacred, divine, and ultimate (Pargament, 1997), and the inclusion of spirituality premised on a deity or theology, while excluding world-oriented and people-oriented spirituality (Hill et al., 2000). It also highlights the formative role of religion in creating moments of self-transcendence when a person “is pulled beyond the boundaries of one's self (thus experiencing) a relaxation of or liberation from one's fixation on oneself” (Joas, 2014: 7). In these situations, the emancipating role of religion as a source of self-transcendence highlights the extent to which religion can shape the relational and temporal contexts of entrepreneurship – both constraining and enabling entrepreneurial action.

Building on these two components, we understand the intersection of R&E to be concerned with *the discovery, enactment, evaluation, and exploitation of opportunities to create future goods and services motivated by the cultural and ideological beliefs, practices, and/or outcomes rooted in religious faith*. This understanding provides the foundation for essential research questions around why, when, and how the beliefs, practices, and/or outcomes rooted in religious beliefs impact opportunities, entrepreneurial action, and consequences of entrepreneurial action for the pursuer and other stakeholders; and why, when, and how the dynamic, ongoing interactions among entrepreneurs and their stakeholders shape and transform their collective religious beliefs, practices, and/or social contexts through entrepreneurial action.

The distinctive domain of R&E is hence bi-directional (Seabright, 2016) and recursive. First, R&E is concerned with the influence of religious beliefs on entrepreneurial antecedents, processes, and outcomes. This approach is consistent with Weber's foundational focus (2002/1905) on how religious beliefs, practices, and values instantiated as institutional forces constrain and enable entrepreneurs developing and executing their business and with recent work that identifies the religious antecedents for entrepreneurial action (Gümüşay, 2015; Smith et al., 2019). Second, entrepreneurship affects religions which requires to examine the relational dynamics of R&E (e.g., Emirbayer and Mische, 1998; Smith et al., 2021), viewing the enactment of entrepreneurial action at the intersection of R&E as a dynamic, ongoing process whereby religious beliefs and practices mutually influence and are influenced by entrepreneurial action.

### 3. The distinctive possibilities of R&E as meaningful heterodoxy

Having articulated the parameters of the distinctive domain of R&E, including its definition and key research questions that form its identity and boundary conditions, we now examine the distinctive possibility of examining R&E as a source of meaningful heterodoxy in the field of entrepreneurship. For R&E to serve as such a source of “meaningful heterodoxy,” it must “involve engaging, challenging, or pivoting understanding on the potentially edgy phenomena entrepreneurs themselves are venturing within: an inherently risky research endeavor as the subject may court controversy or invoke value-judgments” that promises to “advance, challenge, or extend our understanding of the ways in which entrepreneurs break the status quo to create impactful and innovative ventures” (Pidduck and Tucker, 2022: 2). Engaging with the tensions of R&E relates to all four cascading contexts (Pidduck and Tucker, 2022) offering a veritable treasure trove for advancing our theorizing and developing important research questions (cf. Table 1).

#### 3.1. Intercultural heterodoxy

R&E involves tensions and dynamics related to the intercultural heterodoxy, where two or more distinctive cultural elements interact and/or are juxtaposed (Pidduck and Tucker, 2022). As religious people in general and religious entrepreneurs in particular cross borders and cultural contexts, the resulting intercultural and interreligious dynamics illuminate important questions regarding the role of R&E in enhancing or detracting from the formation of social and communal ties in global context. These tensions are most apparent when minority/foreign religions with divergent sets of cultural practices enter new entrepreneurial landscapes as entrepreneurs, customers, as well as culture “brokers” and “makers.” In these situations, the extent to which religious beliefs and practices from one culture are carried into and synthesized with established cultural beliefs and practices in a new cultural context serves as an important source of cultural transformation.

These cultural elements may include macro issues such as systems or institutions to micro issues such as cuisine or non-verbal cues (Pidduck and Tucker, 2022). At a macro level, new business models may cross borders and enter a sector such as Islamic banking in “the West,” resulting in a new market opportunity (Di Mauro et al., 2013). At a meso-level, ventures are developing new working practices, such as religious ambiguity, to expand the pool of human capital to include those previously excluded by religious considerations of creed, race, and/or gender (Gümüşay et al., 2020a). Mindfulness practices originating in Buddhism and yoga practices originating in Hinduism continue to gain popularity in the global north in part due to the mental and physical benefits such embodied practices provide to people (Munir et al., 2021). In response, some Christian and Muslim entrepreneurs have developed new businesses to capitalize on the growth of these embodied practices. At a micro level, markets for Kosher and Halal products may emerge as more Jews and Muslims settle in a certain region thereby broadening the range of dietary products offered to consumers (Dana, 2009). Islamic banking continues to generate novel banking practices that strive to replace traditional business models in the finance sector with alternative sources of income apart from interest fees. Entrepreneurs are incorporating religious practices such as being closed on the Sabbath, even in very secular parts of the world.

In these cases, entrepreneurs “broker” different cultural understandings or “create” cultures within their ventures that differ from the prevailing religious and cultural norms in which the ventures are embedded in ways that are differentiated from other traditional entrepreneurial products and services. Such diversity of opportunity exists and can be examined both across religions as well as

**Table 1**  
Illustrative examples and future research questions along heterodoxy facets.

Cascading facets	Illustrative examples	Potential research questions
Intercultural heterodoxy	Islamic banking in “the West” Religious ambiguity to include excluded sources of capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How do entrepreneurs engage in religious sensegiving to broker opportunities across cultural borders?</li> <li>- Why and how do some entrepreneurs, and not others, include religiously excluded or marginalized resources in the entrepreneurial process?</li> <li>- Why and when does empathy or alienation result from intercultural entrepreneurship?</li> <li>- Why and when are resource providers willing to make the leap across religious cultural boundaries?</li> <li>- How do entrepreneurs adapt opportunities to increase legitimacy across religious cultural boundaries?</li> <li>- Why and when do the religious majority acquiesce to new cultural understandings of entrepreneurship?</li> </ul>
Ideological heterodoxy	Passing inheritance of a family business to charity rather than family Aligning business strategy to renew culture and glorify God	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How and why does a religious logic interact with other institutional logics in entrepreneurship?</li> <li>- How can we conceptualize the role of a deity or God as stakeholder in entrepreneurship?</li> <li>- When and how does a religious logic lead to alignment or divergence with a prevailing political party view?</li> <li>- How do entrepreneurs and investors manage logic multiplicity in the entrepreneurial process?</li> <li>- How does religious logic heterogeneity challenge our understanding of the relationship between religion and entrepreneurship?</li> </ul>
Otherness heterodoxy	Faith-based marginalized entrepreneurs Entrepreneurial support organizations focused on under-represented entrepreneurs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How do religious entrepreneurs engage with the challenges of being neither accepted nor understood?</li> <li>- Why and how do initial tranches of capital lead to subsequent capital for “othered” entrepreneurs?</li> <li>- What types of new financing products are needed to fund “othered” entrepreneurship?</li> <li>- How does religion contribute to alienation or acceptance by othered entrepreneurs?</li> <li>- When and why does religious “othering” provide legitimacy advantages or challenges?</li> </ul>
Rule and norm heterodoxy	Explicit promotion of faith in entrepreneurial ventures Faith-based entrepreneurial accelerator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Why and how does the explicit promotion of faith encourage or hinder resource acquisition?</li> <li>- How do entrepreneurs normalize “grey areas” to expand potential entrepreneurial opportunities?</li> <li>- Why and how do religious entrepreneurial “rebels with a cause” balance their goal for distinctiveness with their need for legitimacy?</li> <li>- When and how does the minimization of negative outcomes increase the approval of religiously taboo activities?</li> <li>- How do ventures engage with tensions as new rules and norms on religious practices are introduced?</li> </ul>

within each religion (Gümüşay, 2020; Yan, 2020). From a cognitive perspective, this approach challenges not only what is feasible but also what is desirable in terms of entrepreneurial action by introducing new cultural understandings. In terms of resource acquisition, this brokering identifies new pools of capital, increases the value of undervalued assets, or creates a new attraction for different asset classes. In so doing, intercultural ties may be strengthened by increased interaction with people of different cultural understandings and may lead to empathy and inclusion, as a ‘bright side’ of integrating religion and entrepreneurship.

At the same time, each of these intercultural and interreligious opportunities can create resistance by the majority cultural members. To counteract such resistance, entrepreneurs can attempt to graft their opportunities into an understanding of the religious majority. For example, Christian and Muslim entrepreneurs have sometimes distanced themselves from the labels of mindfulness or yoga and even introduced new variations into the ancient practices to counteract legitimacy issues. Attempts by religious entrepreneurs to build bridges across cultural divides can lead to charges of heresy or apostasy as opponents of these changes decry the syncretic efforts of religious entrepreneurs to combine cultural beliefs and practices. In addition, entrepreneurs who carry out their religious values in their venture that deviate from the cultural norm may also face pressure and resistance (e.g., Hobby Lobby). As such, the introduction, negotiation, and resolution of cultural differences, contradictions, and paradoxes become of paramount importance in R&E. This opens a number of research opportunities as the sensegiving, sensemaking, and risk tolerance of entrepreneurs, religious leaders, key stakeholders, and society take on increased importance in the initiation, continuance, and discontinuance of R&E across cultural boundaries.

### 3.2. Ideological heterodoxy

R&E engages with core questions around ideologies about what is, what should be, and how to move from ought to is. Ideological heterodoxies thereby are about “divergences in deep seated presumptions and/or beliefs” (Pidduck and Tucker, 2022: 2). Religion may challenge the very core of the entrepreneurial purpose. This may include not only distancing itself from capitalistic expectations of profit maximization of the economic paradigm (Smith et al., 2021; Pidduck and Tucker, 2022) but also divergence from other ide-

ologies and institutional logics. This is because religion often serves as a meta-logic to many of its adherents (Dyck, 2014), thereby influencing how a religious logic interacts with other institutional logics and generally occupying a prioritized position relative to other logics (Gümüşay, 2020). While the theological turn to entrepreneurship focuses on the interaction of a religious and market logic (Smith et al., 2021), there are a number of other logics that are influenced by the intersection of religion and entrepreneurship whereby the religious logic acts as a filter, mediator or shaper. For example, a religious logic may encourage an entrepreneur to question their allegiance to a political party. Rather than simply pursuing entrepreneurial action aligned with a far-right or far-left ideology, an entrepreneur may be compelled to focus on the “radical middle,” agreeing with one political party on certain issues such as taxation and another political party on different issues such as economic development incentives. A religious logic may call into question the family logic of unconditional loyalty and legacy regarding succession and encourage a distribution of profits or equity to charitable organizations rather than the next generation of the family. Finally, a religious logic may lead an entrepreneur to challenge the decisions of the board of directors in a corporation with the authority of a deity or God. For instance, Praxis Labs encourages operations that shift from using people to blessing people and strategy that shifts from leveraging culture for their own benefit to renewing culture that is more humanizing and God-glorifying ([www.praxislabs.org](http://www.praxislabs.org)).

The introduction of a religious logic also raises the questions of logic multiplicity and heterogeneity in entrepreneurship. While research on hybrid institutions often examines two logics or identities, the introduction of a religious logic may lead to logic or identity multiplicity, where three or more logics or identities are salient. This addition increases institutional complexity by adding “complex patterns of relationships” among identities or logics (Ramarajan et al., 2017). For example, a recent study found religious impact investors varied on how they managed the expectations of religious, social, and financial logics. Some investors relied on a distinguishing strategy where minimum returns were necessary for each logic and others used a shadowing strategy where the social and financial returns were collapsed into a single measurement (Smith et al., 2022). In addition, the religious logic is heterogenous, suggesting differences between and within different religions, thereby encouraging a “recalibration” or inter- and intrareligious institutional logic diversity to complement Western and Christian empirical studies (Gümüşay, 2020).

From an ideological perspective, religion may transform the very essence of what an opportunity is, how it is evaluated, and whether and which is pursued (Gümüşay, 2018; Smith et al., 2019). Entrepreneurial action and outcomes may thus deviate substantially from the logic of economic ‘utility maximization’ through wealth generation or any other prevailing institutional logic. Understanding the tensions and (in)compatibilities of different ideologies will be crucial for understanding how and why religious entrepreneurs act, persist, grow, or give up on their ventures and their religious understandings. In addition, ideology may drive the decision of the legal structure of an organization, how it raises capital, and the forms of capital that are acceptable. For example, a religious logic may encourage an entrepreneur to reject the for-profit/non-profit dichotomy that may fall along political lines in favor of a structure that incorporates aid and trade to solve a social problem, such as human trafficking.

At the same time, entrepreneurial ideologies and values have entered religious organizations and impact the very core of who they are, as well as how they define and measure purpose. This has moved beyond a traditional focus on the integration of faith and work to a specific integration within churches about how to support entrepreneurs and even launch their own entrepreneurial ventures or entrepreneurial support organizations. In the United States, Christian megachurches are not only behaving entrepreneurially to attract new members but they are also developing entrepreneurial programs, including training programs, entrepreneurial accelerators, and even venture capital funds (Smith et al., 2019). However, the introduction or reliance on new ideologies likely leads to tensions that may attract some stakeholders and repel others, leading to the creation of hybrid organizations (Smith et al., 2010). In Germany, such a hybrid was launched in 2010 with an incubator tailored specifically towards Muslim social entrepreneurship (Gümüşay and Smets, 2020). Ideology differences can be managed by emphasizing some issues as core and others as peripheral (Besharov and Smith, 2014). Yet, these ideological tensions raise sensemaking issues related to the core identity of the organizations and movements, as well as alienation and even break away organizations (Kreiner et al., 2015).

### 3.3. Otherness heterodoxy

R&E relates to the otherness heterodoxy, which is about being considered or perceived different, foreign or an outsider (Pidduck and Tucker, 2022: 7). The combination of religion and entrepreneurship still faces many hurdles because each may still be skeptical of the other – and keep it away as “otherness”. Ventures that try to integrate faith experience a “liability of novelty” – as their novel identity and practices may neither be accepted nor understood (Gümüşay and Smets, 2020). They are thus challenged and othered, needing to develop concepts and practices both for their own internal workings as well as their external justification to multiple audiences and stakeholders (Fisher et al., 2017). This othering raises questions about how explicit or implicit entrepreneurs and organizations should be about R&E. Certain groups may also be othered. For instance, female Muslim entrepreneurs may face additional hurdles but also draw from their faith – with implications both for religious and entrepreneurial practices (Essers and Benschop, 2009). Religious entrepreneurs who are members of LGBTQ + communities also face numerous challenges in navigating the inherent tensions between their personal lives and the expectations of various religious communities. Similar issues confront social entrepreneurs, even as they attempt to follow the Golden Rule to empower others. From a productive perspective, an entrepreneur motivated by their religion may feel compelled to develop solutions to empower disadvantaged populations. For example, a technology entrepreneur may apply their skills to create ICT solutions in less developed countries to follow the Golden Rule. On the one hand, this “otherness” may be embraced as a desirable solution by members of the disadvantaged population because it solves a problem and emanates from beyond their own country. On the other hand, this “otherness” may be eschewed by members of the disadvantaged population because it is viewed as charity, not conducive to local needs, or associated with a savior mentality. To address issues of otherness, entrepreneurial support organizations backed by religious ministries are seeking to reduce the barriers to entrepreneurship for under-

represented groups based on race, gender, and social class through empathy-based solutions. In this way, R&E may contribute directly to the promotion and practice of inclusive and emancipatory entrepreneurship (Rindova et al., 2009).

Otherness creates a number of opportunities for R&E to bridge the divide between the majority and the marginalized groups of society. These opportunities may include catering to a specific niche of the market or empowering people from marginalized groups to more fully participate in existing entrepreneurial ecosystems. In terms of resource acquisition, insiders may need to normalize the funding of ventures from under-represented populations by investing the first tranche of capital or developing investment funds, products, and theses for specific under-represented populations. For example, a Christian investor in Chicago has developed specific investing solutions, such as forgivable loans, to promote entrepreneurship by under-represented groups targeting under-represented problems in both Chicago and Africa.

Religious organizations commonly attempt to stay true to their beliefs and origin and are skeptical of introducing new thinking and practices into their midst (Smith et al., 2021). On the one hand, introducing entrepreneurship may be deemed to corrupt the purity and inner core of their faith. This may lead to the distancing of such thinking and practices. On the other hand, the use of entrepreneurial approaches, tactics, and programs may appeal to groups that have been “othered” or marginalized by traditional churches. For example, a major church in the United States promoted itself as, “The church for those who have given up on church.” This approach resulted in one of the fastest growing and largest churches in the U.S. In both cases, tensions are created by the “othering” of entrepreneurs, religious leaders, stakeholders, and certain segments of the population, often based on issues of social identity, legitimacy, and inclusion/exclusion. The sensemaking of where to draw the boundaries, how to engage in legitimation, and whom to include (exclude) are critical issues for addressing the tensions of R&E.

### 3.4. Rule and norm heterodoxy

R&E addresses the rule and norm heterodoxy by challenging the status quo, disrupting established customs, and breaking with conventions (Pidduck and Tucker, 2022: 8). For many religious people, their faith is their “unconditional, infinite and ultimate concern” (Tillich, 1957, p. 8). As such, it molds and informs their most fundamental cause and reasoning about forming rules and norms. Faith can both help to stabilize as well as radically challenge practices in ventures related to entrepreneurial ethics, conventions, and taboos and also import new ones. For example, faith-driven entrepreneurs often move beyond the common conventions of keeping their faith private and their ventures public. They integrate faith in their organizational purpose as well as daily practices including prayer, reading, and contemplation challenging what has been called the Sunday-Monday divide, whereby faith is practiced not only during weekends but also weekdays at work. Instead of being subtle about their religious faith, these entrepreneurs feel like they are “rebels with a cause” (Pidduck and Tucker, 2022: 8) to not only incorporate their personal faith but also infuse faith goals and objectives into the fabric of the organization. The Business-as-Mission (B.A.M.) movement explicitly encourages the use of ventures as mechanisms for religious missionary work and evangelization. This explicit expression of faith may create tensions for other stakeholders (e.g., investors, customers, suppliers, etc.) from a different religious tradition, no religious tradition, or the same tradition but holding different views on public versus private articulation of religious beliefs. Yet, questions remain about how the explicit promotion of faith may influence the participation of critical resource providers.

For many decades, the Catholic church has relied on the sale of alcohol and gambling to support their educational institutions. For example, many parishes in the United States offer bingo on a weekly basis and have annual church festivals, where the majority of the profits come in the form of beer sales and proceeds from bingo and other forms of gambling table games. While some view the source of these profits as “grey areas,” the funds from these activities continue to fund the religious education of generations of students. From an opportunity recognition process, the intersection of R&E may limit some of the possible opportunities available to entrepreneurs and organizations. Yet, the ability of entrepreneurs and organizations to normalize these activities or minimize the concerns related to the outcomes of these activities may increase the likelihood of exploitation.

Entrepreneurship in religious organizations may be seen as a new means towards an ulterior end for themselves and their followers. This ulterior end may include “discovering what cannot be rendered material, the ineffable mystery of God's will” (Bento da Silva et al., 2022: 1379). Given these ends are essential but may be difficult for some to agree with or grasp, there will likely be tensions between religious and entrepreneurial rules and norms but also potential ways to resolve them. For example, some churches have launched entrepreneurial accelerators as a financial tool to fund their future church missions. Some members of the church congregations have departed because they felt like they were turning God's house into a marketplace thereby serving Mammon rather than God. Others were eager to participate in these innovative ways to both carry out and fund God's work. In these cases, critical mechanisms such as identities and logics may be used to form the bases of sensegiving and legitimacy. Of course, these social constructions of reality may range from fully inelastic to fully elastic understandings of appropriate rule and norm constructions (Kreiner et al., 2015; Gümüşay et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2021).

## 4. The emerging subfield of R&E

Having explained the meaningful heterodox tensions of R&E, we ask: Where does this heterodoxy lead? To date, the answer appears to be pointing to an important emerging subfield of R&E. Extant research recognizes that both organizational and intellectual fields often contain distinctive subfields that develop their own practices, structures, and logics (e.g., Porac et al., 1989) and their emergence may lead to important changes at the broader field level (Zietsma et al., 2017). Towards this end, we propose the emerging R&E offers the promise of contributing several important new perspectives in the broader field of entrepreneurship research. As we noted earlier, religion plays a socially beneficial role when these systems promote bridging social ties (Wuthnow, 2002), generate alternative social imaginaries and emancipatory narratives (Laine and Kibler, 2022), and help forge moral communities organized to

ameliorate social problems and conflicts (Tole, 1993). These pro-social benefits of R&E, in turn, are the source of the 'bright side of R&E' through the development of empathy and concern for others (e.g., Tucker et al., 2019) and transcendence (Gümüşay, 2021), which enables entrepreneurs to see beyond their current circumstances to alternative possibilities.

At the same time, R&E also illuminates the 'dark side' of entrepreneurial action whereby the partisan actions of religious entrepreneurs create or reify sectarian divides in communities around the world. To be clear, we are not proposing that religious beliefs and practices are the sole cause of civil conflict and strife around the world, but we certainly acknowledge religion can play a role in exacerbating these conflicts. In this sense, there are "tensions, paradoxes, and juxtaposition of ideas, people, and resources" inherent in R&E centering on the extent to which such practices either promote or undermine the formation of community through entrepreneurial action (e.g., Bacq et al., 2022).

In R&E, the 'dark side' of entrepreneurial action often manifests through the fanaticism of entrepreneurial action motivated by a frenzied, inflexible commitment to one's ideological beliefs. In these situations, R&E imposes their values, beliefs, and ideologies on others thereby creating or amplifying social conflicts and divide. In similar fashion, a second problem in R&E shares common roots with fanaticism and stems from the alienation created by the extent to which R&E reifies in-group and out-group dynamics between members of different religious groups. Marxist critiques of capitalist systems often centered on the notion of the 'alienation of labor' whereby workers are unable to benefit from the profits generated by their work. In some cases, R&E creates a different type of 'alienation of labor' by severing the link between an entrepreneur and communities he or she might be able to serve. In other cases, R&E might amplify divides between social groups by alienating marginalized and underrepresented groups from engaging in 'mainstream commerce' because they belong to different religious groups. Religiously-motivated xenophobia, class, social, and cultural tensions between majority and minority religious groups can often exacerbate problems of social alienation, stripping people of the opportunities to bridge social, political, economic, and cultural divides through entrepreneurial action.

In contrast, when R&E works towards enhancing and promoting communitarian values and ties, R&E can be transformed into socially- and economically-beneficial outcomes. Whereas sectarian motives can undermine community cohesion, the pursuit of R&E to bolster and enhance communitarian values can transform fanaticism through empathetic action as entrepreneurs strive to serve their 'neighbor' even across sectarian divides. Although each of the major world religions contains a spotty historical record full of divisive conflict through sectarian violence, each of these religions also has provided countless examples of socially-transformational leaders who transcended these social divides often by caring for their neighbors. From historical examples such as Quakers in the United States or British evangelical leaders such as Wilberforce who led abolitionist movements to eradicate African slave trade, to modern social entrepreneurs who work across cultural, institutional, and sectarian boundaries to eliminate sex trafficking, when R&E harness the communitarian values of religious systems to transcend social divides, society benefits. At the root of these efforts is an empathetic concern for one's neighbor, and a desire to leverage entrepreneurial action to achieve these benefits. Taken together, R&E contributes to entrepreneurship research, highlighting important conversations and alternative perspectives on the inherent value of R&E to the broader field of entrepreneurship.

## 5. Conclusion

Religious beliefs and practices play an essential role in the lives and work of countless entrepreneurs around the world. Although in recent years there is a spark of scholarly interest at the intersection of R&E, we empathize with many of our colleagues who are uncomfortable with such work. For many in our field, the intersection of R&E is another 'embarrassing incident' where private beliefs spill out into public, scientific discourse. As entrepreneurship scholars who are also members of different religious communities, we understand the trepidation many of our colleagues experience when contemplating questions at the intersection of R&E. At the same time, we also encourage our colleagues to consider the fundamental importance that religion plays in the daily lives of so many entrepreneurs around the world. Whether one ascribes to a religious belief system or not, religious beliefs are as close to a universal cultural or social force as any other in human society. Without grappling with these values and concerns, entrepreneurship scholars are left with an incomplete and possibly emaciated understanding of entrepreneurship. But beyond these concerns, we also assert that when properly harnessed, religious beliefs and practices are a critical source of communitarian values that help build important bridges across social divides. In this sense, the intersection of R&E is an important source of fresh, new, and heterodox insights into the processes through which entrepreneurs strive to transform organizations and society through entrepreneurial action.

## Author statement

All three authors contributed to all aspects of the manuscript.

## Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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