

THE EFFECTS OF MIXED-FAITH MARRIAGES ON FAMILY LIFE AND IDENTITY

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I HAVE long been interested in mixed-faith relationships but only became actively involved in 1987 after something that took me by surprise. I organized a series of discussion evenings for members of my congregation in Maidenhead who faced difficult personal issues: bereavement, divorce, the needs of elderly parents, problems with teenage children, and intermarriage. They each attracted a good number of participants—except the latter, which had an enormous attendance, far beyond my expectations and including people from far away who were not members but had heard of the event. It was clear that this was a topic that was not being tackled and was crying out for attention. Since then I have organized seminars throughout the country and met individually with several hundred couples.

One indication of the complexity of the issue is finding the best term to describe it. The expression 'mixed-faith marriages' is used in this paper as a convenient shorthand which will be intelligible to most people. However, it contains two flaws. It conceals the fact that a significant number of couples are not married but are living together, in a fully committed and fully consummated relationship, but not technically as man and wife. This is a phenomenon affecting society at large and includes many same-faith couples, but it often applies particularly to mixed-faith ones. Lack of parental approval and unresolved question marks in the couple's own minds over the type of wedding mean that many mixed-faith couples prefer to sidestep these problems by avoiding an official marriage ceremony. As Jenny (a Catholic) put it, 'There's a sort of unwritten rule: so long

as my dad can tell the rest of the family I'm not married, he will put up with Malik and I sharing a flat. If he had to say I was married to a Muslim, then life would be impossible.' Some couples are happy to go along with this arrangement, although others are bothered by it. Gerald senses the dilemma acutely: 'Sometimes I feel as if I am living in sin, but for the time being I reckon it would be a greater sin to outrage the family by being the first member to get married in a registry office rather than a synagogue.'

The other disadvantage with the term 'mixed-faith marriages' is that not all of the unions are mixed-faith ones. Some of them are single-faith, in the sense that one partner has a faith and the other does not. In the case of the latter it may be that they were brought up in a religious tradition which they subsequently repudiated. Alternatively, they may never have received any religious orientation. The forms which hospital patients have to fill in on being admitted often ask their person's religion, but a high percentage leave it blank or simply put 'nothing'. They are not lapsed Anglican or former Jews or ex-Catholic, but simply nothing, never having been given a faith and never having taken one up of their own accord. There are those who find this hard to comprehend: 'But you must be something,' Jill, a regular church-goer, remembers telling Harry when they first met. He was not. In an age of secularism there are many who are second- or third-generation 'nothings'. This can sometimes be an advantage, leaving the religious partners free to practise their own faith and introduce it in the home. However, although they may not have the problem of religious competition, religious indifference or resentment can be equally divisive. The non-religious partners may consider domestic rituals and family gatherings at festivals to be an intrusion and may resist any attempts to introduce them or to 'indoctrinate' the children.

The difficulty is that most other terms are even more inappropriate. 'Mixed relationships' may avoid the theological and matrimonial problem but could be applied to other groupings, such as mixed-class or mixed-race. They too face many challenges, but as they can often involve people of the same faith, they must be considered a different category. The term also carries the connotation of mixed-up and confused, which would be unfair to a large percentage of couples. 'Marrying out' is also an inappropriate phrase because, as will be seen below, many individuals do not feel that they are jettisoning their own religious identity by marrying someone of a different faith. The religious authorities may view it that way, but their perspective does not always match the reality of what is happening in people's lives. 'I hate that term,' said Rachel; 'it is so negative. It implies that marrying out is giving up. Falling in love with Christopher meant I loved *him*, not that I suddenly hated my religion.' Moreover, in cases where one partner does not have a faith but feels happy to go along with the other person's beliefs and practices they vehemently object to the term, as does Helen: 'It's not a matter of Harvey marrying out, but of me marrying in!'

The expression 'intermarriage' has the advantage of being short and slipping easily off the tongue but is too imprecise. 'Exogamy' is more accurate but tends

to send people scuttling for a dictionary. 'Cross-cultural marriage' draws attention to the fact that it is often the cultural expression of beliefs rather than the beliefs themselves that may be problematic. Thus Trudy, a Methodist, values the command to honour one's parents as much as her Jewish husband David. However, she finds it annoying that he feels obliged to ring his mother every day, whereas she speaks to her mother once a week. Still, 'cross-cultural marriage' can also refer to a Catholic Bolivian peasant married to a Catholic Austrian countess and does not necessarily involve religious differences. For the purposes of this paper, therefore, 'mixed-faith marriages' is the preferred, albeit imperfect, term of reference. Others will be used occasionally, purely for the sake of variation. The only situations specifically excluded are where one partner has converted to the faith of the other, in which case they are now in a same-faith marriage.

Of course, it could be argued that all marriages are mixed-faith ones. Even when people share the same religion, they may have different images of God, different ways of praying, different childhood experiences that influence the rest of their lives. The personality of a local priest during one's teens—sensitive or repressive, stimulating or soporific—can radically affect one's outlook and lead partners in later life to be amazed to hear each other's understanding of the same faith. Even for those with an entirely similar religious background, marriage can present some formidable challenges. The current divorce rate in Britain—one in three of all marriages—includes a high percentage of same-faith marriages and shows how precarious marriage can be today. There is no suggestion that same-faith marriages are automatically successful and always full of bliss and harmony.

Why is it particularly an issue now? Mixed-faith marriages have always existed and can be found throughout the world, but in modern Britain they present a particularly striking, and as yet uncharted, phenomenon. Until 1945, London was the centre of a vast empire, at whose pinnacle was the head of the Church of England and whose subjects included nearly all the Hindus in the world, all the Sikhs, a large proportion of the Muslims, and enormous numbers of Buddhists. Since then the empire has disappeared, but its former citizens have mingled extensively, many of them migrating to England. This has had a dramatic effect on the religious landscape:

Within living memory every religion tended to be restricted to specific parts of the world. If one wished to see Buddhism at first hand it was necessary to travel to Ceylon or Japan. Now the Chiswick Vihara has some twenty thousand people on its mailing list, and saffron-robed monks walk the Sussex lanes or the streets of Wolverhampton. A Japanese peace pagoda rises on a lakeside in Milton Keynes and another is to tower above the suburbs of London. Muslims lived, then, in Arabia over-spilling into North Africa, and eastwards into Persia and India. Now among Nash's terraces surrounding Regent's Park the great dome of a splendid mosque symbolizes the presence of nearly a million Muslims in the United Kingdom. Hindus were properly the citizens of the Indian Empire. Now Leicester has the largest Hindu community, after Durban, outside India; and Birmingham and Wolverhampton, Manchester and Leeds, Coventry and Bristol, as well as dozens

of much smaller towns, have flourishing temples.... Sikhs, too, have left their ancestral homes in north-west India.... Some two hundred thousand of these 'disciples' are now settled in Britain.... Nor should we forget the Chinese 'diaspora' scattered the length and breadth of these islands.... There are, too, small communities of Jains, of Zoroastrians, and of Bahais...[and in addition] there are 335,000 Jews living in the UK. (*Anglican Consultative Council* 1988: 4)

Not only is the UK a multi-faith society, but it has been one for over forty years. The children (and in many cases grandchildren) of those religious immigrants have been born in Britain and have grown up in the same roads, nurseries, schools, sports clubs, and jobs as other citizens. Certain voluntary ghettos may exist—Jewish areas, Hindu quarters, Muslim parts—but many have chosen to mix outside these domains or have been forced by economic circumstances to do so. They live and work alongside members of other faiths. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that physical proximity has led to social contact and has quickly developed into sexual attraction and emotional bonds. The sheer humanity of each other has broken through the religious barriers. Jack spoke for thousands of other couples when he said 'When I met Varda for the first time, I didn't think "Gosh, what a nice Hindu"; I thought, "Gosh, what a nice person she is."' What is surprising is that so many people—be it parents, priests, rabbis, or imams—have been caught off-guard by the explosion in such relationships. In a multi-religious country such as Britain today mixed-faith marriages are inevitable. They are the price of an open society in which pluralism and tolerance are regarded as virtues. Some will regard it as too high a price to pay and seek to retreat behind ghetto walls and isolate themselves. Many will attempt to find a middle path, participating in society at large, but maintaining distinctive family lifestyles, including marriage patterns. Their success rate, however, is subject to so many factors over which they have no control that it cannot be taken for granted. Others will be indifferent to the new trend and consider it the sign of a mature society that can accommodate diversity on both sides of the front doormat.

The exact number of mixed-faith marriages is impossible to quantify, as marriage licences do not specify the religion of the partners. One group that has begun to collate information is British Jewry, which reports a 44 per cent rate of outmarriage, while among American Jewry it stands at 52 per cent. The Catholic Church in Britain estimates that 65 per cent of weddings under their auspices involve a Catholic marrying a non-Catholic (Romain 1996). Why have mixed-faith marriages increased now and become such a pressing issue? The answer can be divided into four overall headings: changes within the wider society, developments within the religious communities themselves, dynamics within the family, and chance.

Changes within the wider society are certainly the most crucial reason for the growth in mixed-faith marriages, although they are still only part of the answer. Most important of all is the transformation of society from one that was strictly divided into groups and which judged people by the category to which they belonged to a society that valued the principles of egalitarianism and treated people

as individuals. 'What do you do?' has superseded 'What do you believe?' as the key question when meeting someone new, particularly of the opposite sex. As Rabbi Alexander Schindler put it pithily, 'We live in an open society, and inter-marriage is the sting which comes to us in the honey of our freedom.'

The rise of tolerance led to a decline in the sense of public disgrace that had helped prevent many would-be mixed-faith marriages occurring. Hetty, now in her seventies, well remembers the non-Jewish boyfriend she loved and lost in her youth because both sets of parents refused to allow the match to proceed. 'It simply wasn't the done thing. It is hard to say who was more appalled—his father or my father—but they were both agreed that it had to stop.' Her own experience did not stop her expressing concern when her grandson got his way and married out of the faith, although she admits that part of her felt very envious at the freedom he has that she did not. 'Everything has changed now—and mixed marriages hardly seem to matter. It was so different in my day.' Moreover, the religious pluralism that now exists in Britain, with many a church occupying the same road as a mosque or synagogue, has helped make faith appear to lack objective truth in the eyes of many and to be a subjective matter; in effect, religious viewpoints have lost much of their role as a criterion for public judgements. If an individual conforms to them or deviates from them—be it a Catholic who has an abortion or a Muslim who enjoys a pint of beer or a Sikh who intermarries—it is of no concern to society at large and does not affect that person's standing in it.

At the same time, the concept of marriage has also undergone a radical change. For many, it is no longer a vehicle for transmitting family property rights, nor a means of perpetuating religious traditions. It is also no longer the union of two families, its arrangement not being the prerogative of family heads, with the actual bride and groom being incidental players. Instead it is a private matter for the couple concerned, with the family as bystanders. Compatibility is not only judged by the two partners, but is seen as being dependent on their feelings for each other. Love is the determining factor. When Rashid told his father, 'I am in love with someone non-Muslim', it was the first half of that sentence that was important to him, not the second half. When making a decision about their future together, his emotions took precedence over his background and convinced him that the marriage should go ahead. 'It's Pam that counts,' he said, 'not her religion.'

The social interchange between the faiths is not limited to children meeting in school but happens in a wide range of contexts: sports, political groups, cultural activities, social clubs, special interest societies. The result is that those who meet there find that what they have in common is often of much greater importance—at least at that stage in their lives—than what divides them. As Pete (lapsed Church of Scotland) said about his Jewish fiancée: 'All I knew about Linda was that she was a brilliant chess-player. When we talked it was about chess or the people we knew. It never occurred to me to ask if she prayed and who to. It was months before I found out she was Jewish.' The workplace is another major source of mating, and although members of different faiths have long co-existed side by side, changes in the social climate have meant that relationships have developed beyond

the merely collegial. The stereotype of the Jewish doctor who marries a Christian nurse represents not only the opportunities presented by the medical profession, but stands for men and women of all occupations who find that daily contact and common purpose create a bond that they wish to maintain for the rest of their lives.

In fact the points of contact very often go much deeper than hobbies but stem from the very similar upbringing individuals from different faiths can have. If their parents occupy the same socio-economic bracket and have similar standards of behaviour, their offspring can find that their journey through childhood and the teenage years has followed an almost identical path despite the religious differences. 'Our homes were both loving, middle-class, relatively prosperous, with a lot of importance attached to the arts, but also a strong concern for social issues,' said Clive, 'and the fact that one of them was Christian and the other Hindu was almost an extra detail that got lost in the general mix.' His wife nodded vehemently and added, 'Yes, of course we were aware of that distinction—but it was the shared sense of values and goals that drew us together.'

The tolerant attitude society has evinced towards minority groups, including religious minorities, has led to members of those groups feeling more at ease in their relations with the majority culture and less inclined to live only in parts of the country in which they are surrounded by members of the same faith community. The result is that daily life becomes increasingly assimilated for them and their children. Several years later, when those parents are confronted by their offspring announcing their engagement to a partner of a different faith, they may feel a sense of regret but in the cold light of their own decisions they cannot be surprised.

Changes in society may be crucial, but equally important are developments within the religious communities themselves. Changes in society only become relevant when they are matched by a response from within the religious groups, and particularly when those groups lose the desire for cohesion or when their commitment to the future weakens.

The collapse in the religious identity of many households has been a key factor in this process. In many ways Jenny's story is typical and speaks for a whole generation who feel that they have been religiously orphaned and given no clear sense of direction, or even roots to cling on to:

I know I am Church of England—because that's what it says on my baptism certificate, which I got when I was a few weeks old. But as I was never taken to church or Sunday school after that, I feel it doesn't really mean much. It's like saying I am a Lancashire girl because I was born in Bolton—okay, it's true, but so what? Anyway, I am not an atheist—because I do believe in a God—but I don't really know in what way or how to express it in a religious sense. I suppose it means being moral—and that's fine; but I don't have any real understanding of rituals or festivals to give it a religious setting. And I suppose that would not have bothered me too much—a shame, but not a problem—unless there had been all that fuss over Len being Jewish and not wanting to get married in church. Sud-

denly my family was up in arms—I would be the first one not to have a church ceremony. I was stunned at first. Then I got furious. How dare they expect me to keep up a tradition they'd never bothered to pass on. If they had given me absolutely no reason for marrying in, why shouldn't I marry out?

For his part, Len provided a mirror image, coming from a family that was more Jewish in name than in deed:

It was a fairly typical story. We observed the High Holy Days every year but did precious little in-between. I was Jewish once a year! True, my mother wouldn't have pork in the house, but there was no objection to eating it in restaurants or at friends' homes. That struck me as having double standards, but what was worse was the whole business of driving to synagogue when it is supposed to be forbidden [on festivals and sabbaths] and then parking round the corner and pretending we had walked there. I remember feeling that was awful—especially when the point of going to services was to pray to God and to be open and sincere, and I was determined that when I grew up I would either do it properly or not at all. With hindsight I guess it was inevitable that with that sort of background it was bound to be 'not at all'. Meeting Jenny didn't really drag me away from my Judaism because it was never really there in the first place. And it wasn't just my family. Most of my friends came from similar situations. What surprises me now is not that so many have married non-Jews like I have, but that some have still married Jews. It certainly wasn't for religious reasons.

The change in family dynamics is another factor in the rise of mixed-faith marriages. This is particularly evident with regard to those who have been divorced and who are the most likely to marry out of the faith. In their case, there are even more reasons for so doing: first, the hostility against their former partner may be transferred to anything which symbolized them—be it their family, their friends, their favourite food (even though it could have been enjoyed by both of them), and their religion (even though they both shared the same faith). As Mike put it, 'I know that I am as Jewish as Carol, my ex, is—so it wasn't "her thing"—but somehow Jewish food and family and festivals is all tied up with her in my mind and I don't want any of it any more.' Secondly, the break in the marriage is often accompanied by a break with the mutual friends the couple once had. Both seek out new social circles, and the ones where they are less likely to meet each other or bump into old acquaintances will tend to be general leisure groups, evening classes, sports clubs, and singles groups in which there is no common religious denomination. Thirdly, the sale of the marital home and the search for cheaper property by one or both partners may lead either of them to move out of the area and to settle in a totally new environment where there may not be many members of their own faith community. Fourthly, it is much harder to establish a new social life once a person has left the age of youth clubs and college societies, and when most of one's friends are single too and are a source of introduction to new faces. Having to look for a partner is difficult enough for

any divorcee, even if they are part of the religious and cultural majority. When they are part of a religious minority, the pool of eligible partners is considerably constricted. By deciding to enter a mixed-faith relationship, one is expanding one's horizon enormously and increasing one's prospects of success. As Ali said succinctly, 'For every Muslim woman I might meet, there are thirty non-Muslims. It would be daft to limit my options so severely.'

A fifth reason is that many divorcees feel that they played by the rules the first time by marrying within the faith, but it did not work and so are free to change the rules next time round. Janice spoke for countless others of all faiths when she said: 'I did everything by the book when I was married and it all ended in tears. Being both Jewish didn't stop us tearing each other to bits. So maybe now I'll have better luck with someone out of the faith—it certainly can't be any worse.' Henry, who met his wife in the church bell-ringing group, felt similarly: 'Although I entered my first marriage willingly, I was conscious that it was what everyone else in the family wanted—right sort of girl and all that—and what I had been groomed for. Next time I marry, it'll be purely up to me. It's my turn now.' A sixth cause is that divorcees have been living away from the parental home for several years and are used to running their own lives. They are therefore older and more independent than those marrying for the first time, who may still be living with their parents or be more subject to their influence. The family pressures to marry within the faith are considerably lessened, and even if they still do exist, divorcees feel more able to resist them. Mary relates how her parents put an end to a serious relationship with a non-Catholic before she married her Catholic ex-husband: 'Now I don't think they'd dare say anything, and even if they did they would get short shift from me.' A seventh reason lies with the religious communities themselves, who sometimes fail to provide the support that is needed by divorcees and newly created single-parent families. 'It was awful,' said Susie, 'one moment I was really involved in synagogue life, the next I was social outcast number one.'

There is also a fourth aspect to the rise in intermarriage that is not so easy to analyze but must be mentioned—chance. There are many individuals who did not enter a mixed-faith marriage for any of the numerous reasons listed above, but because 'it just happened that way'. For many in this position, marrying out of the faith was not just unintentional, it also went against their own principles. 'Whenever discussions came up about intermarriage, it was always me who said how wrong it was', recalls Tracy. Her attitude was echoed by many others, including Rosalind, who said: 'This may sound daft, but even though I am in a mixed-faith marriage, and a very happy one at that, I still feel it's better not to have them. Okay, our marriage works marvellously, and I hope it will continue this way for the rest of my life, but I think the potential problems are enormous. So I would still counsel people against it in principle.' This disapproval of the very course that they themselves had taken had ramifications for their hopes for their children. Stuart's comments typified those of many: 'I may have married out

of the faith, but however hypocritical this may seem, I still want my children to marry within the faith. I just think it's better that way for all the usual reasons.'

What if the parents are hostile? Among the various strategies they adopt in trying to separate the newly engaged couples are:

1. preventing them meeting again, whether by forbidding them verbally or by sending them abroad (such as to visit relatives in India, or to work on a kibbutz in Israel);
2. creating obstacles ('you can't marry till you buy a house', hoping that by the time they can afford one the relationship will have cooled; or 'you must bring her to synagogue/the *gurdwara*', hoping the experience will deter the other partner);
3. criticizing the other person's suitability (which can range from 'he's not good enough for you' to 'he's too good for you');
4. instilling a sense of guilt ('it will kill your grandfather if we tell him'; 'all our sacrifices for you seem in vain'; 'two thousand years of tradition will cease because of you');
5. giving direct threats ('she will never step inside this house'; 'you'll be cut out of the will'; 'we won't come to the wedding');
6. predicting a terrible future ('it can't possibly work'; 'he won't treat you the way you expect'; 'her family will take over and dominate your home');
7. enlisting others to dissuade the person (usually relatives or the minister, although sometimes trying to get friends 'to make him see sense' and sometimes contacting the other parents to see if they are potential allies).

It is noticeable that these and many other strategies are employed as much by parents who have little religious involvement as by those who are staunchly traditional. Many of their objections are triggered by an emotional reaction rather than a concern for theology. One is a sense of rejection: that by marrying 'somebody different from us' their child is turning his or her back on them, which is perceived as a slap in the face. Another is the worry that the new partner will cause their son or daughter to become alienated from them. As Annie said, 'I'm sure my daughter-in-law will drag my son away from us. I can feel it in my bones.' There is also a sense of guilt at 'where did we go wrong' and a deep sense of failure that all the time and effort they put into their child's upbringing has been wasted. For some parents there is anger that they are being shamed: 'How can my son do this to me when he knows I'll never be able to show my face in church again', said one distraught mother. It begs the question of whether she really is responsible for her son's choice of marriage partner and whether it is right that fellow congregants should spurn her rather than support her. Other parents are bothered more at the thought of having grandchildren of a different faith to them. This can either be because they fear a lack of relationship—'they'll think of us as strangers'—or because they feel that their family line will now come to an end and that they will lose their stake in the future.

Anguish and arguments may well precede many marriages, but ultimately an increasing number of today's parents find not only that they have little control over their children's paths, but also that they are not prepared to cut off all contact in

the name of tradition. This is true not only of religiously lapsed parents, but also of those who are still committed. It reflects two social factors. First, the tendency to have smaller families than in previous generations means that casting out a child is a much harder step; losing one child out of eight is sad, but losing one out of two is unbearable. Secondly, the fact that children marry at an older age and have often left home before marrying gives them an independence that lessens the impact of parental threats of dissociation. Love-struck seventeen-year-olds can have their pocket-money stopped and be sent to their room; a twenty-seven-year-old living in a semi twenty miles away, i.e., used to making decisions in every other aspect of life, will do so in the question of marriage too. Once all parental attempts to postpone the relationship have failed (or have not even been implemented for fear of being counter-productive), reluctant acceptance is the general reaction. In this respect, parents are the mirror image of their children, who in choosing their partner also put feelings before faith.

Parents are not the only source of contention. Grandparents often have stronger religious views than the parents of the couple—particularly among the minority faiths, as they are less assimilated in wider society. In certain families, it is their opinion that carries greater weight. In many instances they can take a divergent view from the parents, objecting when the latter are accepting, or vice versa. Jane's parents did not mind too much when she married a non-Catholic, but her grandmother was desperately upset, refused to attend the wedding and has not yet seen her two-year-old grandson. Ross was very taken aback that his grandparents criticized him over his non-Jewish fiancée: 'I was used to arguing with my parents—that was normal—but I was always very close to my granddad and ma. When they turned on me, that really hurt.' At other times, it is the grandparents who can have a healing role, 'knocking sense' into parents and children and helping both sides to keep everything in perspective and not forget the bonds of affection that unite them. This is also true of siblings. Being of the same generation as the person marrying out of the faith, they are well aware of the social currents that have led to the relationship, yet also appreciate the upset that the parents feel. Often they occupy the role of mediators, urging each party to understand the position of the other and even acting as go-betweens, negotiating terms by which 'mum and dad will invite Mike's fiancée round and he will talk to her about having the wedding in a registry office rather than in church'. In other cases, though, brothers and sisters can be equally disapproving, whether it is because they object to mixed-faith marriages in principle or because they are aware of the distress caused to their parents by it. When Bakhshish broke off relations with his parents, he kept contact with his siblings. Abdul lost his whole family. His brother and sister were still living at home when he married a non-Muslim, whereupon his parents declared him *persona non grata* and forbade them to have any further contact with him.

As for day-to-day relations between the couple themselves, food is often bound up with religious traditions and can necessitate pre-planning of a sort not to be found in any cookbook. Ahmed does not insist that Jane buys halal meat, but he

has asked her not to cook pork for him, and so sometimes he has a cheese omelette for breakfast while she enjoys bacon and eggs. Susan takes a different view and in deference to her Jewish husband does not have pork in the house at all, although she does relish having veal and ham pie when she is out with friends. Frank's wife goes even further and has made an effort to master the intricacies of kosher food, such as not mixing meat and dairy products in the same meal: 'Getting used to making sure that, for instance, we had fruit salad after our Sunday roast and not chocolate mousse was a bit of a headache at first, but it came with time. I decided at the start of our marriage that if it means a lot to him, it should do to me too.'

Her mother, by contrast, is less certain and is worried that she is not eating properly because of the special regulations. She might be even more concerned if she were Kate's mother, as Kate's Muslim husband Yaqub tries to observe the laws of Ramadan. This entails fasting during the day and only eating food at night throughout that month. Initially Kate objected on the grounds that he virtually never went to the mosque so that it seemed ridiculous to 'suddenly get religious one month in the year, especially when it causes a lot of inconvenience for me'. The result was lengthy discussions about why Ramadan was special for Yaqub and why keeping it but ignoring other customs made sense to him, even if it did not appear reasonable to her. The same could be said of many members of other faiths, whose selection of what to observe and what not to observe may seem arbitrary, even hypocritical, to their partners, but has an internal logic for them and relates more to the customs of their home rather than the rules of their scriptures. In the end, Kate came to understand Yaqub's perspective and a compromise was struck whereby he could eat when he liked during Ramadan, although he was responsible for providing his own meals.

Even greater delicacy is required for religious occasions inside the home. Even the most religiously lapsed person is caught up in some of the major 'family festivals' such as Christmas or Passover, either because of their own warm associations with the festivals or because family expectations demand that they be involved. Such times can prove to be enjoyable experiences for the other partner, a chance to share religious traditions and to meet the extended family. However, they can also be the source of problems. When Donald brought home a small Christmas tree in mid-December, he saw it as a pretty decoration for the front living-room, whereas his Muslim wife saw it as a declaration of religious war. Donald was stunned: 'She knows I never go to church; I thought she realized that for me Christmas isn't about Jesus and worshipping the Saviour, it's about family and giving presents.' After a two-hour heart-to-heart conversation his wife began to understand and consented to keep the tree, but it was typical of the sorts of assumption that mixed-faith couples cannot take for granted about each other. Some Jewish partners can also feel very ambivalent about Christmas, celebration of which may have been portrayed by their parents as 'selling out' to Christianity when they were children. Having holly and Christmas decorations in the home can seem unnatural or even an act of betrayal, however much it is interpreted by the

other partner as merely a season of goodwill without any theological overtones. 'Every year when my husband gave me a Christmas present,' said Susie, 'part of me felt it was like a bribe, egging me on to convert to Christianity. Rationally, I know that's nuts, but that's how I felt and it spoilt things.' Often the solution was a *quid pro quo* deal, with the house having both a Christmas tree and a *menorah* (a nine-branched candelabrum that is used to celebrate the festival of Hanukkah, which occurs around the same time). A Hindu-Christian couple struck a similar bargain: she could have her Diwali lamps if he could have his mistletoe.

Mixed-faith sex is often considered a source of attraction—the lure of the forbidden—rather than a reason for discontent, but it can also have problematic aspects if the partners have conflicting attitudes to what happens in bed because of their religious backgrounds. Camilla describes herself as a nominal Catholic but is still strongly influenced by her upbringing, particularly the church's teachings against contraception, even though she does not necessarily endorse them. She and her Sikh husband want to have children, but not yet, and she has no objections to the idea of family planning. However, she still feels that she does not want to be the one taking the contraceptives and so will not go on the pill, preferring her husband to wear a protective—to which he objects because he says intercourse does not feel as good when he is wearing one. The matter has now been resolved, but at one point it led to a lot of tension, culminating in a furious row, with her husband declaring 'I'm going to bed with you, not the Pope!' Kate's problem with Yaqub related to the festival of Ramadan again. For them sex had never been just for night-time and in bed but 'whenever the mood took us—even in the middle of breakfast'. She received a shock, therefore, when he did not respond to her daytime advances and told her that not only was food forbidden in the day during Ramadan, but also sexual relations (although they are permitted at night). 'I must admit I thought that was a bit nutty', she complained, 'but what upset me much more was that he didn't tell me beforehand or even ask if I minded. Of course, I respect his religion, but when it affects me I think I should be consulted.'

In these and many other points of tension, there is often an overlap between religious teachings and cultural traditions. This is not surprising, particularly among minority faiths who have a strong ethnic element to family and communal life. For them, there is little distinction between specifically religious rituals and more general activities, such as eating habits, sexual mores, and family dynamics. They are all part of 'the way we do things'. It is common, therefore, for even those do not consider themselves religious to still be strongly attached to the cultural aspects of their heritage. The problem occurs when the other partner fails to appreciate that being lapsed religiously does not necessarily mean being lapsed culturally. Jilly still finds it strange that her pork-loving Jewish husband still insists on taking friends out to a Jewish restaurant because he adores the food there. Vic knows his lapsed Catholic wife has a wonderful sense of humour but cannot understand her blind spot over jokes about the sex life of the Pope.

Family relationships are an important area for these cultural norms. Jilly sees her parents once a month and speaks to them two or three times on the phone in-

between. She regards this as normal and certainly sufficient to fulfil her Christian duty to honour her parents. She finds it highly perplexing that her Jewish husband pops into his parents almost every other day as well as insisting that they both go there on Sunday afternoons. The fact that the phone never seems to stop going with his brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles ringing up drives her to exasperation: 'I have nothing against a single one of them—they're all lovely people—but I find this closeness pretty suffocating.' In other instances, the problem lay with the family's expectations of the husband-wife relationship. Nair tells how her Church of England husband incurred her parents' displeasure because 'he would automatically light my cigarette or open the car door for me—something that Muslim men don't do and was really frowned upon'.

The decision-making process in mixed-faith households can vary enormously. Some couples plan in advance for as many contingencies as possible; others only discuss issues when they arise. The former tends to be a much more successful method, examining topics calmly and without pressure, whereas the latter means debating issues in the heat of a crisis and needing to make a quick decision. Sometimes it is the wife who has the upper hand, simply because she is the one who is largely responsible for cooking or domestic rituals or the nurture of young children. As Nair said, 'I told my husband that as a Muslim I wouldn't touch pig meat, so if he wanted pork chops he would have to cook them himself. The result is he doesn't!' However, there are two more important factors. The first is that much depends on who has the stronger personality. That person will often get their way in religious matters, just as they do in other areas, such as choosing where to go on holiday or which house to buy. The second is that often one partner takes religious traditions more seriously than the other, and so decisions tend to be left to them, in the same way that one partner is keener on gardening or is better at doing the domestic accounts and so naturally takes charge of them. The art of compromise is a valuable skill in most marriages, but especially in mixed-faith ones. This can involve some painful choices, giving up certain habits and letting go of some expectations in return for one's partner also relinquishing some of their preconceptions. Yet it is not just a matter of the partners negating their traditions, but also, and more positively, of both of them adding new dimensions to their life and permitting each other to continue those aspects of their heritage that each considers fundamental to their identity.

In this respect there can be a 'learning curve' that takes some time to master. Indeed, many couples find that they experience several different stages: first there is an initial honeymoon period, albeit punctuated by an occasional hiccup ('you never told me that'). After the euphoria has lessened, this is followed by period of some irritation and even hostility when differing attitudes and unfulfilled expectations simmer over into rows. Providing these difficulties are tackled sensitively, this leads to a time of readjustment and adaptation, with the couple eventually becoming bi-cultural and agreeing what to celebrate together, what both should ignore, and when to 'go off and do our own thing every now and then'.

Yet what might have been a good compromise, or even a bit of a fudge, for the couple themselves does not always suffice when it comes to making decisions for a third party. The issue is further complicated by the fact that many people who describe themselves as lapsed find that their religious traditions become more important to them when they have children. This is partly because they automatically turn to the church/mosque/synagogue for major life-cycle events such as baby blessings or initiation rites, and partly because they feel a deep-seated instinct to pass on to their child the traditions in which they themselves grew up, however vaguely, even though they veered away from them later. The couples that seem to manage the best are generally those who have talked over the issues before they were married and have planned ahead. In this way, they both know where the other stands, what they feel is important, where they are willing to compromise and how they can best avoid sudden crises or running sores. They are also better able to present a joint front to relatives who may seek to exert pressure to ensure that 'the grandchildren are brought up our way and not the other way'.

As for the religious upbringing of children, two separate issues are involved, which are often confused but which couples find much more helpful if they keep separate. One is the religious identity of children. This is the way in which they perceive themselves, and also how others label them. It is the response given to questions they will meet in all stages of life, ranging from nursery-school friends ('I'm Christian. What are you?') to forms to be filled out if they enter hospital with the box that says 'Religion of patient'. The second aspect is their religious education. This is the religious knowledge they acquire, whether picked up from parents and other relatives or taught at religion school. The distinction between the two is crucial, because religious identity is a matter of what children believe in, while religious education is what they know about. Moreover the two need not necessarily be the same, and children can be brought up identifying with one faith yet exposed to the traditions of others. This can be particularly important for mixed-faith families where flexibility and openness can be essential requirements for their religious policy *vis-à-vis* the children. As a result there are several different options that are available to parents, depending on what they feel is the best course of action. Each one has its own advantages and disadvantages:

1. *Children having a single religious identity, with religious education in that faith only.* This enables the children to know exactly where they stand and gives them a firm sense of direction. However, unless there is enormous sensitivity to the partner whose faith is not being followed, he or she may feel marginalized and cut off from the children, while that person's family may also feel estranged.
2. *Children having a single religious identity, but with religious education in both faiths.* This allows the children to know who they are religiously, yet be heir to the traditions of both parents. A possible problem is that it can puzzle those children who are given one identity yet decide they prefer the other faith.

3. *Children having a dual religious identity, but with religious education in both faiths.* This results in the children sharing fully both traditions, but while some children accept a dual identity as natural, it can confuse those who want to know, 'but which one am I really?'
4. *Children having a joint religious identity, with religious education in the syncretized faith.* This treats the two faiths as one and mixes together the customs and values. This can lessen potential tensions, although it can blur important distinctions and degenerate into a few annual feasts without any coherent system of beliefs.
5. *Children having the religious identity of a third faith, which is different to that into which the parents were each born but which they have decided to adopt for the family as a whole as a neutral compromise.* This only applies when both partners feel the need for a spiritual life and are also prepared to leave their own faith. It generally involves change to one that has a common denominator, e.g. a Catholic and Baptist becoming Unitarian, or a Muslim and a Jew becoming Bahai. It may solve many problems, although it can leave both sets of grandparents confused.
6. *Children having no religious identity, but with religious education in both faiths.* This permits the children to make a choice for themselves when they reach an age of maturity. However, this can cause the problem of them feeling guilty that if they choose the faith of one parent they may seem to be rejecting the other parent, even if that is not the case at all. The 'rejected' parent may also feel hurt.
7. *Children having no religious identity and no religious education.* This is an alternative attempt at being neutral, with children making their own decisions in adulthood unencumbered by parental influences. However, one cannot choose from a vacuum and so the result tends to be no choice at all and an absence of religion in later life.

Ultimately there is no right or wrong approach but only whatever is appropriate for each particular couple. If there is one golden rule it is that they act in harmony. Children will often accept the way in which they are brought up, providing it is consistent and genuinely believed in by both parents. Ten-year-old William takes it as natural that he is a Buddhist Jew, because one parent is Buddhist and one Jewish and they treat both as the family faith. It was something of a shock to him when he first realized that not everyone else in the world was a Buddhist Jew and he considers friends with just one faith as 'a bit odd, really'.

A radically different course of action that is adopted by a limited number of parents highlights some interesting lessons. They have chosen to give different religious identities to different children. Kevin is Jewish and his wife Isabel is a Quaker. Their children were brought up in their own image, with Daniel being Jewish, going to synagogue with his father and attending synagogue religion school, while his sister Virginia is a Quaker and went with her mother to meetings of the Society of Friends. The arrangement would seem to be a recipe for relig-

ious schizophrenia, or at least a very divided household, but in fact it has worked well. The children, now in their twenties, have a well-balanced attitude to religion, report no memories of conflict in their childhood or any disquiet now, and have maintained the separate identities in which they were respectively brought up. No doubt a similar arrangement with a different set of parents might not have worked so well, but the case illustrates how what to the outside may appear highly peculiar can seem perfectly satisfactory to those in the situation. It also demonstrates how the key to success is not the policy itself but the effort and sensitivity that is put into it. The success or failure of parents' efforts with their children is not always in their hands alone. The extended family can play a helpful role, sharing their religious traditions and insights; alternatively, they can create problems through a variety of means, such as excluding them or interfering with them or denigrating them in front of the children.

As yet there are no statistics on the relative success of the respective situations, although some work has been done in the United States. A survey of Christian-Jewish marriages traced the affiliation of both the parents and their children (Mayer 1983):

	PARENTS	CHILDREN
Church	36%	21%
Synagogue	9%	3%
Both	6%	—
Neither	49%	76%

Among those parents who are members, there is a significant drop in the religious affiliation of their children, whether attached to church, synagogue, or both. It suggests that while some parents may be able to pass on a strong religious heritage—single or dual—to their children, a considerable percentage fail to do so. The study also examined the celebration of festivals. These figures provide two lessons: first, that minority faith customs are observed less than those of the majority culture, Christianity; and secondly, that those celebrations which take place largely in the home (Christmas and Passover) are kept more than those which are church- or synagogue-based (Easter and Yom Kippur).

'Marriage is not a word, it's a sentence', declared Mae West. Whether one entirely agrees with her or not, it is certainly true that marriages can last a long time, and often covering a period during which one or both partners can change considerably in terms of their needs and interests. This applies to religious matters too and can mean that attitudes to religion at the time of the wedding can be very different fifteen years later. Holly found this out to her cost: 'I thought I had married a lapsed Muslim who didn't care two hoots about God, and he then suddenly gets religious and wants me to convert and come to the mosque with him.'

The question must be asked whether mixed-faith marriages are more likely to experience a divorce than same-faith marriages. Statistical evidence has provided mixed results. Several different research projects have been undertaken, although

largely limited to very particular locations. The conclusion of most is that mixed-faith couples have a marginally higher rate of divorce than same-faith couples, but the difference is so slight as to be inconclusive (Christensen 1968: 13). Some other studies aver that mixed-faith marriages are definitely more prone to instability, with the divorce rate being several times higher (Bahr 1981: 251). While social scientists are arguing the exact percentages, there are some clear reasons why the findings point to a more negative result. One is the pressure that a mixed-faith marriage can face because of the extra compromises and difficult decisions involved. This is magnified if the surrounding families add to the conflict and actively foster dissension between the couple. A second is that a person who is prepared to flout their parents' wishes in the choice of marriage partner may also be more liable to resist the compromises necessary for a harmonious relationship. A third is that a basic human need is security, and if one's marriage partner is often presenting challenges—be it in terms of emotional expectations, family roles, or ways of communicating—this can be unsettling and lead to a collapse of trust. A fourth possible reason applies to those who intermarry specifically as an act of rebellion against their family or community and whose relationship is based on feelings against others rather than *for* that partner, in which case it may well end in disarray. A fifth reason is that if a marriage has taken place in the face of parental opposition, then relatives are less likely to rally round in times of trouble and offer the support that is often crucial in sustaining otherwise reasonably successful marriages through a difficult period. A sixth is that, as a generalization, the more religiously observant a couple the less likely they are to divorce, because marriage is seen not only as a bond between two people, but as a sacrament or union made before God, with an aura of sanctity that encourages them to persevere through difficulties. As mixed-faith marriages often, though not always, involve people without such a perspective and the wedding is usually conducted without a religious ceremony, it is inevitable that resistance to divorce will be lower among their ranks.

Despite the six possible reasons for divorce specifically among mixed-faith partners, interviews with such couples often elicit the comment that it was not religious differences that caused the break-up but a range of other, unrelated aspects. These include incompatibility of lifestyles, growing apart emotionally, financial crises, and sexual problems. As Margaret Mead once put it: 'If you are not going to marry the boy next door—and if you do, you may die of boredom—then you are going to have to work much harder.'

Those whose mixed-faith life together is not ended prematurely by divorce—still the majority of such couples—face added questions as they approach death. One is where the burial will take place—in the cemetery of his faith or her faith? Or will they be buried apart, which may be upsetting for either them or their children? It is perhaps because of these territorial complications that many mixed-faith couples prefer to be cremated instead, and their ashes are usually scattered under the same non-denominational rose-bush.

There still remains the issue of who should take the service. Is it better for the minister of the person who died to do so, who can then conduct the last rites appropriate to the deceased? Or is it better for the minister of the spouse who survived to officiate, who can give the greatest degree of comfort to the partner left behind?

Until now there have been four myths that were widely held about mixed-faith marriages. They have been common currency for decades, arising from false assumptions that were either made in ignorance or were based on true cases which were mistakenly judged as representative of all cases. It must also be said that these myths are often encouraged by ministers of all faiths as a way of reinforcing their dire warnings against the perils of intermarriage.

The first myth is that those who marry out of their faith are deliberately rejecting that faith. They are not. Many would have been more than happy to marry a co-religionist, but it just so happened that the person they met and with whom they fell in love was of a different religion. They still have a deep attachment to their faith, with strong emotional ties that will remain with them for the rest of their lives. For them, marrying out does not mean opting out. They still wish to observe their faith, be part of the religious community to which they belong and pass on that heritage to their children. The question mark is very often not with them but with the religious establishment and whether it will permit them to remain a member of it. As Noreen said, 'Just because I have fallen in love with someone who is not a Muslim does not make me any less of a Muslim. I will always identify with Islam—now it's up to Islam whether it wants to identify with me.'

The second myth is that only those who marry out of their faith have no formal religious instruction nor any guidance or experience of home celebrations from their parents; in other words, intermarriage only affects the nominal members and not the educated ones. It is certainly true that the less religious background a person has the less they consider it a criterion when selecting a partner. However, there are many who had both a firm and positive religious background yet who also find happiness with a partner from a different faith. They enjoyed, and are grateful for, a vibrant family religious life and they attended after-school classes or even a religious day-school. Moreover, most are not headstrong youngsters who rush into marriage blindly but are often mature and experienced adults who gave much thought to their situation before making a decision. Moreover, they had undoubtedly assumed they would marry within their faith until circumstances introduced them to the person with whom they wanted to spend the rest of their life. If they are judged by their religious knowledge and identity, then their upbringing was highly successful; if they are judged by their choice of marriage partner, then it was an abject failure. Much depends on the yardstick that is used.

The third myth is that mixed-faith marriages are doomed to fail. Some do end in tears and there is evidence that such couples have a somewhat higher rate of divorce than do same-faith couples. However, the latter also have a high divorce

rate, and the argument is not whether mixed-faith couples get divorced and same-faith couples do not; both do, and therefore the debate is over percentages. Family or clergy opposed to intermarriage who preach that divorce is likely and unhappiness guaranteed are both distorting the truth and undermining their own message; it is all too easy to point to mixed-faith couples who have shared a long and happy life together.

The fourth myth is that mixed-faith marriage is an issue restricted to certain religions or certain denominations within them. Statements often thrown around in conversation—such as ‘Catholics always stick with their own’ or ‘Jews only mix among themselves’—are ridiculous when compared to the enormous outmarriage rate of the former and the rising one of the latter. Equally unsound is the supposition that members of recent immigrant faiths only marry among themselves, whereas Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs are changing their traditional marriage patterns rapidly. It is also assumed that the more liberal branches of the faiths are more prone to intermarriage. This is an allegation that is usually part of internal fights within those faiths, with more traditional groups throwing at the liberal ones what they consider to be the worst possible accusation, encouraging assimilation and allowing adherents to kill off their faith without noticing it. In fact, it is clear that mixed-faith marriages are prevalent among all sections of every faith. Within the best documented religion in terms of mixed-faith marriages, Judaism, it is apparent that the issue affects Orthodox communities as much as Reform ones, and seminars for Jews in mixed-faith marriages attract equal numbers from both camps (Romain 1989: 18; Schmool 1990).

It is clear from the above that those in mixed-faith marriages cannot be stereotyped. This also means that they cannot be conveniently categorised for dismissive remarks or quick-fit solutions. They vary enormously and those concerned with the issue—be it from a religious, counselling, or sociological point of view—must acknowledge the diversity of factors and results. At least ten different types of relationship can be analyzed, and no doubt other commentators will be able to suggest further ones:

1. *Dual faith harmonious.* Both partners have their own strong faith, respect each other’s religious needs and are mutually supportive.
2. *Dual faith conflicting.* Both partners have their own strong faith, but find it a source of tension and rivalry.
3. *Single faith harmonious.* One partner has a strong faith and the other does not, but is happy to be supportive.
4. *Single faith conflicting.* One partner has a strong faith and the other does not, and resents the intrusion of religion into the marriage.
5. *Merged faith.* Both partners decide to merge their two faiths into a set of beliefs and way of life that they can share.

6. *Alternative faith.* Both partners agree to adopt a third faith, to which they can both belong and feel at ease.
7. *Lapsed faith.* Neither partner values their religious traditions and they share a common 'lapsedness'.
8. *Converted same-faith.* One partner has converted to the faith of the other, whether before or after marriage, but still carries vestiges of the former faith, including close relatives who are part of the other faith.
9. *Re-emerged mixed-faith.* One partner, usually previously lapsed, has felt a re-emergence of their religious roots and thereby changes the religious balance of the marriage.
10. *Confused faith.* Both partners have religious traditions of their own, but are not sure what they believe and go through periods of making a religious effort, jointly or separately, and then giving it up.

The combined effect of these different types of mixed-faith marriages is profound and is having an impact on a wide range of areas. Henceforth ministers of all faiths will have both to acknowledge the new religious landscape and formulate a response to it. In judging how to react, they will have to take into account the two key findings that have become apparent regarding mixed-faith marriages. Firstly, that it is a trend that is dependent on so many factors in society at large, that it is futile to think that a few more sermons can halt it. Continuing the condemnation is certainly an option, but one likely to yield little result. Ministers must come to terms with the lack of power that they exercise in this respect. There is every reason to assume that the trend will remain and grow, and unless ministers wish to get their feet wet they should avoid becoming ecclesiastical Canutes. The clear implication is that the only successful response will be one that is positive and that seeks to work with mixed-faith couples rather than against them.

This is reinforced by the second finding, that many within mixed-faith marriages still value their religious roots and wish to maintain contact with their faith community. Here is where the real power of the clergy lies. By being welcoming to both partners, they can play a major role in influencing whether that residual loyalty is developed or jettisoned. Some ministers may find it difficult to welcome those who, according to one interpretation, have 'betrayed' their religious past. They may find it even more distasteful to welcome the other-religion partner. Moreover, it may provoke a crisis of conscience to welcome their children in the knowledge that they are being brought up in both faiths, or even in the other one. However, unless such policy changes and leaps of religious imagination are made, ministers will find their flock dwindling and will see a growing number of former congregants occupying a religious no man's land. The coming decades will offer

a unique opportunity to relate to the faith of the mixed-faith couples that can be either seized or squandered.

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