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Interfaith Marriages and their Inevitable Doom

In the last ten years, forty five percent of all marriages in the United States were between people of different faiths. Due to this statistic, many people could view these unions as a source of growth and acceptance within different religious communities, and because of this potential acceptance, the marriages themselves would be able to grow and sustain dispute their differing beliefs. However, I believe that because of these differing beliefs, interfaith marriages are doomed to fail due to their differing views in afterlife, as well as how to achieve their version of the perfect afterlife, ruling deities, and even raising children. Every aspect of life from celebrating a holiday, to how to treat members of the different families, to what one should wear could be a potential rift between the couple. Especially in modern times, many married couples already have difficulty keeping their marriage strong and a solid union in the struggles that come from everyday life, even when they share the same religious beliefs. A person's religious beliefs are their foundation for how they live their entire lives, therefore, adding the issue of differing viewpoints on such an important aspect of life to the normal turmoil of marriage creates a union that is not likely to last.

"The main sufferers from the tensions resulting from interfaith marriages are perhaps not the parents who have more or less consciously entered into the situation, but the children who have had no choice in the matter." (Leiffer) The differing views of prayer, worship, and overall beliefs may be known and accepted by the married couple, but by teaching their child or children both religions at once could

confuse the child and ultimately cause them to turn their back on one or both of the religions. For example, an interfaith marriage between a Jewish and Christian couple could cause a child to feel confused about the concept of Jesus. For Christians, Jesus is the Son of God and an extremely important person in their faith, while Jewish followers see Jesus as a good teacher and historical figure, but not anything god like, or someone to worship. These differing views can confuse the child in many ways, and cause a strain between the couple's relationship. If the couple decides to teach their two respective religions in the home, the Jewish follower could develop negative feelings toward their partner, when their partner tells their child about how important Jesus is, and vice versa, with the Jewish follower telling their child Jesus was not anything more than a man. Since the couple lives together, both people would have to overhear the lessons being taught to their child, or children, and could develop a sense of betrayal from their spouse, and even develop the need to protect their children from the other parent. Even if the interfaith couple decided to have their children learn about their respective religions from religious institutions rather than from home to spare any hurt feelings, these institutions could weigh in their opinions on the child's parents union to the child themselves, causing more damage than good. In Naomi Shaefer Riley's book "Til Faith Do Us Part," she tells a personal story that happened to a child from an interfaith marriage that attended a Christian religious institution stating "I heard a sentiment from a woman who told me that her son's Sunday school teacher told him that his mother was going to hell because she was not a Catholic" (Riley) Whether the couple decides to raise their children's religious beliefs through home-based rituals or religious institutions, the child will suffer from their own natural confusion on what is right and wrong, causing discord between the relationship of parent and child, as well as the parents finding fault in their child's hurt in their spouse, which ends up hurting their marriage.

Many religious followers strive to be better people in their everyday lives, in their own respective ways in accordance to their religious laws, in order to achieve the best outcome for themselves,

whether that be Christians living their lives in accordance to the rules in the Bible in order to go to heaven, or Hindus achieving moksha, or liberation, from the “continuous cycle of life and death and rebirth or reincarnation called samsara” (Oxtoby), and becoming immortal. However, if someone does not follow these sacred texts, they would be seen as doomed to that specific religion’s punishment, which in the cases stated above it would be hell, or an eternal cycle of birth and death, having to live through life’s struggles over and over again. In a marriage, both members want what is best for their partner, and want their loved one to always be safe and happy in both life and death. However, in an interfaith marriage, this happiness achieved through death cannot be promised to their loved one, since both believe in different afterlives, causing fear for their loved one’s fate to control the marriage, and most likely bring the marriage to an end. The complexity of the problem can be seen through an example of a union between a Christian and Hindu followers. Since the Christian partner follows the Bible’s teachings and accepts Jesus as the Son of God, the Christian believes they are going to heaven, however, they also believe their partner is going to hell for not doing so. The Hindu partner however, believes in reincarnation, and the cycle of birth and death through acts of karma. Since the Hindu partner knows that their Christian partner has not been trying to work out the rewards and punishments that they believe come with karma, the Hindu sees their Christian partner as being reborn after their death, but if the Hindu follower believes they have worked out the cycle of karma, and understands the cause and effects of their actions, then they would be liberated and become immortal through “moksha”. (Oxtoby) These differing views of how to achieve a perfect afterlife, and not just what the afterlife is itself, also causes more issues in the marriage in regards to their different ideas of ruling deities. In Christianity, repenting for one’s sins and believing that Jesus is the Son of God and one’s savior is the center of believing in Christianity and, many believe, is a guarantee that the person would get into heaven. The same can be said for Islam, but replacing Jesus with Muhammad, and Son of God with Messenger. Simply the partner’s belief on which god is real, and which is not, regardless of how

this person lives their life, is enough to break the entire marital bond if the partner fears for their mate's soul after death. Regardless of the fact that the two people in this scenario could have similar music tastes, or love the same type of food, their outlooks on the fates of their partners are drastically different, causing little ability for the partners to be able to connect with one another overtime, especially as they grow older and draw closer to death, and their differing ideas of what is to come afterwards starts to become a reality.

A study performed by Larry R. Petersen at Memphis State University, with the use of Berger's plausibility theory, revealed that in many cases "spouses who form homogenous marriages generally hold religious world views in common and therefore are likely to reinforce these views in each other. In other words, homogenous relationships themselves may function as plausibility structures in which each partner affirms the credibility of the others religious beliefs and practices, which should facilitate continued commitment" (Peterson) For many religious followers, their devotion to their faith is at the core of their entire existence. When anything goes wrong or right in their life they can turn to their strength in faith to see why events happened to see if it was due to their religious commitment. Same faith marriages have a sense of security with their partner, knowing that if they stray from their religion, their partner is always there to lead them back. Interfaith marriages lose this real life safety net, and in turn, could feel like they are losing the core of their existence if their faith is at an all-time low. Combining every hardship that comes with an interfaith marriage, including how to raise any children that are a product from the union, differing views on afterlife, including how to achieve this perfect afterlife, and their differing opinions on ruling deities, reveals a marriage with too many cracks in the foundation, and is inevitably going to fail. Life is full of difficulties and moments that are going to wear down any person, regardless of their religious strength. Therefore, the partner that someone chooses to be their primary support system through life, cannot be someone who does not support the very beliefs

that are the center of their existence. "The first enrichment of a ... husband and wife is the glorious enrichment of their faith. By comparison I find mixed marriages poverty stricken." (Leiffer)

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