

Caught Among Love, Religion, and Children

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We love each other. What is the problem? Love will conquer any obstacle we encounter. In an ideal world, love does conquer all. However, we do not live in an ideal world. If we lived in an ideal world, there would be no war, poverty, or hunger. Dolphins would not choke on those little plastic rings that hold six-packs together, and the Saints would have made it to the Superbowl. None of these have been accomplished yet, so this cannot possibly be an ideal world. This is unfortunate, but there are always solutions to life's problems. No, the solutions do not lie with Walgreens or Mastercard. Some things seem too good to be true. Picture it. A woman has just met the man of her dreams. He is everything she has ever dreamed about in a man. The pair begin dating, and a couple years later, he proposes – and the rock is big. There is only one problem: he is Protestant. She is Catholic. They both want kids. What can they do? They love each other so much, but there are obvious conflicts.

People of different faiths getting married is so common these days that most do not even see it as a problem. A common trouble participants of interfaith marriages come upon is how to raise children in regards to religion. Sometimes the differences are simply too large, and the couple calls it quits. When children are involved, religious differences can be a touchier subject. The disagreements can be overwhelming as religions can clash. If everything about all religions were the same, there would only be one religion, and there would probably be considerably less conflicts in the world. Since this is not the case, some people have to compromise. Compromise can lead to further dilemmas. *The Blending American* addresses some feelings of children of

mixed religion marriages. Children have shown a tendency to feel the need to pick sides between their parents. A great number of kids raised by parents of different religions end up with little or no sense of religion at all. There is also a great possibility that these children will grow up to marry and face many of the same problems their parents faced in raising them (Barber et al. 308). People usually consider the way they were brought up to be the only completely right way. Feelings of responsibility for the life of a new baby can overwhelm any parents, but for couples of discordant faiths, the emotions can be all too discouraging. Other family members, familiar with the way one was brought up, may even feel the need to throw in their two cents, adding pressure to an already difficult situation. Divorce can be a likely outcome when two people simply cannot find a way to agree. A study conducted in Indianapolis showed that childlessness in Protestant-Catholic couples is considerably higher than in Catholic or Protestant couples (Barber et al. 296). The difficulties that can often lie within interfaith marriages are a very real predicament for many couples.

One way to solve a problem is to avoid it completely. Raising children is a topic that should be thoroughly discussed before a wedding ceremony ever takes place—perhaps even before a proposal. The contrasting ideas should be pinpointed and each one focused on before any decisions are made. One of the first major problems to solve is where the children will go to church. Will Catholic Mom and Protestant Dad join together in taking the children to church each week? At home, will they teach the kids Catholic ideas or Protestant ideas? All of these are very heavy questions. If a couple cannot find any way to compromise, they are usually left with only two choices: split up or choose to not have kids. *The American Religious Identification Survey* taken in 2001 found that ten percent of U.S. couples with children in interfaith relationships divorce, while only three percent of same faiths parents do (Grossman 1). No

children means no religious conflicts in raising them. Not everyone marries with the intent of having kids one day. Even those who do might be willing to give those dreams up for the sake of staying with the one they love.

If the couple insists on having children, some form of compromise will be necessary. One option is to choose a single religion in which to raise their offspring. This usually works best if one parent is not very involved with his faith. Even if he is, success, and hopefully, happiness, is still possible. Some faiths, like Catholicism, require that any children born to a practicing parent must be raised in the faith. Partners of these individuals must be ready to accept the fact their children will be raised to believe some things they themselves do not believe. For example, what will the children be taught about the Eucharist? Catholics hold the Eucharist in extremely high regard, as the physical Body and Blood of Christ. Protestants see it as just a representation. Most Protestant churches do not have the Eucharist every week, while it is a part of every Catholic Mass. Religious researcher George Barna claims choosing one faith is better for the kids, “Without it, you wind up without an anchor, a community and a worldview for making decisions internally and externally” (Grossman 1). There is truth to this statement. Catholic and Protestant churches abound all over the country. Catholic-Protestant churches do not. Some might say there is a reason the Protestant Church split from the Catholic Church so many years ago—the two cannot possibly see eye-to-eye. If a couple agrees with this sentiment, perhaps raising the children in only one faith is the solution for them.

Everybody loves a smorgasbord. Many different foods are brought to the table and everyone helps themselves. Hopefully, everyone can be filled by what is on the menu. Many lovebirds opt to teach their kids aspects of both religions. Some bring everything to the table, while focusing on what the two faiths have in common. Catholics and Protestants have more

commonalities than differences. Giving special attention to these aspects, such as the belief that Jesus Christ is the Savior, and that salvation can come only through Him, is a good idea.

Attempting to shy away from major differences can alleviate the difficulty, although these differences will eventually come up. In these cases, honesty is always the best policy. When children approach their parents with questions about faith, it is okay to say Mom and Dad do not necessarily agree on every aspect of religion, but they respect and love each other anyway (Yob 95). Hostility toward one parent's faith is never suggested. This solution may require quite a bit of compromise, discussion, and agreement. In spite of the potentially difficult times, many couples find this to be the most appealing option for them.

The best solution to the problem of raising children in an interfaith marriage is to teach them aspects of both religions. Some people want children more than they want the person they are with. The idea of having many children is not a compromisable thought to many women and men around the world. What happens if a man meets a woman and they really do feel they are soul mates? What if they want kids and each other? Rather than rob themselves of one or the other, the couple could possibly find their similarities and hone in on them to reach a decision. Couples who teach their offspring only one religion have to deal with confusion from their children about why Mom or Dad does not participate in the rest of the family's religious practices. What is to be done if a child approaches the parent of the religion not taught and asks him a question pertaining to God or spirituality? If the woman has really strong convictions about her faith and the man's faith is the one being taught to the children, it can be taxing on her emotions. Keeping information she sees as life-changing from the flesh of her flesh, those special people she brought into the world and for whom she is responsible, can be too much to bear at times. When two religions are practiced, the children will not have to feel as though they are

choosing one parent over the other. As addressed in “Children of Two Faiths,” many adults who were raised in interfaith families said they, “wouldn’t trade their upbringing for anything” (Austin 11). Later in life, they dealt with social situations in a comfortable manner, finding it easier to accept the religions, cultures, and ways of life of other people (Austin 11). Open-minded and well-rounded individuals are often the result of interfaith unions. If raised in a relatively happy, peaceful home, children of interfaith parents can ultimately become some of the most satisfied individuals in the world.

All of these solutions require quite a bit of work, discussion, and agreement, but what marriage does not? Simple questions such as what to make for dinner can require conversation and have been known to wreck unions. Heart and perseverance are musts. Whichever solution a couple decides upon, they have to be willing to give it their all. Just like marriages of same-faith couples, there will be disagreements and arguments sometimes. Freedom of religion and the pursuit of happiness are two rights to which every man in the country is entitled. For many, happiness is being with the one they love and raising a family with this person. Freedom of religion should not hinder a man’s happiness. It may sound like a world of Carebears and popsicles, but why can’t two different people exist in a semi-harmonious household? Happiness isn’t divorce and confusion. Happiness is being prepared for obstacles and loving each other through them and in spite of them.

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