THE SHIFTING BOUNDARIES OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM IN AMERICA THROUGH THE LENS OF INTERFAITH MARRIAGE

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores interfaith relationships and the nexus of personal and communal religious identity in the United States. The thesis is that religious intermarriage is both a reflective and a predictive material representation of the continual movement and redefinition of the boundaries of religious traditions and the boundaries of the religious and secular. Part I chronicles key historical events that contributed to the slow erosion of theological, legal, and social barriers to intermarriage among Catholics, Protestants, and Jews. As authority over religion and marriage moved from church to state to society, an era of ‘intra-religious’ marriage became one of ‘interreligious’ marriage by the mid-twentieth century.

Part II investigates the characteristics of contemporary intermarriages, based upon qualitative research in the form of in-depth interviews with 43 individuals in Christian-Jewish, Christian-Muslim, Christian-Hindu, or Christian-Buddhist marriages. Contrary to the opinions of some prominent voices in religious communities, these contemporary intermarriages are not simply forms of syncretism or secularism; they are much more complex. These couples and families are developing new approaches to religious belief, practice, and communal involvement that challenge normative ideas of what may constitute a religious marriage and family life. An era of ‘interfaith’ marriage (as distinct from ‘interreligious’ marriage) is emerging.
These interfaith marriages are material representations of a new space in the American religious landscape. As interfaith couples negotiate differences and build bridges between their families and communities, broad-based change is set in motion. This new space – Interfaith Space – not only defies normative parameters, it also transforms religion in America. It is a space that is neither religious (if one defines religious by the normative parameters of religious traditions) nor wholly secular (if one employs a secularist interpretation of the secular). On the contrary, this space is an amalgam of different religious traditions as well as non-religious beliefs and practices. The study concludes with a reflection on how Interfaith Space can (and perhaps will) affect the interdisciplinary academic study of religious pluralism.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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and communities that do not align with the traditions. It is my expectation that these spaces and communities will contribute profoundly to the pluralistic nature of the United States and the global community.
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CHAPTER I

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM
An Introduction

I am large, I contain multitudes.

Walt Whitman, *Song of Myself*

On July 31, 2010, Chelsea Clinton married Marc Mezvinsky. Chelsea, the daughter of President William Clinton and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, was raised in the Methodist church. Marc, the son of Congressman Edward Mezvinsky and Congresswoman Marjorie Margolies Mezvinsky, grew up in a Conservative Jewish congregation. When the news of their engagement broke, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, among hundreds of other news outlets, ran extensive stories on the interreligious nature of this high-profile marriage. Their engagement prompted a number of questions that appeared to vex the American public. Will one of them convert? If not, how will they make it work? What will their wedding ceremony be like? How will they raise their children? Will they go to church together or synagogue? Will they lose their religion altogether? How are Bill and Hillary reacting?¹

On the one hand, the assortment of questions presented by the media appeared to baffle people who experience their religion as integral not only to their personal life, but also to their marriage and sense of community. For people who feel that it is important to marry

someone of the same religion, it is difficult for them to imagine the hardships and sacrifices one would have to make and the joys one would forgo if he/she entered into a religious intermarriage. On the other hand, many Americans found the news of Chelsea and Marc interesting, but not devastating or even unusual. Over time, the news of this interreligious union morphed into discussions dominated by what Chelsea would wear, who would be invited to the wedding, and whether Bill would lose the weight that his only daughter hoped he would lose before the big day.²

For many Americans, religious intermarriage no longer has the stigma or the consequences that it once did. In the fourth century, Constantine forbade Christians from marrying idolaters; the penalty was death.³ Medieval canonists prohibited Christians from not only marrying Jews, but also consulting Jewish physicians, bathing with Jews, and consuming food prepared by Jews.⁴ In the sixteenth century, the Church of England annulled marriages between Anglicans and Muslims or Jews. By the mid-seventeenth century, the Church of England added Roman Catholics to the list of idolaters to whom the English were forbidden to marry.⁵ In the United States, after the disestablishment of religion from the state, it became legal for Protestants, Catholics, and Jews to intermarry; however, it was

² These observations are based upon a cursory analysis of blogs from people commenting on the news regarding the Clinton-Mezvinsky marriage.


⁵ Milton L. Barron, People Who Intermarry (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1946), 43.
highly discouraged, as both marriage and everyday life were deeply associated with one’s particular religious community.

Times have changed, however. According to a 2008 study, 27% of Americans marry someone from a different religious tradition; that number increases to 37% if one includes marriages between Protestants of different denominations. Young people, those under the age of 30, are more likely to marry someone from a different religious tradition than older generations. Catholics are marrying Protestants, Jews are marrying Christians, and increasingly Muslims, Hindus, and many of America’s newer immigrants are ignoring the prohibitions to intermarriage outlined by their religious traditions and are intermarrying. Religious intermarriage is not only becoming increasingly common, it is also becoming increasingly complex. This complexity mirrors broader dynamics in the American religious landscape that are blurring the lines traditionally associated with religion. For example, many Americans who retain religious beliefs are disaffiliating from religious communities; many Christians and Jews are incorporating Eastern religious beliefs and practices into their lives; and more than half of American Christians believe that a non-Christian religion can lead to eternal life.  

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Historical and contemporary dynamics associated with religious intermarriage are a lens to broader changes in the American religious landscape. The thesis of this dissertation is that religious intermarriage is both a reflective and a predictive material representation of the continual movement and redefinition of the boundaries of religious traditions and the boundaries of the religious and secular spheres in the United States. In Part I of this dissertation, I chronicle the history of religious intermarriage in the West and how it reflects these shifts through time. In Part II, I analyze the characteristics of contemporary intermarriages and show how these marriages serve as a harbinger of dynamics that are becoming increasingly prominent in the American religious landscape.

I argue that contrary to prominent voices in religious communities, religious intermarriage is not simply a form of syncretism or secularism; it is much more complex. Contemporary religious intermarriages reveal the emergence of a new space in the American religious landscape. This space is neither religious (if one defines religious by the normative parameters of religious traditions) nor wholly secular or devoid of religion. On the contrary, this space – Interfaith Space – is an amalgam of different religious traditions as well as non-religious beliefs and practices.

Interfaith Space, as illuminated through the characteristics and dynamics of contemporary religious intermarriages, will likely have profound implications for the academic study of religious pluralism. American religiosity is moving beyond the bounds of religious traditions. It will no longer be sufficient to study the boundaries between and among religious traditions, the work of theologians, or the boundaries between these religious traditions and secular aspects of society, the work of social scientists. What will be required are new studies that bridge the disciplines of theology and the social sciences and explore the
cleavages between religions and the religious and secular spheres. This dissertation is intended to contribute to the understanding of this space, as well as urge other scholars to consider Interfaith Space in their work on American religious pluralism.

In this chapter I begin by outlining the various approaches by theologians and social scientists to the study of religious pluralism. This review of religious pluralism literature accomplishes three primary tasks. First, it highlights that contemporary discourse on religious pluralism is primarily focused on how religious traditions relate to one another or on how the religious and secular relate. Through the lens of religious intermarriage I hope to investigate both of these dynamics – how religious traditions relate and how the religious and secular relate. Scholarship on religious pluralism is often limited by pre-determined categories and boundaries that are becoming increasingly obsolete in the United States. Second, the review of the literature on religious pluralism offers explanations of terms that will be used throughout the dissertation, like ‘syncretism’ or ‘American civil religion,’ for example. Third, it enables me to introduce a handful of pioneering studies on religious pluralism that look across the boundaries of religion and religious traditions. It is my hope that this dissertation contributes to this nascent, but growing body of literature.

After a review of the prominent types of scholarship on religious pluralism, I turn to an analysis of the literature on religious intermarriage. I use the term “religious intermarriage” broadly and generically to refer to studies on interreligious, interfaith, mixed, and/or exogamous marriage – terms widely used to refer to the phenomenon of marriage between individuals who identify with different religious beliefs and practices. While gay marriage is becoming an important area of study in the United States, my focus in this dissertation is limited to marriages between men and women.
the dissertation, I define and refine this terminology. Eventually, I incorporate the word “interfaith” with a very specific meaning. Regarding the literature on religious intermarriage, since the early twentieth century, there has been a bounty of sociological studies on Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish intermarriage, as well how-to books and guides for couples entering into these types of marriages. Only recently have scholars begun to consider religious intermarriage patterns and practices of Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists, religious groups I consider in my analysis. In the final section of the chapter, I provide an overview of Part I and Part II of the dissertation in order to highlight the ways in which this study supplements, complements, and uniquely contributes to contemporary discourse on religious intermarriage and religious pluralism in the United States.

The Religious Pluralism Terrain

The biblical story of Babel graphically describes the diversity of languages and religions in the world. People have understood this diversity to be an established characteristic of humankind. However, what differentiates the contemporary situation of religious diversity from the past is a growing sense of egalitarianism among religions. A myriad of scholars including, but not limited to, theologians, sociologists of religion, comparative religionists, political scientists, and anthropologists, continue to discuss and debate the implications of this growing sense of egalitarianism on religious traditions, communities, and society as a whole. Some debate the effects of religious diversity on the

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overall religiosity of Americans; others debate how Christians are to understand the fate of
their Hindu and Jewish neighbors; others devise schematics for how Americans can reach
political consensus when the Protestant ethos that once undergirded public life appears to be
dissolving. Scholars across the academy approach questions of religious diversity differently;
however, their conversations and debates are often categorized under the rubric of ‘religious
pluralism.’ As a consequence, there is complexity and ambiguity around the phrase ‘religious
pluralism’ that no single field of inquiry captures.

In an effort to address this complexity and ambiguity, I develop a map of the
religious pluralism terrain that divides the discourse into two primary categories. The first
category is dominated by theologians and comparative religionists who are primarily
interested in religious pluralism as it relates to the relationships between and among
identifiable and distinct religious traditions. I break this category into sub-sections of the
literature on the theology of religions and comparative studies/interreligious dialogue. The
second category is dominated by social scientists who are primarily interested in religious
pluralism as it relates to the relationship between religious and secular spheres of society.
The sub-sections in this category include literature on secularization theory, religion and
democracy, and American civil religion.

I limit the scope of this review in four ways. First, I focus on scholars who
specifically use the phrase ‘religious pluralism’ in their work. The scholars I have selected
are not exhaustive, but rather illustrative of particular types of conversations surrounding
religious pluralism. Second, I concentrate on contemporary scholarship and the current

(December 2007): 767; Thomas Banchoff, ed., Democracy and the New Religious Pluralism (Oxford:
Oxford University Press, 2007), 5.
discourses in the academy. Third, I limit the scope to scholarship on religious pluralism in the United States. Fourth, I focus primarily on Western, Christian and often, Catholic scholars. The reason for this final limitation is two-fold. One, scholarship on religion and the social sciences in the United States continues to be dominated by Western and Christian categories. Two, Christian scholars (and Catholic scholars especially) have been prominent in shaping the categories and leading the discourse on theology of religions – an important sub-field dedicated to Christianity’s relationship to other religious traditions.¹⁰

My intentions are to bring clarity to the myriad of discourses surrounding the subject of religious pluralism, introduce terms, concepts, and scholarship that I reference throughout the dissertation, and most important, highlight that the majority of the work being done in the field is limited by normative parameters of religious traditions and parameters of secular versus religious space. After a review of this literature, I argue that these limitations hinder the inclusion of people, families, communities, and organizations that do not align with a religious tradition or religious versus secular space. This helps to introduce my research on religious intermarriage.

**Theologians – Relationships among Identifiable and Distinct Religious Traditions**

Theologians and social scientists have different concerns and interests in religious diversity and religious egalitarianism. Thomas Banchoff, political scientist and Director for the Georgetown University Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs, explains the following:

For . . . the theologian, it evokes the idea that religions are so many paths to the same truth. For many other observers, it suggests an affirmation of U.S.-style interest group politics over the corporatist or statist alternatives more prevalent in other democracies.\textsuperscript{11}

The effects of religious diversity on society are not the primary concern of theologians. Theologians seek to understand the implications of religious diversity on the truth claims, doctrines, beliefs, and practices inherent to a particular religious tradition.

**Theology of Religions: Truth Outside of Christianity**

Theologians who work on questions of religious pluralism and theology of religions begin their analysis of other religions from the vantage point of their own ideal system of beliefs, practices, and values. Christian theologians of religions specifically aim to address the following conundrum – how is it that God’s salvific will is universal, and yet, salvation is uniquely and absolutely only in Jesus Christ?\textsuperscript{12} Can a Hindu or a Jew who does not believe in Christ be saved? If so, what is the theological rationale behind this assessment? This discourse surrounding these discussions is focused on the salvific value of other religious traditions and the people and communities who abide by the normative parameters of these religious traditions.

Within the context of Christian theology of religions, the phrase ‘religious pluralism’ takes on a controversial normative definition. It holds that “those who are [potentially] saved are saved by their own religion, independent of Christ and Christianity.”\textsuperscript{13} John Hick, a philosopher of religion, is “without doubt the most noted and hotly debated defender of

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{11} Banchoff, 5. Also see Eck, “Prospects for Pluralism,” 767.
\end{flushright}
religious pluralism” in the field of theology of religions, according to systematic theologian Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen. In Hick’s seminal text, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*, he attempts to step outside of his native Christianity to assess the relationship between the religions of the world. He argues that Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism “constitute different ways of experiencing, conceiving and living in relation to an ultimate divine Reality which transcends all our varied visions of it.”

When human beings practice Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, or Buddhism, or connect with Yahweh, Jesus, Allah, *Brahman*, or *nirvana*, they are experiencing varied visions of an ultimate divine Reality, or what Hick calls the Real *an sich*. This Hickian pluralistic hypothesis provides an explanation for the co-existence of multiple religions, enabling all of them to be potentially true.

While Hick writes as a philosopher, and not a theologian, in this work, his analysis remains grounded in specific religious traditions because his interest is in notions of transcendence. While he periodically refers to Marxist beliefs or the Communist faith, he stresses the following:

Belief in the transcendent has thus generally been defended from the standpoint of a particular religious tradition, and has accordingly been identified with belief in the reality of Jahweh of the Torah, or the Vishnu of the Bhagavad Gita . . .

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14 Kärkkäinen, 282.


16 Ibid., 236-240.

17 There is debate and controversy over whether Hick effectively plays the role of philosopher in his book *An Interpretation of Religion*. See Chester Gillis, “John Hick: Theologian or Philosopher of Religion?” (forthcoming in 2011). For examples of these references to Communist faith, see Hick, 67, 308.

He argues that religious traditions “have greater or less value according as they promote or hinder the salvific transformation.”

While Hick’s model of pluralism is considered foundational, there have been numerous Christian scholars who have also developed pluralistic theologies. One important example is Paul F. Knitter, Catholic theologian and the Paul Tillich Professor of Theology, World Religions, and Culture at Union Theological Seminary. Knitter is a theological pluralist, as opposed to Hick who is a philosophical pluralist. Knitter emphasizes that salvation is through praxis and thus open to followers of other religions. Knitter argues that God’s love was prior to Jesus Christ and it is only in love-based action that humanity can experience salvation. His focus is on love-based action exhibited by individuals within religious communities. He argues that “the liberation movement needs not just religion but religions! . . . A crosscultural, interreligious cooperation in liberative praxis and a sharing of liberative theory is called for.” Peter Phan, Ellacuria Chair of Catholic Social Thought at Georgetown University, posits that diversity is inherent in the Trinitarian life and being of God as well as in the character of creation itself. It is “because of – not in spite of” this

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19 Ibid., 300.


diversity within God and creation that Christians can and must recognize the truth that is present in the diversity of the world’s religions.  

Religious pluralism is not a neutral term in the Christian theological context. It stands in contrast to exclusivism and inclusivism. Exclusivism posits that “those, and only those, who explicitly express faith in Jesus Christ, and [in some versions] are members of the Christian church, have the possibility of salvation.” Pluralists emphasize God’s universal salvific will, while exclusivists insist that salvation is uniquely and absolutely through Jesus Christ. Inclusivism seeks to reconcile the conundrum of God’s universal love and the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. In general, inclusivists retain a high christology like the exclusivists, yet open the door to the potential of salvation in the other religions.

An inclusivist sentiment is woven within and throughout the documents of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). Nostra Aetate, the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, states that the “religions which are found in more


24 Gillis, Pluralism, 16. The original text includes the text in brackets, as it is shown here.

25 Netland, 18.


27 Pope Paul VI, Dignitatis humanae (Declaration on Religious Freedom on the Right of the Person and of Communities to Social and Civil Freedom in Matters Religious), Vatican, 7 December 1965; idem, Gaudium et spes (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World), Vatican, 7 December 1965; idem, Nostra aetate (Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions), Vatican, 28 October 1965. Available at http://www.vatican.va, accessed 10 December 2009.
advanced civilizations endeavor by way of well-defined concepts and exact language to answer” the “unresolved riddles of human existence.” The Church “rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions” and yet, “it proclaims and is in duty bound to proclaim without fail, Christ who is the way, the truth and the life (Jn 1:6). In him . . . people find the fullness of their religious life.” In Nostra Aetate, the Council addresses Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Judaism specifically. The Church does not preclude the possibility of truth in arenas that do not align directly with religious traditions; however, the discourse within the Catholic Church and on religious pluralism and theology of religions in general is dominated by a discussion on the truth and salvific value of and in identifiable and distinct religious traditions.

Interreligious Dialogue in Theory and Practice: Areas of Convergence and Divergence

Comparative scholars and those involved in the theory and/or practice of interreligious dialogue put two religious traditions in conversation with one another. Like theologians of religions, they focus primarily on the major world religions, identifiable and sizable historical traditions such as Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Judaism. They seek to uncover areas of convergence and/or divergence between traditions. Comparative religionist Wilfred Cantwell Smith emphasizes the necessity of comparative religion to understanding one’s own religion:

[T]he future progress of one’s own cherished faith . . . depends more largely than most of us have realized on the ability to solve the question of comparative religion. . . . Unless, I say, we can together solve the intellectual and spiritual questions posed

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29 See Pope Paul VI, Gaudium et spes (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World), Vatican, 7 December 1965.
by comparative religion, then I do not see how a man is to be a Christian or a Muslim or a Buddhist at all.\textsuperscript{30}

Comparative scholars and those involved with interreligious dialogue typically reject the notion that their ultimate objective is syncretism, the attempt to merge distinct religious and/or cultural traditions. In his book, \textit{Common Ground: Islam, Christianity, and Religious Pluralism}, comparative religionist Paul Heck argues that the “study of religious pluralism . . . does not aim to cram different religions into a single box but seeks to reach greater understanding of religion.”\textsuperscript{31} Scholars often look upon syncretism disparagingly. They see it as an attempt to disregard difference and particularities within and across traditions.\textsuperscript{32}

Cultural anthropologist André Droogers explains:

\begin{quote}
Syncretism is a tricky term. Its main difficulty is that it is used with both an objective and a subjective meaning. The basic objective meaning refers neutrally and descriptively to the mixing of religions. The subjective meaning includes an evaluation of such intermingling from the point of view of one of the religions involved. As a rule, the mixing of religions is condemned in this evaluation as violating the essence of the belief system.\textsuperscript{33}

Dialogue can be a vehicle for uncovering common and uncommon ground, potential truth within and across religious traditions, and/or opportunities for cooperation on important
\end{quote}


social issues. Interreligious dialogue does not often include individuals who do not identify with a specific religious tradition. If one belongs to or identifies with multiple religious communities, for example, there is not a home for them within the confines of interreligious dialogue. Peter Phan explains this:

Indeed, interreligious dialogue . . . militates against multiple religious belonging because it requires as a matter of methodology that participants in interreligious or interfaith dialogue preserve their distinctive religious doctrines and practices and show how these are not only similar to but also different from those of other religions.

Beyond the academy, there are practitioners of interreligious dialogue who aim to create fora for interaction among religious communities and individuals who are a part of these communities. The Pluralism Project at Harvard University lists dozens of groups that are not only writing about interreligious dialogue, but also are putting it into action. One important example is the Interfaith Youth Core in Chicago, Illinois. Eboo Patel, founder and Executive Director of the Interfaith Youth Core, has gone to great lengths to associate religious pluralism with the positive engagement of people from an array of different religious communities. Patel engages young leaders across a variety of religious traditions to

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35 Phan, 60-61.

dialogue with one another and also to work actively together to affect positive change in the world.\textsuperscript{37}

In the edited volume, \textit{Religions View Religions: Explorations in Pursuit of Understanding}, religion scholar, Jerald D. Gort, emphasizes that “[w]hat we must try to achieve in our pluralistic societies is at the very least the realization of paradigms of coherent and intelligent ‘contrivance,’ living together in sensible, peaceable and, if possible, cooperative harmony.”\textsuperscript{38} Theologians, comparativists, and scholars and practitioners of interreligious dialogue contribute to this goal of contrivance by studying the relationship between and among religious traditions themselves.

\textbf{Social Scientists – Relationships between Religious and Secular Spheres of Society}

In a complementary way, scholars of the social sciences contribute to this goal of contrivance by studying the relationship between religious traditions and society at large. They do not focus on the boundaries that exist between and among traditions; rather, they focus on the boundaries between the religious and the secular aspects of society. The theory that has dominated discourse in sociology of religion gets to the heart of the relationship between the religious and secular – secularization theory.

\textbf{Secularization Theory: The Place of Religion in American Society}

The secularization thesis holds that religion will retreat from the public arena and eventually disappear from society. The social scientists of the nineteenth century, including Émile Durkheim, Max Weber, Karl Marx, and Sigmund Freud, all concluded that religion, as


it was known, would eventually fade. They believed the origins of this dynamic stemmed from the Reformation, the Peace of Westphalia, Enlightenment ideas, and industrialization. In the 1960s, sociologists, including Thomas Luckman and Peter Berger, developed systematic and comprehensive theories of secularization. However, it became apparent by the late-twentieth century that religion had not disappeared from American society, nor the world. In the twenty-first century, the secularization thesis is “experiencing the most sustained challenge in its long history.”

The relationship between religious pluralism and secularization in the United States has been and continues to be a point of debate. As sociologist Steve Bruce articulates, there are two competing views of the consequences of religious pluralism in the United States. One consequence is that religion will decline. The reason is that “pluralism universalizes ‘heresy’. A chosen religion is weaker than a religion of fate because we are aware that we choose the gods rather than the gods choosing us.” Peter Berger clarifies – “religion loses


its taken-for-granted status in consciousness.”

Philosopher Charles Taylor gives an historical account of this dynamic in *A Secular Age*. Unlike any other time in the history of the West, Taylor contends, today religious belief is not a given. Rather, we “have milieu in which unbelief is close to being the default solution.”

A second and opposite consequence is that religious pluralism will enhance religion in the United States. In an open religious marketplace, there will not be a religious monopoly to stifle competition. Religious denominations will have to compete for religious consumers; they will strive to meet the needs of different types of people. Religious consumers will, therefore, have their needs met and thus, find a religion that suits them and holds their attention. It appears as if religious pluralism has helped and hindered religiosity; both consequences are evident in the United States. As Berger explains, “American society has . . . been the vanguard of both religious and secular pluralism.”

**Religion and Democracy: Consensus in a Religiously Plural Public Arena**

Disestablishment of the church from the state and legal protections of religious liberty have contributed to religious diversity in the United States. José Casanova, sociologist of religion, explains why:

[The religion clauses of the First Amendment] established a principle of differentiation between the political community of citizens and any and all religious communities. Eventually, all religions in America, churches as well as sects,

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45 Bruce, 170-171.

irrespective of their origins, doctrinal claims, and ecclesiastical identities, would turn into ‘denominations,’ formally equal under the Constitution and competing in a relatively free, pluralistic, and voluntaristic religious market.47

This differentiation between the political community and religious communities, the spread of denominationalism,48 and the advent of a voluntary religious market are all factors that contribute to what is widely recognized as unique to the American religious landscape.49

The “principle of differentiation between the political community of citizens and any and all religious communities” (to use Casanova’s phrase) has continued to spark debates over the appropriate role of religion in American political life. Even the nation’s founders held different views on the utility and effects of religious diversity on the American democracy. For example, James Madison, as evidenced in Federalist No. 10, sought diversity so that various factions and interests could compete and thus protect minorities and prevent monopolies.50 Thomas Jefferson believed religious diversity was good since each religious tradition would act as a “censor” on the other. Jefferson expected that reason and inquiry amidst the citizenry would eventually reveal the true religion - Unitarianism.51

George Washington recognized and embraced religious diversity, but sought to unite the


49 Norris and Inglehart, 34.


nation by evoking non-sectarian language and national rituals. He believed that recognition of God, a day of thanksgiving prayer, and religious education would ensure a moral and cohesive nation.\textsuperscript{52}

Contemporary debates on religious pluralism and American democracy center largely on the limits of power of religious groups and the role of religious discourse in reaching consensus on political issues. William Connolly, Krieger-Eisenhower Professor of Political Science at Johns Hopkins University, writes extensively on religious pluralism in the civic arena and its relationship to power and violence. His political theory advocates a “pluralist society” which “inculcates the virtue of relational modesty between proponents of different faiths and creeds, and it seeks to limit the power of those who would overthrow diversity in the name of religious unitarianism.”\textsuperscript{53} He argues that his theory does not imply relativism or a syncretism in truth or morality; his theory is focused on limiting power “of those who would invest their own creed with unquestioned territorial hegemony.”\textsuperscript{54}

There are numerous scholars who, like Connolly, seek to address the dynamics of power and the relationship of this power to civic discourse in a religiously plural democracy. John Milbank, professor of religion, politics, and ethics, insists that religious pluralism is a mechanism of power in the West and can only imply a normative position. The phrases ‘religious pluralism’ and ‘dialogue,’ according to Milbank, must be understood within the


\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 48.
context of Westerners who presume global dominance.\textsuperscript{55} Stanley Hauerwas, theologian and ethicist, concurs with Milbank. While the phenomenon of religious diversity is benevolent, religious pluralism is not. Hauerwas argues the following:

[P]luralism is an ideology used by Protestant liberals to give themselves the illusion they are still in control of, or at least have responsibility for, the future of America. Religion is the designation created to privatize strong convictions in order to render them harmless so that alleged democracies can continue to have the illusion they flourish on difference.\textsuperscript{56}

Hauerwas positions religious pluralism as “imperially enforced uniformity.” He argues that Christians in the West will be able to have “better interfaith understanding” if they free themselves from any notion that they have a particular role or leadership position in negotiating those differences.\textsuperscript{57}

Milbank and Hauerwas insist that theological evidence and religious ideas are shunned in the public arena in order to maintain a liberal Protestant hegemony in the United States. In large part, they are reacting to a Rawlsian ideology that only accepts public reason as the means for reaching consensus in a religiously plural society.\textsuperscript{58} In Political Liberalism, the late John Rawls, moral and political philosopher, describes what he refers to as “overlapping consensus.” Overlapping consensus is a process whereby elements from

\begin{itemize}
\item Ibid., 284.
\item Ibid., 290-292.
\end{itemize}
various comprehensive doctrines (religious and secular worldviews) are commonly agreed upon in society. 59 This conceptual framework is designed to help answer the following question: “How is it possible that there can be a stable and just society whose free and equal citizens are deeply divided by conflicting and even incommensurable religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines?” 60 For Rawls, basic agreement on justice does not presuppose basic agreement on worldview or religious truth. Rather, by focusing on basic questions of justice, not truth claims, and by using the language of reason to explain the basic views of justice, reasonable citizens can find common ground in the political realm. The consensus itself is a result of a process over time. 61 It is not a thing or a global ethic or a law or anything quite as tangible; it is a moving, living, political framework of ideas among a citizenry.

Jeffrey Stout, scholar of religion and ethics at Princeton University, has emerged as a leading voice in the discourse on religious pluralism and consensus building in American democracy. In Democracy and Tradition, he puts Hauerwas and Milbank in conversation with Rawls to find a middle ground. He explores the reasons why religious discourse must be woven into democratic debate and how this can be accomplished in a way that welcomes, yet does not favor, religion in a space that is to be religiously neutral. 62 In reasoning through differences with fellow citizens, the reasoning eventually takes a secular form.

59 Ibid., 144.
60 Ibid., 133.
61 Ibid., 154, 159, 164.
American Civil Religion: National Religious Identity

The relationship between the religious and secular aspects of society and the role of religious discourse in consensus building contribute to America’s civil religion – the “universal and transcendent religious reality revealed in . . . and through the experience of the American people.” Robert Bellah, sociologist of religion, provided this definition in his paradigmatic essay from 1967 titled, “Civil Religion in America.” He insisted that American civil religion is not meant to replace or encompass America’s many denominations or defy the limitations on established religion protected by the First Amendment. Rather, he proposed that the American civil religion is actually a religious “tradition” that stands alongside the particular religions of American citizens. It is an imagined community where a common identity is projected upon America’s diverse citizenry.

As scholars continue to find ways to describe American ideals and American identity they often emphasize the role of religious pluralism. Sociologists of religion, historians, and religionists are partaking in this effort. Diana L. Eck, in her book, A New Religious America: How a “Christian Country” has Now Become the World’s Most Religiously Diverse Nation, regards religious pluralism as essential to America’s civil religion. She argues that “right here in the U.S., we have an opportunity to create a vibrant and hopeful pluralism, in a world of increasing fragmentation where there are few models for a truly pluralistic, multireligious

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64 Casanova explains how “American denominationalism functions at three different levels . . . The first is the basic ‘congregational’ level . . . The second level is the denominational proper . . . Finally, there is the national level of ‘imagined community’ in the sense in which [William] Herberg talks of Protestant, Catholic, and Jew as the three denominational forms of the American civil religion.” José Casanova, “Immigration and the New Religious Pluralism,” 73-74.
Religious pluralism is "the energetic engagement with diversity. . . . the active seeking of understanding across lines of difference. . . . the encounter of commitments." This active engagement with diversity is a source of strength for the American nation.

Barbara McGraw, professor of social ethics, law, and public life, and Director of the Center for Engaged Religious Pluralism at St. Mary’s College in California, echoes this belief that religious pluralism, understood normatively, is core to American civil religion. Where Eck traces the history of American immigration and hones in upon examples of pluralism in America’s communities in her scholarship, McGraw focuses on the ideological premises that informed the founders’ vision for the nation. McGraw argues that the seventeenth-century political philosopher, John Locke, introduced fundamental ideals to America’s founders that “create a space for the many voices of American society to be heard . . .” McGraw emphasizes that the values of liberty of conscience and religious pluralism are concomitant.

In contrast to Eck and McGraw, the late Samuel P. Huntington, the political scientist well known for Clash of Civilizations, laments the religious and ethnic diversity that has come to characterize American society since the 1960s. He believes that embracing new forms of religious and ethnic pluralism in the United States will challenge the integrity of America’s civil religion. He writes, “Anglo-Protestant culture has been central to American identity for three centuries. It is what Americans have had in common and, as countless foreigners have observed, what has distinguished them from other peoples. In the late-

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twentieth century, however, the salience and substance of this culture were challenged."^{68}

For Huntington, what is central to the American proposition is the universal adoption of Anglo-Saxon values, practices, and language. As long as various ethnic and religious groups conform to these ideals, America, he argues, will retain the "the centrality and durability of the culture of the founding settlers."^{69}

William R. Hutchinson, historian of American religion, recognizes that Americans have always embraced some form of religious pluralism, defined as "an ideal or impulse."^{70} However, in his book, *Religious Pluralism in America*, Hutchinson tempers this view. His thesis is that the phrase religious pluralism has evolved and thus, adopted new definitions throughout American history. There have been three stages that reveal the paradigmatic shift in the interpretation of religious pluralism in the United States. In the nation's history, the first stage regarded pluralism as legal and social toleration of deviant persons or groups. These persons and groups were given civic rights, but were outsiders to the dominant culture. The second stage was one of inclusion where deviants became a part of mainstream America, melting or assimilating into the dominant culture. The third stage regards pluralism as participation – individuals and groups, minorities included, actively participating in shaping the social agenda. Hutchinson argues that religious pluralism has been "a work in progress" in the United States.^{71}

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^{69} Ibid., 129.


^{71} Ibid., 6-7, 10.
There is no doubt that as America becomes increasingly religiously diverse, it will become increasingly important to understand specific religious traditions, their relationship to one another, and their role in public life. However, the United States is not only becoming more religiously diverse, it is becoming more religiously complex as Americans disaffiliate from religious communities, mix religious beliefs and practices, and abandon theologically exclusivist views regarding salvation and truth.\(^72\) As a consequence, it is not unlikely that the phrase ‘religious pluralism’ will continue to evolve beyond the three stages Hutchinson describes. In other words, the meaning of the phrase will continue to be a “work in progress.”

Theologians do not typically have the methodologies or the resources to consider the religious and faith commitments of individuals or groups who do not fall within the bounds of a religious tradition. These individuals and groups are difficult to identify.\(^73\) Social scientists are also limited. For example, historical surveys on religion typically focus on quantifying the size and assessing the behaviors of identifiable religious denominations. Additionally, studies that compare religious affiliation in the United States to other nations are often limited to tracking the major world religions.\(^74\) Only recently are sociological surveys of religion in


\(^74\) For an example, see Norris and Inglehart, 100.
America beginning to introduce a new vernacular to be able to identify and track individuals who do not affiliate with a religious tradition and/or mix religious traditions.\textsuperscript{75}

There are other signs of change. Over the last two decades, select scholars have begun to study individuals and groups whose religious lives do not fall squarely within the bounds of one religious tradition. Theologians including Jeannine Hill Fletcher, Peter Phan, and Catherine Cornille, are beginning to look beyond the boundaries of religious traditions in their work on religious pluralism. Social scientists like Robert Wuthnow and Wade Clark Roof recognize that the terms religious and secular ignore emerging dynamics in the American religious landscape. It is my hope to contribute to these emerging studies in this dissertation on religious intermarriage.

Jeannine Hill Fletcher, systematic theologian at Fordham University, challenges the notion that religious identity must be singular. Fletcher argues that “each of us is formed by a web of identity” which means that any religious community is made up of “infinite internal diversity.” She argues that one can be a Christian and retain his/her native religion:

\begin{quote}
Persons have recognized the truth of Christianity but have insisted also on the truth and life-giving possibilities of their native tradition. They have appreciated the resources of multiple religious forms. In their lives these global Christians have embraced both Christianity and other religions as life-giving patterns of orientation.\textsuperscript{76}
\end{quote}

Theologians like Fletcher who acknowledge hybrid identity within a religious community have the opportunity to explore religious pluralism more richly. Hybridity challenges

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{75} The PEW Forum uses the term \textit{Unaffiliated} and the ARIS survey uses the term \textit{Nones} to describe this group of individuals who are not necessarily atheists or living purely secular lives, but yet do not identify as a part of one religious tradition or denomination. PEW, \textit{U.S. Religious Landscape Survey (2008)}; ARIS 2008.
\end{quote}

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theologians to reconsider the traditional insider/outside distinctions that are preserved by positing a singular religious identity on the community.

Peter Phan examines multiple religious belonging in his seminal text, *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue*. Multiple religious belonging, in the context of Christianity, is the idea that a person can live interreligiously as a Christian and as a part of another religious tradition. It is possible for a Christian to adopt into his or her life “the beliefs, moral rules, rituals, and monastic practices of religious traditions other than Christianity, perhaps even in the midst of the community of devotees of other religions.”77 The contributors to *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity*, edited by Catherine Cornille, provide examples of multiple religious belonging in contemporary societies. The authors of these essays wrestle with questions on how to reconcile a multiple religious affiliation with the religious demands of one religious tradition. They attempt to address how it is that one can be Christian and also another religion.78

While pioneering theologians are analyzing hybrid religious identity and multiple religious belonging, there are also social scientists who are exploring a different aspect of a similar phenomenon – spirituality. They characterize spirituality as a quest by people seeking an identity that meets their individual needs. Their quest does not necessarily align with the authoritative voices that come from religious traditions. In visual terms, the difference between the theologian’s approach and the social scientist’s approach is as follows: Theologians are interested in individuals who have one foot in their tradition and another foot in another tradition. Social scientists are interested in individuals whose feet are not

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77 Phan, 61.

necessarily in any single tradition, but whose fingers dip into multiple traditions and spiritual practices.

Over the last two decades, American sociologists Robert Wuthnow and Wade Clark Roof have studied spirituality in the United States. In 1988, Robert Wuthnow published *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s*, where he introduces the idea that a “growing number of Americans piece together their faith like a patchwork quilt.” Wuthnow differentiates between dwelling and seeking – the former as “living within a sacred space;” the latter as “living between sacred spaces.” Spirituality, he explains, “becomes a search for novel ways to retrieve a sense of sacred space.” In his 2005 book, *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity*, Wuthnow explains that the search could be “a trend that will come increasingly to characterize a large majority of Americans, and thus, become a major new way of responding to religious diversity.”

Wade Clark Roof, in *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion*, describes how baby boomers have created a quest culture involving the continual innovation of new types of spiritual and religious practices. Spirituality does not necessarily preclude religion, however. He explains this as follows: “As Americans speak of spirituality today, the term may, and most often does, include religion in the sense of a tradition, yet for many it is not bound by doctrinal, creetal, or ecclesiastical categories.”

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80 Ibid., 7, 51.


Definitions of the “religious other” are changing and insider/outsider distinctions are blurring. The challenge, according to Roof, is that “religious scripts that once communicated deep meanings, symbolic frames of reference, and defined modes of action must now compete with other stories in a pluralistic and media-saturated society that encourages a mixing of religious themes.”

Mixing religious themes (also referred to as pastiche, collage, bricolage, and religion à la carte, to name only a few synonymous terms) obscures any normative distinction between the religious and the secular. For example, if one believes in a higher power, participates in Christian holidays, and practices yoga and meditation weekly, is this person religious or not? Would a religious tradition consider this person religious by their normative definition of what ‘religious’ means for their particular community? Would sociologists consider this person religious by the metrics they typically use to assess religiosity in their surveys? And, if he or she is deemed not to be religious, is it accurate to claim that this person is living a purely secular life, devoid of religion? The answers to these questions are not clear.

Roof and Wuthnow allude to the complexity of these questions. Roof acknowledges that spirituality and the practice of mixing and matching has meant that more Americans openly acknowledge doubt. They no longer accept old conceptions of God that are literal and exclusive. However, Roof warns that “[i]t is much too simple to describe these changes as secularization . . . [these changes are] far from being linear [:] . . . the modern religious

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83 Ibid., 41-42, 74.
84 Ibid., 93.
situation is much more complex and adaptable."\textsuperscript{85} Wuthnow observes that Americans are in the midst of a major transition and a “confrontation with secularity.” Yet, “[t]hey are not marching steadfastly into a secular age but are reshaping deep religious traditions in ways that help make sense of the new realities of their lives.”\textsuperscript{86}

There is an opportunity to develop new scholarship on religious pluralism that illuminates how individuals and families “are reshaping deep religious traditions in ways that help make sense of the new realities of their lives.” I argue in this dissertation that contemporary couples who have embarked upon religious intermarriage are reconciling multiple religious traditions and in the process, shaping their own spirituality. They appear to have their feet planted in one or two traditions, but also have their fingers dipped in religious and spiritual practices that fall outside the bounds of what is normatively considered religious. Their lives cannot be defined by what theologians call ‘multiple religious belonging,’ or what social scientists call ‘spirituality.’ Rather, religious intermarriage is a sort of middle ground that has fostered new forms of religious pluralism in the lives of American families. Charles Taylor alludes to this middle ground. He proposes the following:

[There are] two kinds of religious sensibility, those which underlie respectively the new kinds of spiritual quest, on the one side, and the prior option for an authority which forecloses them on the other. . . . But if one can escape from this dialectic which propels people to these extremes, it should be clear that there are other alternatives, and that much of today’s spiritual/religious life is to be found in this middle ground.\textsuperscript{87}

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., 47, 75.

\textsuperscript{86} Wuthnow, \textit{America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity}, 10-11.

\textsuperscript{87} Taylor, 512.
It is my contention that the religious lives of these intermarried couples and families reveal the permeability of the boundaries between and among religious traditions and also between the religious and secular aspects of American society. Their lives are characteristic of the middle ground that shapes much of the contemporary American religious landscape.

**Studies on Religious Intermarriage**

To appreciate the nuances of contemporary American religious pluralism, it is necessary to uncover the shifting boundaries among religious communities and between the religious and secular spheres of society. An historical and contemporary analysis of religious intermarriage in the United States is uniquely suited to help one understand these shifting boundaries. Because marriage is a concern not only of two individuals, but also families, religious communities, broader society, and the state, it puts at tension, through its very nature, the relationship between religious communities and religious and secular realms of society. As a microcosm of macro dynamics associated with religious pluralism, religious intermarriage has the potential to illuminate important theological and religious shifts in the nation.

The literature on religious intermarriage is vast. However, most of it is limited in its scope and objective. I divide this literature into three primary categories. The first category includes studies that discuss the dynamics and consequences of religious intermarriage on one specific religious community, like the American-Jewish community or the American-Catholic community. Pastoral literature that advises couples on the challenges associated with religious intermarriages, how-to guides, and studies that explore the specific effects of religious intermarriage on the doctrines, beliefs, and practices of a religious tradition fall into
this category of literature. The objective of these studies is often to enable lay people and religious leaders to assess the validity of, dynamics involved with, and lasting effects of religious intermarriage in a religious community.

In the United States, literature of this type is dominated by Jewish and Catholic studies. Not only have there been high rates of Jewish intermarriage, but this phenomenon has had a significant effect on the American-Jewish community. Many of these texts deal primarily with cultural concerns and methods for how couples and families can navigate these relationships. For example, *The Guide to Jewish Interfaith Family Life* (2001) dedicates multiple chapters to advice on interreligious weddings, relationships, children, in-laws, birth ceremonies, parenting, and the holidays. Christian communities and especially the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops have been actively engaged in producing scholarly and pastoral literature on religious intermarriage. Books and articles by theologians Michael Lawler at Creighton University and John Borelli at Georgetown University are illustrative of this type of scholarship.

English-language literature on Muslim religious intermarriage in the United States is limited but growing. Legal scholar Alex Leeman’s Spring 2009 *Indiana Law Journal* article

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on the legal theory behind religious intermarriage in Islam is only one example of the emerging literature on the role of Shari’a law in the American democracy. In 2005 Islamic legal scholar Abdullahi A. An-Naim (ed.) published *Inter-religious Marriages Among Muslims: Negotiating Religious and Social Identity in Family and Community*. This book focuses on intermarriages of Muslims in India, Senegal and Turkey. Other studies are emerging on religious intermarriages in the American-Muslim community across ethnic and religious lines. Scholarly analysis of religious intermarriage in American Hindu and Buddhist communities is currently quite limited. Religious studies scholar Gail Sutherland offers an important comparative analysis of Hindu intra- and inter-religious weddings in Houston in her article, “The Wedding Pavilion: Performing, Recreating, and Regendering Hindu Identity in Houston.” However, this study is unique in its focus on the Hindu community. Most of the commentary on this community and other Asian immigrant communities appears in popular journals like *Hinduism Today* and Internet sources.

The second category of literature includes broad-based sociological studies that provide insight on religious intermarriage in a number of religious traditions. These types of studies began to appear in the early-twentieth century. However, the scope of research has

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primarily been limited to marriage between Protestants of different denominations and ethnicities, and/or marriage between Protestants, Catholics, and Jews. The work of sociologist Ruby Jo Reeves Kennedy in her article, “Single or Triple Melting-Pot? Intermarriage Trends in New Haven, 1870-1940,” provided a foundation for sociological studies in the field. The objectives of these types of studies are often to track an increase or decrease in the incidence of religious intermarriage within and across religious groups, correlate religious intermarriage to other demographics like gender, age, education level, ethnicity, or divorce rates, and/or assess the effects of religious intermarriage on children.

It was not until the early-twenty-first century that sociologists began to collect nationally-based data on religious groups beyond Christians and Jews. For example, the “U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, 2008” by the PEW Forum on Religion and Public Life provides a wealth of quantitative data and demographic information on religious affiliation and intermarriage patterns of Christians and Jews, as well as Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and other groups. Additionally, the “2001 American Religious Identification Survey” (ARIS 2001) collected national data on religious intermarriage across a variety of religious groups.

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While quantitative studies account for the majority of sociological scholarship on religious intermarriage, there are a few qualitative and ethnographic research studies that have sought to understand the underlying causes and consequences of religious intermarriage. Other studies offer nuanced typologies of the various approaches to religion that intermarried couples pursue (e.g., convert, practice the religion of the spouse who is more religious, practice both religions, abandon religion altogether, adopt an alternative religion, etc.).

While this second category of literature—broad-based sociological studies—is the most expansive, the scope and the objectives of these studies are limited and specific.

The third category of literature includes historical studies on religious intermarriage. These histories are often limited to a specific time and locale, and in the case of religious intermarriage, specific religious communities. The objective is often to describe aspects of an era of history through the responses of religious authorities and communities to religious intermarriage during that time. There is a series of books sponsored by the Lilly Project on Religion, Culture, and the Family that provide context as to how marriage has evolved in the West. For the most part, however, these books do not directly address issues related to religious intermarriage. The one exception is a chapter in Sex, Marriage, and Family in John


Calvin’s Geneva by John Witte Jr. and Robert M. Kingdon that outlines the prominent intermarriage issues facing Calvin and his contemporaries in the mid-sixteenth century.\textsuperscript{99}

The most prominent historical work on religious intermarriage in the United States is by Anne C. Rose, historian and religious studies professor. In her book, Beloved Strangers: Interfaith Families in Nineteenth-Century America, she examines twenty-six Protestant-Catholic or Protestant-Jewish families in the decades between the War of 1812 and World War I. Her work highlights the shifting contours of American religion and the relationship between marriage, society, and religious institutions during this time.\textsuperscript{100} One can also find select histories of religious intermarriage in the United States in the literature in histories of religious communities. For example, in Jonathan D. Sarna’s book, American Judaism: A History, he references religious intermarriage often, as it has been a significant issue for the Jewish community throughout American history.\textsuperscript{101} Based upon my research, however, no one has pieced together various histories on religious intermarriage to tell a comprehensive story about the evolution of the phenomenon in America’s multitude of religious traditions.

\textbf{Religious Intermarriage as a Lens to Religious Pluralism}

As evidenced by the extensiveness of the attached bibliography, I rely upon this vast religious, sociological, and historical scholarship throughout this dissertation. However, the


\textsuperscript{100} Anne C. Rose, Beloved Strangers: Interfaith Families in Nineteenth-Century America (Harvard University Press, 2001).

objective and scope of my work differs substantively from these studies. Because my objective is to understand the shifting contours of religious pluralism in America through the lens of religious intermarriage, I evaluate intermarriage over many centuries and consider a multitude of religious communities in my analysis. In other words, because I seek to investigate whether there have been shifts over time, I do not limit my analysis to one time period. Because I seek to understand how these shifts are reshaping the religious landscape in the United States, I do not limit my work on a specific geography within the nation. Because I seek to explore what these shifts relay in terms of American religiosity, I do not limit my analysis to one or two religious traditions.

There are two recent qualitative studies that appear to be similar in their objective to link religious intermarriage to broader trends in American religious pluralism. The first is by sociologist Robert Wuthnow. He dedicates a chapter of his book, *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity* (2005), to the topic of religious intermarriage. His analysis is based upon interviews with 32 Christian-non-Christian couples. The second is by religious studies scholar Kate McCarthy. She dedicates a chapter of her book, *Interfaith Encounters in America* (2007), to the topic of religious intermarriage. Her analysis is based upon a blog she tracks and interviews with 14 individuals in intermarriages that include a variety of religious traditions.

Both of these studies proffer interesting and compelling insights. While there have been numerous studies on the topic of religious pluralism in America and the topic of religious intermarriage, only the Wuthnow and McCarthy studies attempt to bridge the two. Both Wuthnow and McCarthy conduct limited qualitative research studies. Neither professes to have developed findings that are statistically significant or explain all of the dynamics
associated with contemporary religious intermarriage. Therefore, their work must be interpreted as an invitation for additional studies to explore similar terrain. These two studies in conjunction with my dissertation are seeds for an emerging conversation on Interfaith Space that I hope continues to blossom.\(^{102}\) I believe that by supplementing their work with my own, I am making a contribution to scholarship on religious pluralism.

Moreover, my contribution is substantively unique relative to their studies and to other literature on religious pluralism or religious intermarriage. No other study attempts to use religious intermarriage as both a reflective and a predictive device to reveal the movement in American religion and reveal the emergence of new space not currently accounted for in the majority of theological and sociological scholarship on religious pluralism.

To achieve this end, there are three important and unique characteristics of this study. First, I employ mixed methodology. Part I of this dissertation is a social history. I investigate secondary literature on marriage and intermarriage starting in the fifteenth century in order to assemble a picture of the various stages religious intermarriage has gone through. To understand the nature of contemporary religious intermarriage and the ways in which it is unique, it is necessary to gauge from where it came and how it has changed. Historical shifts offer perspective on current and future dynamics. In Part II, I move from a social history to a sociological qualitative analysis of 43 religious intermarriages. Because I employ qualitative and not quantitative research (a distinction that I outline more thoroughly in Chapter 6), I am able to explore the paradoxical and ambiguous nature of religious intermarriages. It allows me to examine how these couples and their families are living with and/or rejecting

\(^{102}\) I define Interfaith Space in Chapter 8.
boundaries of their religious traditions and boundaries that have historically separated religious and secular forms of marriage and family-life.

Second, as I mentioned previously, I do not limit my study to Catholic-Jewish marriage or Protestant-Muslim marriage, for example. My objective is to use intermarriage to illuminate broader dynamics in the American religious landscape. I focus on an array of religious communities that contribute to the broad contours of American civil religion. In Part I, I limit my exploration to Catholics, Protestants, and Jews, as these groups play a dominant role in the religious history of the nation. In Part II, I expand my exploration to Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists, as these religious traditions, while small in number, are turning America into “the world’s most religiously diverse nation,” to quote Diana Eck.103

Third, throughout this project I have been cognizant of and focused upon two separate axes of concern. One axis posits ‘religious’ and ‘secular’ at opposing ends. In Part I, I seek to understand the power and influence of the church (and later churches or religious denominations) relative to the power and influence of secular/civic authorities on the institution of marriage. Authority over marriage moves from the church to the state through the centuries. At the same time, for many, religious ideas associated with marriage evolved into romantic and contractual ideas. In Part II, I define secular versus religious parameters of marriage and family-life and juxtapose the experiences of interreligious couples to these parameters. This axis of concern informs my findings on the shifting boundaries between the religious and secular spheres.

The second axis posits ‘closed’ religion and ‘open’ religion at opposing ends. These terms ‘closed’ and ‘open’ are not technical; I simply use these terms to provide a visual for

103 Eck, A New Religious America.
this second axis. Closed religion refers to those communities that create sharp divisions between themselves and the religious other. These communities prohibit or discourage religious intermarriage, for example. Open religion refers to those communities that do not create sharp divisions between themselves and the religious other. These communities, for whatever theological, legal, or social reason, may allow and/or accept religious intermarriage. At one point the Catholic Church was a closed religion; now it is more open. This second axis of concern informs my findings on the shifting boundaries between and among religious traditions. As I described in my review of religious pluralism literature, theologians and social scientists often focus on only one of these axes; my aim was to consider both axes in order to allow for new insights to emerge. In these ways, my hope is to make a contribution not only to the literature on religious intermarriage, but also to the broader literature on religious pluralism in America.

I present my work in eight chapters split into two parts. Part I is not only a history of religious intermarriage, it is a story of liberation. From the fifteenth century to the twenty-first century, the theological, legal, and societal doors to intermarriage slowly open, making a practice that was once forbidden and taboo, common. During this time, religious authority shifted from churches and communities to individuals and families; theologically exclusivist views became more inclusivist and pluralistic; the role of women in marriage and the family changed; the religious associations with marriage dissipated; and, Protestant societal hegemony gave way to a religiously diverse and complex marketplace of religions. As relationships between the religious and secular shifted, so too did relationships between and among religious communities. The result was to free individuals to not only marry someone
from another religious tradition, but also to shape their marriages and religious lives as they pleased. This liberation of religious intermarriage is the subject of Chapters 2 through 4.

Part II is an analysis of how contemporary intermarried couples – Christians married to Jews, Muslims, Hindus, or Buddhists – are exercising their freedom to shape their marriages and their religious lives. It is a story of negotiation and innovation, two natural byproducts of liberty. I juxtapose the experiences of 43 intermarried couples with normative boundaries associated with religious traditions and religious and secular forms of marriage and family-life. Their religious beliefs and practices are not religious, according to the normative parameters of religious traditions; however, their lives are far from secular or devoid of religion. Because these contemporary religious intermarriages defy tradition and yet are not wholly removed from tradition, they are affecting change in families and religious communities. The changes they are influencing are harbingers of the growing importance of Interfaith Space in the American religious landscape. Ultimately, I return to categories of scholarship in the review of religious pluralism literature. As a material representation of the continual movement and redefinition of the boundaries of religious traditions and the religious and secular in the United States, religious intermarriage is a lens to understanding important shifts in how scholars understand and approach the subject of religious pluralism.
PART I

History of Religious Intermarriage: A Story of Liberation and Shifting Boundaries
CHAPTER II

SEEDS OF LIBERATION
Theological and Legal Doors Open in the Sixteenth, Seventeenth, and Eighteenth Centuries

“Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s”

(Matthew 22:21)

Religious intermarriage in the United States has become commonplace. However, this was not always the case. Theological prohibitions established by the Catholic Church limited the possibility of religious intermarriage in Christendom. During the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century, shifting views of the relationship between the church and the state, and the secular and the religious spheres, expanded the possibility of religious intermarriage. Nevertheless, it remained rare due to a number of theological, legal, and social barriers. In the late-eighteenth century, while the government constitutionally guaranteed religious liberty, including the liberty to marry someone from another religion, religious intermarriage continued to be socially taboo well into the twentieth century. In this chapter and the following two chapters, I argue that the theological, legal, and social doors to religious intermarriage have slowly opened. In the process, it becomes evident how the boundaries between religions and between the religious and secular spheres of society have shifted.

To illustrate how religious intermarriage has been liberated from ecclesiastical, civil, and social constraints, I divide this discussion into three chapters. In this chapter I offer important context for the legal freedom to intermarry and also the social constraints to
intermarriage in the United States. I begin by introducing the theological and legal prohibitions on religious intermarriage in Christendom. Then, utilizing the marriage models introduced by John Witte, Jr. in *Sacrament to Contract*, I explore the major positions of Protestant reformers on marriage, adding my own research on religious intermarriage. While Martin Luther, John Calvin, and the English reformers had very different ideas about religious intermarriage and the relationship between church and state, they provide important context for the perspectives of America’s Protestant settlers and founders. I conclude this chapter by describing the significance of American disestablishment in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century on religious intermarriage. Disestablishment meant that neither the states nor the churches could legally limit marriage for religious reasons. However, numerous societal constraints to religious intermarriage persisted into the twentieth century.

In the next two chapters, I elaborate upon these societal constraints and the shifts that occurred on American soil, making the United States increasingly fertile ground for religious intermarriage. I explore these societal dynamics through the nineteenth century (Chapter 3) and various phases of the twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries (Chapter 4). As American society diversified religiously, as the institution of marriage became increasingly secularized, and as the role of religion and religions in the public sphere evolved, religious intermarriage has become increasingly common, increasingly diverse, and increasingly acceptable in society. What becomes apparent in the next two chapters is that the American religious landscape is characterized by movement – movement in how majority religious groups relate to minority immigrant communities, movement in how religious authorities

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view other religious traditions, movement in how the laity responds to religious authority, movement of the role of men and women in religious life and public life, and movement in how the nation as a whole perceives itself religiously. The liberation of religious intermarriage from theological, legal, and social barriers helps to reveal the movement in American religion and the fallacy of assuming that there are rigid boundaries between religions and/or between the secular and religious spheres of society. To appreciate the magnitude these changes over time, I begin with an explanation of how marriage and religious intermarriage were treated by the Roman Catholic Church authority in medieval Christendom.

**The Catholic Sacramental Model – Church Authority**

The Roman Catholic Church was the principal theological and legal authority over the institution of marriage from the twelfth through the sixteenth centuries. During this time, marriage between a baptized and a non-baptized person was not permitted. By marrying a non-Christian, one risked excommunication from the Church, social isolation, and while it was not common, being burned to death. An overview of the role of canon law and the Roman Catholic Church in medieval society, as well as the Church’s sacramental understanding of marriage, provides context for the harsh prohibitions against a Christian marrying a non-Christian. This will also provide context for the significance of Martin Luther’s reformed position on religious intermarriage in the sixteenth century.

In the late-eleventh and early-twelfth centuries, the Papal Revolution (1075-1122) ushered in a new era in the West that enabled important development and systematization of
marriage theology and law. During this time, the clergy rid themselves of civil rulers, proclaimed the supremacy of the Pope, and established the Roman Catholic Church as an autonomous authority throughout the West. The “spiritual sword of the Church was to guide the secular authorities into the paths of truth and righteousness. It was the visible Church, under the papacy, that set the rules for leading the good life by which sinful man could be saved.” During this time, Church courts were beginning to enjoy jurisdiction over marriage litigation. As medieval historian James Brundage explains:

Although no detailed litigation records survive from this era, episodes reported by chroniclers make it plain that by about 1100 even kings and great nobles ordinarily brought questions concerning the validity of their marriages to ecclesiastical authorities and were often prepared, however reluctantly, to abide by their decisions. This monopoly on marriage questions represented a momentous victory for Church reform, as well as a source of considerable power for the Church’s judicial system.

By the thirteenth century, the monk Gratian systematized the Church’s various canons and decretals into a succinct collection called the Decretum (circa 1140) that became the standard textbook of canon law at universities and schools throughout the West. The Decretum was eventually replaced by an official version of canons promulgated in 1234. Through this wide

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3 “Pope Gregory VII’s revolutionary document of 1075, Dictates of the Pope (Dictatus papae), declared for the first time the independence of the Roman church from secular rulers and the supremacy of the papal curia over all ecclesiastical courts.” Berman, Law and Revolution, 94-99. This is also discussed in Berman, Faith and Order, 191.

4 Berman, Faith and Order, 87.


6 Ibid., 223.
collection of canon laws (*Corpus Juris Canonici*), the Church not only had jurisdiction over the laws that affected priests and monks, but also had “exclusive jurisdiction over laymen in matters of family law . . . ,” including marriage.\(^7\) Marriage was a binding contract; to break this contract or enter into it wrongly was not only illegal, it was a sin against God.\(^8\) The sacramental model of marriage that the Church adopted in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries solidified the jurisdiction of the Church in matters related to family law and marriage.

Marriage in the Catholic Church is a sacrament. Marriage represents the mysterious union between Christ and the church and confers God-given grace upon the wedded. This sacramental theology of marriage is based upon scripture and developments in the Catholic tradition. In scripture, the Book of Genesis introduces Christians to the creation of the sexes and their union in marriage. “The LORD God said: ‘It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make him a helper fit for him.’” (Gen. 2:18)\(^9\) “Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh.” (Gen. 2:24) The Hebrew Bible makes analogous the covenant between God and his chosen people of Israel and the


\(^8\) Berman, *Faith and Order*, 193.

covenant between a man and a woman in marriage. This is evident in Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. The New Testament emphasizes the analogous relationship between Christ and the church. Paul reminds his fellow Christians that in marriage “two shall become one flesh” (1 Cor. 6:16) as “he who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.” (1 Cor. 6:17). Paul affirms the mystery of marriage and its relationship to the church. “This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church . . .” (Eph. 5:32). The Catholic sacramental model of marriage is based upon this scriptural reference to the mysterious union between a man and a woman and Christ and the church.

While St. Augustine of Hippo had listed “sacrament” as one of the goods of marriage in his fifth-century treatises,¹⁰ this meaning of sacrament was understood differently from the meaning that sacrament acquired in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. For Augustine, *quoddam sacramentum* or the sacramental bond meant that marriage was both a source and a symbol of the permanent union between Christians. However, Augustine did not interpret marriage as a sacrament that conferred grace.¹¹ Seven centuries later, the meaning of the marriage sacrament shifted. In the mid-twelfth century, theologian and bishop Peter Lombard defined a sacrament as “a sign of the grace of God and the form of invisible grace in such a way that it is its image and its cause.” Lombard’s *Four Books of Sentences* (circa 1150) became the standard theology text at medieval universities and this definition of sacrament became the prevailing interpretation for the next four centuries. Commenting on

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Lombard’s *Book of Sentences*, Thomas Aquinas argued that it was “most probable” that “marriage, insofar as it is contracted in faith in Christ, confers grace to do those things which are required in marriage.” He also wrote that “it is to be believed that through this sacrament grace is given to the married.” In *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas listed marriage as one of the seven sacraments.\(^{12}\) Theologians Peter Lombard and Thomas Aquinas, among others, developed a sacramental theology of marriage that was systematized into a comprehensive collection of canons that became theologically and legally binding throughout the West from the thirteenth century until the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century.\(^{13}\)

Only a sacramental marriage was a “valid and licit” marriage in the eyes of the Church. Sacramental marriage was only for two baptized people. To have a valid and legal marriage in Christendom, a baptized person could not marry someone who had not been baptized. Baptism differentiated Christians from non-Christians.\(^{14}\) Baptism, the first of the seven sacraments, is the basis of the whole Christian life and the door to the other sacraments.\(^{15}\) While Baptism and the other sacraments normally required clerical involvement, the sacrament of marriage did not. Rather, it required two baptized persons, man and woman, to administer the sacrament to one another. When two baptized Christians

\(^{12}\) Ibid., 77. For the history of the definition of sacrament, see Michael G. Lawler, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Contemporary Sacramental Theology* (Omaha: Creighton University Press, 1995), 29-34.


\(^{14}\) Baptism was the hallmark of who could marry whom validly and legally. Even those who did not nominally identify as Christians, but were baptized, could enter into valid marriages. Marriages between orthodox Christians and heretics or between the faithful and the excommunicated were recognized as valid. However, a marriage between a baptized person and a Jew was not. Charles George Crump, *The Legacy of the Middle Ages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1932), 346.

\(^{15}\) For specific information on the sacraments, see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 2000).
agreed to marry, they would become the “ministers of the sacrament” – offering it to one another in their vows. While a priest generally witnessed the marriage, it was the couple who would formally administer the sacrament.

When the couple confers the sacrament to one another, God provides a channel through which grace would be bestowed upon the husband and wife. As a channel of grace, marriage would transform the relationship between a man and woman; it would provide divine help in marital and parental duties and welcome the couple into the universal church. If either husband or wife were not baptized, grace would not be conferred upon the couple and their marriage would not be sacramental and indissoluble.

Medieval canonists confirmed that the sacramental model of marriage left no room for the possibility of religious intermarriage between a baptized and a non-baptized person.

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This was considered a “diriment impediment,” the most stringent sort of impediment that prohibited this type of marriage and made any existing marriage of this kind null and void.\(^{18}\) In 339, the Emperor Constantine condemned marriages between Christians and idolaters; the penalty was death. As early as the Council of Elvira (303), the Church forbade religious intermarriage. Various Church councils throughout the Middle Ages repeated these prohibitions.\(^{19}\) By the twelfth century, canon law (not civil law) regulated marriage and from this point forward, canonists “accepted without question the rule that \textit{disparitas cultus} created what they termed an impedient [diriment] impediment to marriage.”\(^{20}\) When Gratian was systematizing various Church laws in his \textit{Decretum} (circa 1140), he included a list of nineteen canons that were related to the sexual and marital relationships between Christians and Jews. By 1234, the canon law collections included twenty-four statements on these matters.\(^{21}\)

\(^{18}\) The Church uses the word “impediment” to refer to all obstacles to marriage whether obstacles stemming from divine prohibitions or ecclesiastical and civil prohibitions. “Prohibitive” impediments may render a marriage illegal (against canon law) but still valid. However, “diriment” impediments render a marriage illegal and invalid. Diriment impediments are meant to protect the sacrament of marriage. Religious intermarriage between a baptized and a non-baptized person is a “diriment impediment.” \textit{Catholic Online}, s.v. “Disparity of Worship,” www.catholic.org, accessed 3 June 2010. Also see, \textit{Catholic Encyclopedia}, s.v. “Canonical Impediments,” www.newadvent.org, accessed 29 June 2010.


\(^{21}\) Ibid., 30-31. See Table 1: “Jewish-Christian Sexual Relations in Gratian’s \textit{Decretum}” and Table 2: “Jewish-Christian Sexual Relations in the \textit{Quinque Compilationes Antiquae} and the \textit{Liber Extra}.”
An overview of the general situation of Jewish communities in Christendom and the prohibitions against not only marriage, but general forms of interaction between Christians and Jews, illustrates the religious exclusivity of the time and the serious theological, legal, and social consequences of religious intermarriage. As I will illustrate later in this chapter, with the Reformation in the sixteenth century, the primary concerns over religious intermarriage shifted from Christian-Jewish marriages to Catholic-Protestant marriages.

Interaction between Jews and Christians was limited, with the exception of Spain and Southern France where Jews enjoyed greater freedom and interaction with their societies at large in the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth centuries. Generally, throughout Christendom, Jews lived in separate communities, often isolated from Christians. This was often voluntary on the part of Jews who sought “social convenience, physical security, and religious unity.” Jews did follow the state laws and often paid steep taxes. They were not often subject to local authorities, however. It was not uncommon for the Jewish community to have special arrangements with the king. The Jewish community would pay “liberally for a charter protecting its religious and economic rights” and the king would benefit from Jewish involvement in commerce and finance.

Medieval canonists “adopted as a basic element of their treatment of Jewish-Christian relations the proposition that canon-law jurisdiction, at least in some matters, extended over all non-Christians, including Jews.” For example, “Johannes Teutonicus (ca. 1170-1245/46)...

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23 Ibid., 374.

24 Ibid., 386-387.
explained in his authoritative *Glossa ordinaria* on the *Decretum* that the Church had the power to discipline non-Christians and could impose temporal [not spiritual] penalties upon them when they transgressed rules that Church authorities laid down.” Pope Innocent IV (1195-1254) supported this view, declaring that the Church had jurisdiction over Jewish religious practices.25

Canon law denied Jews the ability to hold public office. Additionally, there were many canons that were designed to prevent relationships between Jews and Christians. “The canons forbade Christians to bathe in the company of Jews, to consult Jewish physicians, or to take medicine compounded by a Jew. Likewise, Christian women were forbidden to nurse Jewish infants or to allow Jewish women to nurse their babies. The canons also warned Christians not to dine with Jews, consume food prepared by Jews, attend Jewish parties or celebrations, or invite Jews to their own festivities.” Jews could not “own Christian slaves, employ Christian servants in their houses, or even live in the same dwelling with a Christian. Converts from Judaism were forbidden to leave legacies to Jewish relatives or to have further contact with unconverted members of their families of origin.”26

Thirteenth-century Christendom was largely characterized by unadorned religious exclusivism, in theological and social terms. Men and women feared hell and most believed that heathens were damned. This was solidified for the Church during the Fourth Council of the Lateran in 1215 that confirmed that there was no salvation outside of the Church.27 The canon laws developed as a result of and after the Fourth Council of the Lateran were designed

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26 Ibid., 26-27.

to limit the interaction between Christians and non-Christians. One could speculate that the Church had fears regarding religious conversion and apostasy as well as concerns regarding impurity of rituals tainted by Jewish involvement. Jewish and Saracen (Muslim) men and women needed to wear a badge on their clothing when they were in public so that Christians would not mistake them for other Christians and have relations with them.\textsuperscript{28} When, in 1222 a deacon sought to convert to Judaism to marry a Jewess, he was burned at the stake.\textsuperscript{29} There were many restrictions on sexual relations between Christians and Jews. The Church was concerned that sexual relations between Christians and Jews would result in grave spiritual impurity; it would perilously displease God. There is also evidence that the Church’s fears regarding impurity also affected laws on Christians dining with and/or receiving medical treatment from Jewish people.\textsuperscript{30}

Despite these prohibitions, it was not until the Council of Trent (1545-1563), as a reaction to the Reformation and clandestine Catholic-Protestant marriages, that the Catholic Church required all weddings to take place in a Church.\textsuperscript{31} As a result, there were cases of Christians and Jews marrying secretly. If they were found out, however, there were often dire consequences, including excommunication, social isolation, and at worst, execution. The secular authorities, in service to the Church, treated religious intermarriage as a capital offense – in “aggravated or notorious cases, one or both of the parties could be burnt to

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{28} Brundage, \textit{Sex, Law, and Marriage in the Middle Ages}, 26-27; Durant, \textit{Age of Faith}, 387.
\item \textsuperscript{29} Durant, \textit{Age of Faith}, 387.
\item \textsuperscript{31} R.H. Helmholz, \textit{Marriage Litigation in Medieval England} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 27.
\end{itemize}
death.” This was not common, however. “Much more commonly, their marriages were pronounced void and they were forced to separate, unless the non-Christian partner promised to accept baptism.”

Until the sixteenth century, this model of Christian marriage dictated ecclesiastical and civil law throughout the West. The Church forbade Christians to marry Jews and anyone else who had not been baptized in the Church. This closed all doors to religious intermarriage.

The Lutheran Social Model – No Church Authority

In the sixteenth century, the Protestant Reformation erupted. For the next 131 years European wars challenged the civil and ecclesiastical authority of the Roman Catholic Church and inspired the development of numerous reformed Christian theologies. Marriage, an important institution to the church and the state, garnered considerable attention from the reformers. Martin Luther, John Calvin, and the English reformers developed new theologies of marriage and models of authority for overseeing the institution of marriage. To different extents, their theologies created the possibility of religious intermarriage for Protestant Christians. While religious intermarriage remained highly unlikely due to a lack of religious diversity in sixteenth and seventeenth-century Europe, the theological and legal reforms of this time opened new doors to religious intermarriage in future centuries, particularly in the United States where Protestantism dominated.

Martin Luther, a German priest and professor of theology, initiated the Reformation in 1517; he was excommunicated by the pope and condemned as an outlaw four years later. Luther rejected the idea that a human being could do anything to attain grace from God or

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32 Brundage, Sex, Law and Marriage in the Middle Ages, 28; Spickard, 165-167.
influence his or her salvation. While Luther’s initial dispute with the Church was over indulgences, or the claim by the Church that one could purchase their freedom from God’s punishment of sin, Luther challenged many aspects of Catholic theology, including the validity of canon law. “Luther started a revolution by addressing the question of ecclesiastical authority directly and in the most radical terms. He proclaimed the abolition of the ecclesiastical jurisdiction . . . and the validity of the canon law altogether.”

Secular rulers, ordained by God, made the laws, even the laws that influenced the legal, economic, political, and social affairs of the church. The Christian church was neither a law-maker, nor an enforcer of laws.

Luther challenged the Catholic Church’s sacramental theology of marriage and its theological and legal prohibitions against religious intermarriage. Because marriage was an earthly affair, not a sacrament, Luther could theologically accept religious intermarriage. His theology opened the door to civil marriage and the legal recognition of interreligious unions. An exposition of Luther’s marriage theology, and corresponding rejection of the sacramental model delineated in canon law, helps to explain his acceptance of Christian-non-Christian marriages. While other reformed theologies of marriage (Calvinist and Anglican) recede from his radical views on religious intermarriage, the lasting influence of Luther’s theology cannot be underestimated.


34 Berman, Faith and Order, 105.
Luther rejected the idea that marriage is a sacrament. He argued that while “God himself instituted it [the estate of marriage], brought husband and wife together, and ordained that they should beget children and care for them[,]” God made marriage a social institution, an earthly affair, to be overseen by civil, not ecclesiastical authorities. Accordingly, he saw no reason to prevent a marriage between a Christian and a Turk, a Jew, or a heretic. This social model was based upon a theology of two kingdoms, a theology not unrelated to that espoused by Augustine. In *City of God*, Augustine delineates that one kingdom is the earthly kingdom, governed by secular law; the second kingdom is the heavenly kingdom, governed only by the gospel and grace. Nonetheless, where the antagonist for Augustine was the pagan Roman state, for Luther it was “the medieval confusion of the two cities.” Heinrich Bornkamm, church historian of Heidelberg University, explains that for Luther, “the medieval confusion of the two cities results in an earthly city of God in the form of a church that is a legal and coercive institution and a state that is obliged to serve her and to persecute heretics.” To reconcile the medieval model with scripture and God’s intentions, Luther proposed a distinction between secular and spiritual powers. Luther effectively rejected the church-state model that was the result of the Papal Revolution. No longer was the “spiritual

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sword of the Church . . . to guide the secular authorities into the paths of truth and righteousness.” Luther insisted that the Church had no sword at all – it was purely a spiritual community. Hence, Luther rejected much of canon law and the Church’s restrictions on marriage.

Luther believed that marriage was part of the earthly kingdom and a gift from God to all people, and a foundation for society. It was an institution ordained by God, that sat outside the bounds of the church and the state, to “exemplify for a sinful society a community of love and cooperation . . .” However, for Luther, marriage was not a channel for grace, played no role in one’s salvation, and in no way required the oversight of complex canon law. The Catholic Church had a litany of restrictions on marriage outlined as impediments in canon law. These restrictions affected who could marry whom and also when a marriage could be annulled. Due to the indissolubility of marriage in the Catholic sacramental model, canon law did not allow divorce. Contrary to canon law, Luther sought to minimize the restrictions on marriage and divorce. Luther was interested in what scripture mandated and nothing more.

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38 Berman, Faith and Order, 87.

39 It is important to note, however, that Luther’s thinking later in his life “led to a contamination of the original distinction between the spiritual and worldly regiments.” This also affected his view of Jews and most likely his views on religious intermarriage. As church historian Christopher Strohm explains, “In his later years, Luther was also not able to see his fundamental earlier ideas become reality with regard to the Jews . . .” Christopher Strohm, “Calvin and Religious Tolerance,” in John Calvin’s Impact on Church and Society, 1509–2009, eds. Martin Ernst Hirzel and Martin Sallmann, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 181.

40 Witte, From Sacrament, 49.
In his three-part 1522 treatises, *The Estate of Marriage*, Luther 1) repudiates canonical impediments to marriage, 2) addresses divorce, and 3) purports the goods of marriage. The tone of his piece is evident in his introduction:

How I dread preaching on the estate of marriage! . . . The shameful confusion wrought by the accursed papal law has occasioned so much distress, and the lax authority of both the spiritual and the temporal swords has given rise to so many dreadful abuses and false situations, that I would much prefer neither to look into the matter nor to hear of it. But because timidity is no help in an emergency, I must proceed. I must try to instruct poor bewildered consciences, and take up the matter boldly.\(^{41}\)

In his refutation of the Pope’s “eighteen distinct reasons for preventing or dissolving a marriage,” Luther opens the theological door to religious intermarriage. In the passage below, Luther provides his reactions to the impediment of marriage to a non-believer:

The fifth impediment is unbelief; that is, I may not marry a Turk, a Jew, or a heretic. I marvel that the blasphemous tyrants are not in their hearts ashamed to place themselves in such direct contradiction to the clear text of Paul in I Corinthians 7 [:12-13], where he says, “If a heathen wife or husband consents to live with a Christian spouse, the Christian should not get a divorce.” And St. Peter, in I Peter 3 [:1], says that Christian wives should behave so well that they thereby convert their non-Christian husbands; as did Monica, the mother of St. Augustine.\(^{42}\)

Luther points to Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians to support his view that both entering into and also remaining in a marriage with a non-Christian is acceptable. Eeducing his two cities theology, Luther clarifies that marriage is an earthly affair:

Know therefore that marriage is an outward, bodily thing, like any other worldly undertaking. Just as I may eat, drink, sleep, walk, ride with, buy from, speak to, and deal with a heathen, Jew, Turk, or heretic, so I may also marry and continue in wedlock with him.\(^{43}\)

\(^{41}\) Martin Luther, *Estate of Marriage*, 147.

\(^{42}\) Ibid., 152.

\(^{43}\) Ibid., 152.
Luther’s belief that marriage was a “worldly undertaking” and his rejection that marriage was a sacrament opened the Christian theological door to religious intermarriage. However, Luther goes further in his account of why religious intermarriage to a heathen, Jew, Turk, or heretic is acceptable; all are God’s creatures. He continues as follows:

Pay no attention to the precepts of those fools who forbid it. You will find plenty of Christians – and indeed the greater part of them – who are worse in their secret unbelief than any Jew, heathen, Turk, or heretic. A heathen is just as much a man or a woman – God’s good creation – as St. Peter, St. Paul, and St. Lucy, not to speak of a slack and spurious Christian.  

Not only are Jews, heathens, Turks, and heretics “God’s good creation,” but believers and non-believers are bound together to do the work of preserving the world, according to Luther. Just as the secular and sacred cities are bound together by God, so too are believers and non-believers. The Golden Rule (Matt. 7:10) and God’s commandment to love one’s neighbor extended over all of humankind. A Christian’s duty to God is to work alongside non-believers to better the world. This betterment includes marriage. Those “who firmly believe that God himself instituted it [marriage] . . . can therefore also be certain that the estate of marriage and everything that goes with it in the way of conduct, works, and suffering is pleasing to God.”

It is the Christian’s duty to marry; it is not necessarily the Christian’s duty to marry another Christian.  

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44 Ibid., 152. In regards to this passage, it is helpful to note that for Luther, “the world and the masses are and always will be un-Christian, even if they are all baptized and Christian in name.” His contention was that true Christians “are few and far between (as the saying is).” Martin Luther, *Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed* (1523), from *Luther’s Works, American Edition*, 65 vols., trans. and eds. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehman (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955-1986), 45:91; quoted in Martin Luther’s *Basic Theological Writings*, 2d ed., ed. Timothy F. Lull, foreword by Jaroslav Pelikan (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 437.

45 Martin Luther, *Estate of Marriage*, 158.

46 Just as Luther’s clear distinctions between the spiritual and earthly spheres began to erode later in his life (see earlier footnote), so too did his apparent openness towards the Jews. In 1543
Luther held a conservative view of the role of parental authority in marriage, which mitigated, somewhat at least, his liberal theological view on religious intermarriage. Historically, the Catholic tradition did not encourage, but did allow for clandestine marriages. As long as two Christians voluntarily agreed to marriage and consummated their marriage through intercourse, their marriage would be recognized by the Church. Luther believed that clandestine marriage weakened parental authority and in the process, weakened the stability of society. This link between marriage and the stability of society would remain essential in Calvinist, English, and eventually American marriage models. While Luther did not believe that parents were given the authority to abuse their child or to compel their child to marry someone he or she did not love, he did require parental permission, public witnesses, and a public profession of the marriage vows. He wanted to ensure that marriages would

(twenty-one years after he wrote The Estate of Marriage), he expressed fiercely malevolent views toward the Jews. Most ecclesiastical and political authorities at the time did not follow through on his recommendations. In On The Jews and Their Lies (1543), Luther wrote the following: “Since they [the Jews] live among us, we dare not tolerate their conduct, now that we are aware of their lying and reviling and blaspheming. If we do, we become sharers in their lies, cursing, and blasphemy.” He goes on to suggest that their houses be destroyed, they be assigned to manual labor, and their synagogues be burned. He concludes this particular essay by clarifying that the Jews are “surely possessed by all devils.” Luther’s Works: American Edition, 65 vols., trans. and eds. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehman (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955-1986), 47:121-305; quoted in Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings, 2d ed., ed. Timothy F. Lull, foreword by Jaroslav Pelikan (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 25-32.

47 “It is particularly notable that no public ceremony was required to make a marriage valid and indissoluble. Such a ceremony, preceded by publication of banns, was necessary to render a marriage fully licit. The parties sinned by marrying without publication of banns and blessing by a priest. They rendered themselves liable to the spiritual penalties of penance. And the court records produce cases where men and women were punished for failing to secure solemnization, or at least ordered to do so under threat of ecclesiastical censure. But this failure did not affect the question of the validity of the marriage.” Helmholz, 27.

become part of the public order, integrated into the social structure of society.⁴⁹ James Turner Johnson, professor of religion and political science, explains the significance of involving parents and the public in the marriage:

The significance of this was to place marriage in the framework of God’s plan for government of the world, to link the sociality which should be the core of marriage to the sociality that is part of the larger society.⁵⁰

It is reasonable to deduce that by requiring parental consent, young men and women were discouraged from straying from their native religion. At the same time, by making marriage public, young men and women would be tying their social and perhaps political fate to their choice of a marriage partner. What this means is that even if a young German man or woman would meet a Jew or a Turk they wanted to marry (a highly unlikely scenario given the religious demographics at the time), social barriers to this type of religious intermarriage remained. Luther’s theology of marriage opened a door to the possibility of religious intermarriage; however, the likelihood of these types of marriages occurring would not increase until many centuries later, in an environment where theological, legal, and social circumstances allowed for it.

Luther’s social model of marriage was, in many ways, a severe reaction against the sacramental model. When we imagine Luther’s harsh and dramatic reaction to the Roman Catholic model of marriage and the canonists’ impediment to religious intermarriage, we would do well to picture a pendulum that has just been flung with brute force from one side to the other. Marriage was not to be regulated by the Church; it was to be regulated by civil

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⁵⁰ Johnson, “Marriage as Covenant in Early Protestant Thought,” 129.
authorities. Marriage to a heathen or a Turk was fine – perhaps even better to a Turk than to an unbelieving Christian. Luther did not just open the door to religious intermarriage; it is as if he came blazing right through the door with all his might. The Calvinist covenant model of marriage and the Anglican commonwealth model, both of which make their way across the Atlantic to America’s early communities, move us closer to a via media, somewhere between the sacramental and social models I described. The pendulum swings back and forth, borrowing from both Catholic and reform theology, to settle eventually somewhere in between. A review of Calvin’s approach to marriage and religious intermarriage, followed by a brief explanation of the Anglican situation, provides us with context for understanding the social and legal constraints on religious intermarriage that the early American colonists inherited, as well as the significance of separation of church and state.

The Calvinist Covenantal Model – Dual Church and State Authorities

John Calvin, leader of the reform movement in Geneva, was not as theologically liberal on the issue of religious intermarriage as Luther. He believed that these unions were spiritually perilous. However, Calvin agreed that there should be no civil laws preventing religious intermarriage. While Calvin and Luther shared the major theological tenets that defined the Reformation and differentiated Protestants from Catholics, they differed on their conception of the role of the church in law. For Luther, the church did not make laws or enforce them. Yet, for Calvin, the institutional churches did make laws that would regulate theological doctrines as well as the morality of the people in society. Unlike the Roman

51 Many early editions of Institutes of the Christian Religion, Calvin’s seminal text, focus on tolerance of other religions (i.e., opponents of the true religion). However, in later editions of Institutes, these references were removed. According to the analysis of Christoph Strohm, “[t]his is an
Catholic Church, however, Calvin conceived of local churches or congregations that would have the right to elect their own leaders and make their own laws. This model of Calvinism became highly influential throughout Switzerland, Scotland, Hungary, Germany, and other areas of Western Europe. Geneva became the unofficial capital of the reform movement. Calvinism also influenced English dissenters and America’s early Puritan and Congregationalist communities who dominated the Northeastern colonies. Many of the covenantal ideas on marriage espoused by Calvin and his disciples continue to inform many views of marriage in contemporary American society.

In the mid-sixteenth century Calvin and his fellow reformers were developing their own Christian theology of marriage and the corresponding civil laws. Like Luther, Calvin rejected the notion that marriage was a sacrament; it was not tied to one’s salvation. In “Of Marriage” in Calvin’s seminal work of Protestant systematic theology, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (published in Latin in 1536 and in French in 1541), he writes:

> Everyone admits that it [marriage] was instituted by God (Gen. 1:22-24; Matt. 19:4-6); but on the other hand no one had perceived that it was a sacrament until the time of Pope Gregory. What person of calm sense was it who took that into his head? Marriage is certainly a good and holy ordinance of God. So also are the tasks of

indication of how Calvin’s new responsibilities as a church leader – similarly to Luther – led to a problematic modification of the Reformation’s distinction between the tasks and means of the spiritual and worldly regiments.” In reaction to various threats that challenged what he deemed to be true religion, Calvin sought unity – this meant that “there was no room for plurality and individual religiosity.” Strohm, 183-185.

52 Berman, *Faith and Order*, 105.

agricultural laborers, masons, shoemakers, and barbers, which nevertheless are not sacraments.  

For Calvin, marriage was grounded in the biblical doctrine of covenant. His theology of marriage rests upon scriptural references to marriage as an abiding covenant between husband and wife, analogous to the covenant between God and his people. The authority of God in marriage is unmistakable in Calvin’s theology. Calvin wrote that “when a marriage takes place between a man and a woman, God presides . . . God is . . . the stipulator [of marriage] who by his authority joins the man to the woman, and sanctions the alliance.” The covenantal aspect of marriage involved not only the couple and God, but also the family and the community. More particularly, as chosen representatives of God, Calvin insisted that parents were to mentor and consent to the union, peers were to provide


witness to the sincerity of the marriage, ministers were to bless the union, and magistrates were to ensure the civil legality of the marriage. God would be present at the ceremony and participate through these representatives. Because of the strong link to both God and the community, all marriages, including religious intermarriages, had to happen publicly with these representatives and in a church.

God would also continually reveal his moral law to the married couple throughout their lives. God reveals the two types of moral law, according to Calvin. These two types of moral law informed Calvin’s views on religious intermarriage and the distinctive roles of civil courts versus ecclesiastical courts in regulating marriage. The first type of morality instills civil righteousness. It is accessible to all human beings and dictates civil morality for believers and non-believers alike. All human beings, “[e]ven the pagans,” understand how fidelity and procreation contribute to the well-being of a marriage. Only Christians, however, benefit from the second type of moral law that instills spiritual righteousness. This moral law enables even devout Christians, or saints as Calvin referred to them, “to learn more thoroughly . . . the Lord’s will [and] to be aroused to obedience.” For Christians the moral law not only enables them to follow the civil laws, but also to create a life and marriage that cultivates Christian love and values. This moral dualism informed Calvin’s understanding of religious intermarriage.

57 Comm. Lev. 19:29; Serm. Deut. 5:16; Comm. 1 Cor. 7:36, 38; Serm. 1 Cor. 7:36-38; Comm. Eph. 6:1-3.


60 Institutes (1559), book 2, chap. 7.12.
For Calvin, religious intermarriage was permissible, but for the Christian it posed significant dangers.\textsuperscript{61} He affirmed St. Paul’s call that a previously contracted religious intermarriage was not grounds for divorce; however, he was clear that a Christian-non-Christian marriage was deleterious in at least two ways. First, a Christian marriage is based upon emulating the love of Christ for his church; an unbeliever would bring profanity into the home and thus, not properly serve his or her spouse and effectively raise Christian children, for example.\textsuperscript{62} Second, once a believer is married to an unbeliever, he or she risks being tempted to stray from the true Christian religion. Calvin explains that in the Old Testament, in an effort to preserve the purity of the chosen people, God created a “wall of separation” (Eph. 2:14) between Jews and Gentiles. The coming of Jesus Christ, however, tore down this wall and diminished distinctions between God’s people. Recognizing this, Calvin insisted that this did not imply that Christian-non-Christian marriage was God’s intention. On the contrary, God commands that people are not to be “unequally yoked” (2 Cor. 6:14).\textsuperscript{63}

Calvin makes a distinction between interacting with nonbelievers in the activities of everyday life and interacting in intimate familial relationships. This is one of the key areas where Calvin and Luther differ. The latter, Calvin argues, “opens the door” to heresy. He writes:

As long as we live among unbelievers, we cannot escape those dealings with them which relate to the ordinary things of life. But if we get closer, so that a greater


\textsuperscript{62} Letter to Lelio Sozzini (June, 1549) in CO 13:307-308.

intimacy becomes necessary, we open the door as it were to Satan. Such are the alliances between kings and nations, and marriages between private persons. 64

To illustrate this point, Calvin elaborates further in an exegetical passage on Deuteronomy: “When one couples two oxen together, if one advances, the other must follow; if one pulls to the one side, the other must conform as well. So it is when one is on familiar terms with someone.”65 While not a sacrament, marriage between Christians enables one to live a Christian life. If one marries a non-Christian they are in danger of being led away from Christ.

Calvin would receive numerous letters asking about his views on religious intermarriage, seeking guidance on where the lines of acceptability should be drawn. There were degrees of peril associated with different types of religious intermarriages. One letter “ask[ed] whether a papist marriage should be no less avoided than a Turkish one.”66 While admitting that he does “not sufficiently grasp how far it [the validity of religious intermarriages by the church] extends,” he does write the following: “I would not dare to place those who inwardly retain the papal superstitions in which they were educated in the same class with the Turks.” Marriage between baptized persons is the lesser of two evils than marriage between a Christian and a non-Christian. In addition, Calvin argues that “[w]hoever deprives his children of baptism commits more than a double offence.”67 If one were to develop concentric circles, Calvin would place all Protestant denominations in the inner


circle, acceptable for marriage partners. Calvin himself married an Anabaptist. The next circle would include Catholics; marrying a Catholic is more dangerous than marrying a Protestant. However, because Catholics are baptized Christians, the peril is considerably less than marrying someone in the third circle, which would include Jews, Muslims, and other nonbelievers. The third circle, or the realm of those who are not baptized, creates the most severe problem for Calvin. He writes, “For the farther a person is from Christ, the more it behooves us to shrink from that person’s company.”

It is appropriate to pause here and reflect briefly on the long-term implications of Calvin’s answers to the letters he received on religious intermarriage. Here we see early examples of how Christians were defining and relating to the religious other. While the Catholic Church had required that all valid marriages be between Catholics, those baptized in the one true church, Calvin began to make relative distinctions between Christians – that is, between Protestants and Catholics, as well as between Christians and non-Christians. Through the medium of religious intermarriage, his theological perspectives on the boundaries between religions emerged.

As will become apparent later in this chapter, this process of shaping theological perspectives on the boundaries between religions, through the medium of religious intermarriage, continues through the centuries. Nineteenth-century American Catholic and Jewish immigrant communities wrestled with religious intermarriage and in the process worked through varying theological perspectives on the boundaries between their religion and others. As with the situation in Calvin’s Geneva, as laity experiment with religious intermarriages, they challenge their religious authorities to reflect upon the theological

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relationships between communities. Twentieth-century reforms by Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish authorities reflected a shift in earlier boundaries established by the traditions. In a symbiotic way, religious authorities and the men and women of different religions who fall in love, push and pull one another to reshape and move the lines that once separated religious groups. This theme reoccurs throughout history, taking on different forms depending on the structure and nature of religious authority.

Luther and Calvin differed on who had authority over marriage. While Luther saw the oversight of marriage by civil authorities, Calvin had a strong role for ecclesiastical governance. In this way, his theological views on marriage and views on the relative dangers of other religions influenced early Protestant thought. The Consistory (the spiritual authority) and the Small Council (the civil authority) shared control over marriage. When an issue with a marriage would occur, the Consistory held original jurisdiction. The Consistory provided religious validation for the marriage; the Small Council granted marriage licenses and dealt with criminal issues and civil disputes including adultery, divorce, and annulment.

69 For a comparison of the views on the church and law for these reformers, see William A. Mueller, *Church and State in Luther and Calvin: A Comparative Study* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1954).

70 Robert M. Kingdon, *Adultery and Divorce in Calvin’s Geneva* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 16. The *Ecclesiastical Ordinance* established this framework and the relationship between the Consistory and the Small Council. Unlike the Roman Catholic Church model of ecclesiastical authority over civil matters in marriage, the Consistory was limited to dealing with spiritual issues alone. Marriage was not solely a spiritual matter; it was “mixed up with politics” as well, according to the *Ordinance*. Jean-François Bergier and Robert M. Kingdon, eds., *Registres de la compagnie des pasteurs de Genève au temps de Calvin*, 2 vols. (Geneva: Droz, 1964), 1:9-13; quoted in Witte, *From Sacrament*, 82.
The Consistory had the power to excommunicate.\textsuperscript{71} While religious intermarriages were civilly legal, a significant shift from the Catholic position, to be part of the church and have one’s marriage recognized by religious authorities was paramount.\textsuperscript{72} To be excommunicated from the church by the Consistory held not only significant religious, but also social and political implications for a citizen; one’s church community was also his or her political and social community.\textsuperscript{73} While two people from different religions could civilly or legally marry, it remained important to them that the church validate and not annul their marriage. Despite the essential link to Christianity contained in Calvin’s covenant model of marriage, he interpreted scripture to affirm that Consistory \textit{did not} have the power to annul an engagement or marriage between a man and a woman from different religious traditions.

In one case, the Consistory denied communion to a woman who was engaged to marry a man from another city – a “papist” city. The woman was “admonished as to whether she . . . [was] going into idolatry without regret” and “she answered yes.” The Consistory also denied communion to her father and mother who were involved in engaging their daughter to this man. The Consistory decided that to marry a Catholic was “against God and reason and against the commandment of God.” The Consistory sent the case to the secular authority, the Small Council, for a review of criminal charges. The Council determined that

\textsuperscript{71} Excommunication was controversial in Protestant communities due to the association with Roman Catholic courts. For details on this controversy, see Kingdon, \textit{Adultery and Divorce}, 18-30.

\textsuperscript{72} Witte and Kingdon, 355.

\textsuperscript{73} Kingdon, \textit{Adultery and Divorce}, 18.
while the marriage between this woman and the papist was “against religion,” the couple should “do as they please.”

As seen in Calvin’s responses to letters asking for theological direction on religious intermarriages, the Consistory evaluated each case differently, and in their rulings provided strong scriptural and theological rationale for dissuading these marriages. However, they recognized that they could not absolutely prevent marriages between Protestants and Catholics or even Protestants and non-baptized persons. The Consistory followed the direction of St. Paul – once a marriage was contracted, the Consistory advised Protestant spouses to remain in marriages with an unbeliever. Despite the perilous road a Christian goes down when marrying a non-believer, Calvin reflected that “the piety of the one [believer] has more effect in sanctifying marriage than the impiety of the other [non-believer] in polluting it.”

While Calvin’s covenantal view of marriage put religious intermarriage in a much harsher (and ill-advised) light than what we understand from Luther, he kept the theological and legal doors to religious intermarriage open. He rejected the idea that marriage was sacramental, that faith was a prerequisite for a valid marriage, or that ecclesiastical advisors had sole authority over marriage. His covenantal view of marriage provided strong rationale for the disadvantages of marrying someone who was not a part of the Christian community, would not be able to partake in a Christian marriage, and was not privy to the spiritual

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morality that God shared with his elect. However, a Christian-non-Christian marriage that took place in a church with the proper public witnesses and representatives of God present was a marriage that neither civil nor spiritual authorities could prevent or annul.

**Anglican Commonwealth Model – One Church-State Authority**

The sixteenth-century English reformers adopted theological and legal restrictions to religious intermarriage that closely resembled the canons of the Catholic Church. Many of the American colonies inherited these restrictions. However, seventeenth-century Enlightenment ideas by English philosopher John Locke and others would challenge the Anglican establishment and have a profound influence on America’s founders, paving the way for religious liberty and correspondingly, the freedom to intermarry in the United States. An understanding of the English model of marriage, restrictions on religious intermarriage, and the church-state authority over marriage put the American developments into context.

The English Reformation took a different form from the continental reformation led by Luther and Calvin and their disciples. The early-sixteenth-century break with the Roman Catholic Church came after the reign of King Henry VIII who sought to annul his marriage with Catherine of Aragon; the Catholic Church denied his annulment. While the Church of England disassociated with papal rule and made the King the head of the Church and in charge of all reforms, it retained many of the Catholic traditions that Luther and Calvin had rejected.

English law declared that marriage was not a sacrament, but it included a list of impediments to marriage similar to that used by the Catholic Church, including the
impediment against religious intermarriage.\textsuperscript{76} In 1552 English reformers presented the
Reformation of Ecclesiastical Law to Parliament that included many alternative laws on
marriage that could be traced to Lutheran and Calvinist antecedents. For example, the
reformers expressed ideas that are similar to Calvin’s in their commentary on religious
intermarriage. In the chapter titled “Concerning Matrimony” they write:

With those who are not of the Christian faith, marriage to Christians is not to be
arranged. For since it is proper for Christian children to be brought up in the
Christian Faith, there is great anxiety that that could not happen unless both parents
are Christians. But if it happens that those who are already husband and wife are of
different religions, these persons are not to be heedlessly separated, but they are to
keep together for as long a time, in harmony with the doctrine of Paul with respect to
Christian charity, as the person who is of a foreign religion will continue living and
cohabiting with the other one.\textsuperscript{77}

In the final chapter of their commentary titled “Concerning Degrees Prohibited in Marriage,”
the reformers present a liberal stance on religious intermarriages that went beyond Calvin’s
views. They sought to allow couples with varying “spiritual associations” to marry.

Since a spiritual association, as it is commonly called, is not introduced in the sacred
Scriptures, and is not supported by any sound and stable principles, it ought not to
impede at all the course of marriage.\textsuperscript{78}

In referring to spiritual associations, these English reformers introduced a type of religiosity
that would become increasingly relevant for understanding contemporary, twenty-first-
century conceptions of religious intermarriage. This will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Ultimately, Parliament did not approve the Reformation of Ecclesiastical Law.
Instead they retained many of the medieval canon laws and made the liturgical Book of

\textsuperscript{76} Milton L. Barron, People Who Intermarry (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1946), 42.


\textsuperscript{78} Spalding, 99.
Common Prayer established law. The Book of Common Prayer defined Anglican marriage theology – it described marriage as “an honorable estate, instituted of God . . . signifying unto us the mystical union, that is betwixt Christ and his Church.” Marriage was to be for procreation, remedy against sin, and the comfort and help that is brought by companionship. All churches were required to use the Book of Common Prayer; dissenters were persecuted. These laws included prohibitions against marrying a non-Christian. Marriages to Jews or Muslims were annulled by the Church, and by the mid-seventeenth century the Church of England added Roman Catholics to the list of “idolaters” to whom the English were forbidden to marry.

English law had provided narrow exceptions for validating private or clandestine marriages. However, these exceptions had been widely taken advantage of and by the mid-eighteenth century, clandestine marriages had become a significant problem in England. This prompted the ratification of the 1753 Parliamentary Act for the Better Preventing of Clandestine Marriage. This law definitively stated that all valid marriages in England


required an Anglican religious ceremony with the Anglican liturgy and an Anglican priest. Banns had to be published before the marriage, solidifying the public nature of the event. Jews and Quakers were the only exceptions; they could have their own marriage ceremonies. All others had to be married publicly as Anglicans for their marriage to be recognized; otherwise, their marriages were made null and void. In England and in English colonies in America, this law aroused protests from those dissenters “who objected to being married in an Anglican Church and by an Anglican clergyman.”

Because the Church of England was the established church of England, it held authority over both religious and civil realms of society. Marriage was integral to all of English society; its religious foundation could not be distinguished from its civic importance. The seventeenth-century Anglo-Catholics and Anglo-Puritans (who adopted Calvinist reform ideas) agreed that marriage was a microcosm of the broader society. The hierarchical relationship between husband and wife mirrored the relationship between the King and the commonwealth, analogous to the relationship between Jesus Christ and the church and also Adam and Eve. The stability of English society was dependent upon order in families; without the latter, the former would disintegrate. This English commonwealth model of marriage was a reflection of both the Catholic sacramental and Calvinist covenantal models, while adding a strong social and political dimension. Marriage represented the mysterious

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union of Christ and his church, a covenant between husband and wife and God, and a
covenant between “the Church of England and the Commonwealth of England.”

The symbiotic religious-civil purpose of marriage helped to justify many of the
theological and legal precepts, particularly regarding prohibitions against clandestine
marriages and divorce. The marriage covenant as a representative of the covenant between
the Church and the Commonwealth provided important rationale for requiring marriages to
be made public and take place in the Church of England. By definition, a marriage was for
the public and was not a private affair. A husband’s authority over his wife and their
authority over children and slaves mirrored the hierarchy of English society. The family
would be foundational for the health and well-being of public life. The association between
marriage and society also formed the basis of the rationale used to explain the prohibition of
divorce, a topic that created continual controversy in England. In the Catholic Church
marriage was a sacrament and therefore divorce was not possible. However, the Church of
England had determined that marriage was not a sacrament, yet they too rejected divorce.
Bishop Lancelot Andrewes (1555-1626) expresses his views on the deleteriousness of divorce
in Against Second Marriage After Sentence of Divorce with a Former Match, the Party Then

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84 Susan Dwyer Amussen addresses the practical reasons for this model in An Ordered
John Witte Jr. addresses the theological reasons through analysis of sixteenth and seventeenth-century
writings by English theologians including, but not limited to, Thomas Becon, Martin Bucer, William
For an analysis of the debate royalists and parliamentarians had on the interrelationship between the
hierarchy of marriage and the social structure of England, see Mary Lyndon Shanley, “Marriage
Contract and Social Contract in Seventeenth Century English Political Thought,” The Western

85 For details on this controversy, see Stone, 139-366.
Living (c. 1610). He says that divorce is “against nature,” “against church,” “against commonwealth,” and “against the whole state of mankind.”

The debate over divorce was not wholly distinct from the issue of religious intermarriage. In the mid-seventeenth century, John Milton (1608-1674), the English poet, pleaded with Parliament to reconsider its stance on divorce. He did not desire to overturn the traditional purposes of an English Christian marriage. However, he did aim to refine it to better serve English families and communities. One important reform he advocated was for divorce if a husband and wife adopted discordant religious views. He argued that a Christian marriage required harmony between two people and essential to this harmony was a common Christian faith. Without it, both the marriage and the effect on the community would be tarnished. For Milton, a man married to “an Idolatresse” would “alienate his heart from the true worship of God.” Milton elaborates on this point as follows:

. . . and what difference is there whether she pervert him to superstition by her enticing sorcery, or disenable him in the whole service of God through the disturbance of her unhelpful and unfit society, and so drive him at last through murmuring and despair to thoughts of Atheism.

It is the pernicious nature of a Christian being bound to a non-Christian that most concerns Milton. However, “in those marriages where the parties are alike void of Religion,” they have a civil marriage and the husband and wife owe civil duties to one another. Milton goes to great lengths to minimize St. Paul’s command not to divorce an unbeliever (1 Cor. 7:12-

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13). Milton argues that “where the yoke is mis-yok’t, heretick with faithful,” the Christian, in order to remain Christian, must divorce.\textsuperscript{88}

Soon after Milton’s contestations, there was a brief, but important, period in English history when a new government authority challenged not only divorce and religious intermarriage, but also the commonwealth model of marriage altogether. During this time, the Church of England did not play a role in marriage.\textsuperscript{89} It was during this period that writers were developing their own ideas on the liberalization of religion and marriage in society. Many of these ideas would become integral to certain conceptions of marriage in America, opening doors to religious intermarriage. In describing the commonwealth model of marriage in England, I have used the term “commonwealth” fairly broadly to refer to English society and to emphasize the primary focus on the institution of marriage.\textsuperscript{90} However, the Commonwealth of England also refers to a specific period in history, from 1649 to 1660, after the English Civil War and the execution of Charles I, and before the Restoration period when the monarchies of England, Scotland, and Ireland were restored under Charles II. For seven of these years, from 1653 to 1660, Oliver Cromwell ruled England. During this time the Church of England was denied jurisdiction over many areas of public life, including marriage. Local justices of the peace oversaw the licensing of marriages and marriage-

\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., 2:291-592.
\textsuperscript{90} Witte, From Sacrament, 8.
related disputes. When Charles II restored the monarchy, he made it law that these marriages were to be recognized as valid even though they lacked “any religious solemnization.”

During this brief time, there was a flurry of experimentation with marriage custom and law. The Restoration dismissed the vast majority of this experimentation; however, “it was prescient of later legal developments and indicative of some of the customs of the English countryside and of the colonies.” No longer concerned with censorship, English writers composed ideal marriage scenarios that were freed from the bounds of class and religion. The leader of one of England’s dissenting sects, Gerrard Winstanley of the Diggers, described his vision of marriage as follows: “every man and every woman shall have the free liberty to marry whom they love, if they can obtain the love and liking of that party whom they would marry. And neither birth nor portion shall hinder the match, for we are all of one family, mankind.” Ideas on marrying for love, not for familial compatibility or property ownership rights, were conjoined with visions of polygamous utopian societies, equal rights for the sexes, and new contractual ideas about marriage. “The sexual revolution . . . meant replacing property marriage (with love outside marriage) by a monogamous partnership, ostensibly based on mutual love . . .” The liberal views of marriage rejected traditional views that prohibited religious intermarriage.

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92 Witte, *From Sacrament*, 177.

93 Hill, 252.

94 Ibid., 247, 253-260.
The notion of marriage as an earthly affair harkens back to Luther’s social model of marriage; conjoining the civil nature of marriage with ideas of love and liberty raised Enlightenment ideals that would eventually infiltrate the American mindset about marriage. John Locke (1632-1704) introduced a liberal-Christian conception of marriage that was not based upon “free love” but on the social contract. He published his *Two Treatises on Government* just a decade after the Glorious Revolution (1688) which began the reign of William and Mary. William and Mary ushered in new reforms including the Bill of Rights and the Toleration Act. These reforms provided numerous religious freedoms, one of which provided select dissenter communities (e.g., Congregationalists, Baptists, Presbyterians, and Quakers) with the right to license marriages.\(^{95}\) Locke’s political theory refuted the traditional commonwealth model of marriage that made the hierarchical relationship between Adam and Eve reflective of the hierarchy of English society – the King over his people, the husband over his wife. For Locke, the story of Adam and Eve reflected the idea that men and women were born free and equal into a state of nature.\(^{96}\) By voluntarily agreeing to a social contract, men and women move from a purely natural state to a state where they have both natural rights as well as social obligations. One’s agreement to a certain social contract is not

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determined by one’s parents or one’s church, people decide for themselves to which society they want to belong.\textsuperscript{97}

The Lockean interpretation of marriage, as understood through the biblical story of Adam and Eve, provides a foundation for separating the institution of marriage not only from religious authority, but also from state authority. Locke interprets the biblical story of Adam and Eve to reveal that the first society that man and woman chose was the society of marriage. In marriage two people voluntarily agreed to a social contract with one another. They moved from a state of nature into a social state when they agreed to marry one another. The terms of the marriage contract, together with the individual’s natural rights, came before their social contract with their church, their state, or other societal organizations. Locke writes:

\begin{quote}
The first Society was between Man and Wife, which gave beginning to that between Parents and Children . . . Master and Servant . . . And though all these might, and commonly did meet together, and make up but one Family . . . each of these, or all together came short of Political Society, as we shall see, if we consider the different Ends, Tyes, and Bounds of each of these.\textsuperscript{98}
\end{quote}

For Locke, the role of the Commonwealth or the Church of England is limited to protecting the agreement that is voluntarily entered into by husband and wife. This naturalist and contractual model of marriage not only challenged the hierarchical structure of the English commonwealth, it also challenged the notion that any authority, God, Church, state, society,

\textsuperscript{97} Locke writes, “For every Man’s Children being by Nature as free as himself, or any of his Ancestors ever were, may, whilst they are in that Freedom, choose what Society they will join themselves to, what Common-wealth they will put themselves under.” Locke, \textit{Two Treatises}, II:73. For further analysis see A. John Simmons, \textit{The Lockean Theory of Rights}, 216-221.

\textsuperscript{98} Locke, \textit{Two Treatises}, II:77.
could govern marriage.\textsuperscript{99} While Locke does not extend his ideas to the topic of religious intermarriage, his influential ideas regarding authority over the institution of marriage in society are a precursor to what unfolds on American soil. The shifting place of marriage in society from a public realm where the state and church, or Commonwealth and the Church of England, oversee marriage, to a private sphere where a man and woman agree to their own conditions for marriage, slowly emerges and becomes somewhat normative by the late-twentieth century.

Many American founders were influenced by Enlightenment ideals of Locke.\textsuperscript{100} They used Locke to define the social contract, protect inalienable rights, and advocate not only religious toleration, but full religious liberty of conscience. His influence on political theory and the shaping of government would come to fruition in the late-eighteenth century. The liberal ideals of marriage as based on love and liberty became woven into the American fabric as tightly as the more conservative Calvinist-Puritanical vision of marriage as Christian and covenantal. The liberal ideals helped to disestablish the church from the state and open the legal doors to religious intermarriage in America; the conservative ideals by the early Protestant majorities helped to perpetuate a \textit{de facto} Christian establishment that would hinder, but not necessarily prevent, the social possibilities for such unions.

\textsuperscript{99} Locke was perhaps influenced by Grotius’ “impious hypothesis.” For an explanation and analysis of this, see Brian Tierney, \textit{The Idea of Natural Rights: Studies on Natural Rights, Natural Law and Church Law 1150-1652} (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 319.

\textsuperscript{100} There has been a scholarly debate on the influence of Locke in the United States. For an analysis of different views and a compelling argument as to how “the British colonists . . . were living the Lockean Enlightenment as a matter of daily experience,” see Jerome Huyler, \textit{Locke in America: The Moral Philosophy of the Founding Era} (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 208.
Disestablishment in the United States – Minimal State Authority

Marriage in colonial America was an outgrowth of the English tradition. The Anglican commonwealth model was prevalent in Virginia, Maryland, and other southern colonies. The seventeenth-century Puritans adapted a version of the Calvinist covenant model that lived on in New England Congregationalist communities. All the while, Enlightenment ideas were infiltrating early intellectual thought on religious liberty and marriage. By the late-eighteenth century, the American states had won their freedom from Britain. In the ensuing years, the federal government and each state would go on to disestablish its state church and free the institution of marriage from any particular Christian denomination.\(^{101}\) Disestablishment meant that religious intermarriage became viable, at least for most free whites.\(^{102}\)

Locke’s political theory is evident in the Declaration of Independence and leading intellectual voices on religious disestablishment in post-Revolutionary Virginia.\(^{103}\)


\(^{102}\) Native Americans, blacks, and Asians would continue to face racial restrictions on intermarriage. For Catholic and Jewish immigrants, disestablishment opened the legal door to religious intermarriage but did nothing to open the social door. As I will discuss in the next chapter, a *de facto* Protestant-Christian establishment dominated America’s civil religion well into the twentieth century.

decade-long debate over how to fund the Anglican churches that were disenfranchised after the Revolutionary War, Virginia became the first state to disestablish. In the religious liberty debates leading up to disestablishment, James Madison’s *Memorial & Remonstrance* proved vital to bridging the interests of dissenter communities who sought religious freedom from Anglican civil magistrates and the interests of Enlightenment-influenced rationalist elites who hoped to shape a new government free from the influences of religious powers. In his plea to remonstrate against a proposed bill to fund Christian churches, Madison argues that not only is government perverted by religious influence, but also, the Christian religion is perverted by government influence. He writes:

We remonstrate against the said Bill . . . Because the Bill implies either that the Civil Magistrate is a competent Judge of Religious Truth; or that he may employ Religion as an engine of Civil policy. The first is an arrogant pretension falsified by the contradictory opinions of Rulers in all ages, and throughout the world: the second an unhallowed perversion of the means of salvation. . . . Religion [Christianity] both existed and flourished, not only without the support of human laws, but in spite of every opposition from them, and not only during the period of miraculous aid, but long after it had been left to its own evidence and the ordinary care of Providence.\textsuperscript{104}

In 1786, Virginia disestablished the Anglican-Episcopal church. Virginia became the vanguard for a broader movement toward disestablishment and constitutional guarantees of religious liberty at the federal and state levels. In 1789 the states ratified the Bill of Rights, the first ten amendments to the United States Constitution. The First Amendment contained what has become known as the “establishment clause” and the “free exercise clause.” It reads:

*Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof;* or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the

\textsuperscript{104} Alley, 31.
right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.\textsuperscript{105}

Initially the First Amendment only applied to the national government. However, in the mid-twentieth century the due process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment made this law applicable to state and local governments. In the ensuing fifty years after the disestablishment of the church in Virginia and the ratification of the First Amendment, the remaining states disestablished their state churches.

The disestablishment of state churches in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries opened the legal door to religious intermarriage in the United States. By law, states were prohibited from passing laws that “respected” or privileged one religion over another or gave greater civil rights to one religious group over another. As a consequence, civil marriages between men and women of different religions would be recognized by the government. By the same token, religious communities were free to set limits on the types of marriages they would recognize. However, because of disestablishment, these religious communities had no way to enforce legally their theological pronouncements. While there would be social and sometimes political consequences for intermarriage, there were no longer legal consequences.\textsuperscript{106}

\textsuperscript{105} Emphasis mine. Ronald D. Rotunda, ed., Modern Constitutional Law Cases and Notes, 7\textsuperscript{th} ed. (St. Paul, MN: Thomson West, 2003), lxiv.

\textsuperscript{106} For example, for Jewish communities, marriage and divorce had historically fallen under the jurisdiction of Jewish law; as I have mentioned, it was not uncommon in medieval Europe for Jews to have arrangements where they could escape canonical and other civil laws. However, in the United States, with disestablishment, marriage and divorce laws came under the domain of the state. While the Jewish community had severe penalties for religious intermarriage, these penalties were not enforced civilly. Michael S. Berger, “Judaism,” in Sex, Marriage, and Family in World Religions, eds. Don S. Browning, M. Christian Green, and John Witte Jr. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 66.
The freedom to marry inter-religiously eventually extended to all the states. In the Roman Catholic Spanish colonies of Louisiana and Florida, for example, the Catholic sacramental model prevailed. Religious intermarriage was not permitted in these colonies. However, when the United States acquired these territories, in 1803 and 1819 respectively, and they achieved statehood, marriage laws were changed and canonical impediments to religious intermarriage as well as divorce and remarriage were revised. Legal scholar Hans W. Baade explains this as follows:

Spanish and Mexican law[,] as to the formal validity of marriages[,] failed to make any significant and lasting positive contribution to secular American marriage law. This was so because . . . [Spanish-Catholic laws] discriminated against those who were not in communion with Rome. As such, it was simply incompatible with the constitutional order of a secular republic and with the political aspirations of a pluralist society in which non-Roman Catholics, although divided into many creeds, nevertheless constituted a solid majority. As a general rule, therefore, the Spanish . . . law governing the formal validity of marriages was quickly replaced by the typically “American” system of alternative civil or ecclesiastical form, the latter including all faiths equally.\textsuperscript{107}

Disestablishment not only meant the legality of religious intermarriage, it also paved the way for the increased possibility of theological and social acceptance of religious intermarriage. In the West, marriage had moved from the church (Catholic sacramental model) to the state (Lutheran social model) to both the church and state (Calvinist covenant and Anglican commonwealth models). With disestablishment, marriage was no longer fully under the control of the church, as there was no more “church,” only churches and denominations; nor was marriage under the control of the state, as the state only set minimal religious regulations on marriage, most of which were positioned as racial rather than

religious. This left Americans to choose freely their own religious and/or non-religious marriage practices.

Disestablishment facilitated three important and interrelated developments in the American religious landscape which directly affected the evolving character of the institution of marriage and the nature of religious intermarriages. The first development was differentiation of the religious and secular spheres and the increasing importance of the arena of civil society. Disestablishment in the United States was part of a broader modern movement that led to the differentiation of the religious and secular spheres of society. Secular arenas including the state, the market, and science, were slowly emancipated from religious control. Differentiation brought on numerous theories of secularization that posited that religion, now separate from the state and market, would become privatized and eventually fade.

Contemporary theories of secularization uphold the differentiation thesis, but challenge ideas of privatization and the decline of religion, posing a much more complex relationship between the religious and the secular spheres and the public and the private realms of society. For the most part, this complex relationship takes place in a sphere of society that straddles and blends both secular and religious arenas – civil society. In the late-twentieth century, American theologian and Jesuit John Courtney Murray helped move the Roman Catholic Church toward religious liberty by emphasizing the important place of

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Civil society in the Catholic Church’s understanding of where religious authority lies in a nation without an established religion. He argued that the Church was well suited to rely on the Catholic laity and the process of dialogue to influence the mores of society, rather than the strong-hand of the state or an established church. In this realm of civil society, people of different religious backgrounds work to harmonize (concordia) their spiritual and civic lives. In civil society, an arena related but distinguished from the realm of the state and the realm of political parties, religious groups are free to play a strong role in society.\(^{111}\)

Civil society is the arena of America’s ‘civil religion.’ Civil religion is not a defined concept; rather, it is a scholarly category that will allow me to describe the overall tenor of religion in American society through different phases of history. In 1951, sociologist Robin M. Williams described the idea of a “common religion” to provide “an overarching sense of unity even in a society riddled with conflicts.”\(^{112}\) In 1955, William Herberg called this common religion, “the American Way of Life.”\(^{113}\) In 1967, sociologist Robert Bellah defined “American civil religion” as “a genuine apprehension of universal and transcendent religious reality as seen in or, one could almost say, as revealed through the experience of the American people.”\(^{114}\) This apprehension is not defined by the state, as it is in Jean Jacques


\(^{112}\) Robin M. Williams, American Society: A Sociological Interpretation (Knoph, 1951), 312.


Rousseau’s earlier description of civil religion in France. Nor is the American civil religion defined by any church or group of religious authorities. Bellah clarifies that “there actually exists alongside of and rather clearly differentiated from the churches an elaborate and well-institutionalized civil religion in America.” Because American civil religion is defined through the experiences of the American people, it moves and shifts as the experiences of the American people move and shift. As I will explore in the next two chapters, the shifting nature of religious intermarriage, both in the types of unions formed and the acceptability of those unions, is not unrelated to the shifting nature of American civil religion.

The second consequence of disestablishment was religious diversity. Because no church or religious group is privileged by the state, there was an opportunity for many different religious groups to live side-by-side in America. This religious diversity manifested itself in three forms. One form of religious diversity was denominationalism. American religion was responsible for creating this new social form of religion. A denomination is “a church that recognizes the right of other churches to exist, be it de jure or de facto.” The model of an established ‘church’ with ‘sects’ that break away from the established church, was no longer a relevant model in the United States. Early in American history, through the

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115 Rousseau described the need for and requirements of a civil religion. This civil religion would make citizens moral and dutiful. The sovereign, the state itself, would be the one to determine the articles of civil profession of faith. The articles of civil profession, according to Rousseau, needed to be belief in the divinity, the life to come, happiness, punishment, the social contract, and tolerance. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, On Social Contract or Principles of Political Right (1762), in Alan and Julia Conaway Bondanella, eds., Rousseau’s Political Writings, trans. by Julia Conaway Bondanella (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1988), 172.

First and Second Great Awakenings, in the mid-eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries respectively, Protestant religious groups splintered and multiplied into various denominations. Denominationalism has spread to other American religious communities as well.

Another form of religious diversity came through multiple waves of immigration. Jewish and Catholic immigrants streamed to America’s shores in the nineteenth century. Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and Hispanic Catholic immigrants have continued to come to America in large numbers since the late-twentieth century. Because there is no established religion in America, immigrant communities are able to bring their diverse ethnic and religious practices to their lives in America. A final form of religious diversity was the growth of new religious movements. Some of these movements have emerged organically out of the American religious landscape and existing denominations and others have been imported from Eastern traditions and transformed to match the American ethos. Disestablishment enabled these different forms of religious diversity. The scope of this diversity has grown considerably, directly affecting the types of religious intermarriages that have formed in America throughout the centuries.

The third development that resulted from disestablishment was religious choice. No longer bound to the established religion and exposed to expanding religious alternatives, American religion transformed into a consumer marketplace. Individuals and families were free to change their religion, their religious denomination, and/or disaffiliate from religion altogether. Because Americans have the liberty of choice, religious traditions have had to

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117 For detailed analyses on new religious movements, see George D. Chryssides and Margaret Z. Wilkins, eds., *A Reader in New Religious Movements* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006).
compete for congregants. Congregants can choose to leave their religious community if they are unsatisfied or if they find more spiritual meaning or social reward in a different community. No longer is a religious group able to take for granted its authority and influence in the lives of community members. In the nineteenth century, religious leaders, particularly from evangelical denominations, strove to convert as many Americans as possible to their brand of Protestantism. However, in the twenty-first century, often religious leaders from different traditions are unified in their common battle against disaffiliation and disinterest in religion.

While religious authorities have been challenged by disestablishment, they have also been rewarded. As early as 1833, when the last state disestablished their state church, historian John M. Murrin argues that “even most clergymen considered the transformation [to disestablishment] a good thing. They believed that volunteeristic religion produced healthier varieties of Christian commitment than any form of state support could generate.”

Sociologists studying secularization in America versus Europe often attribute the religiosity of Americans (measured through attendance at church and frequency of prayer) to disestablishment and the volunteer nature of religion. Choice in religion has had a profound effect on religious intermarriage in America. Theological prohibitions on religious intermarriage would no longer be civilly recognized or enforced, ultimately freeing individuals to marry outside their churches and/or in defiance of the boundaries for marriage established by religious authorities.

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CHAPTER III

AN ERA OF INTRA-RELIGIOUS MARRIAGE
Societal Doors Begin to Open in the Nineteenth Century

“Flesh of thy flesh, bone of thy bone, I here, thou there, yet both but one.”
Anne Bradstreet

The American religious landscape is characterized by movement. Religious communities change, they play different roles in shaping American public life, and their relationships with other religious communities transform over time. The institution of marriage in America is also dynamic; because it lives between the secular realm where it is legalized by the state and the sectarian realm where it is celebrated and validated by one’s religious community, the nature of the institution moves as the religiosity and secularity of American life transforms. Because there are relatively few government restrictions on religious intermarriage and because Americans are not legally bound to follow one religion or abide by its laws and doctrines since disestablishment, the possibility, acceptability, and essentiality of religious intermarriage in post-colonial America have been most strongly shaped by developments in the realm of American civil society. I examine these developments in this chapter and the next.

In the United States, the taboo-nature of religious intermarriage has diminished. However, despite the theological and legal doors that were opened by the Protestant reformers and disestablishmentarians, religious intermarriage remained rare in nineteenth-

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1 Anne Bradstreet (1612-1672) was an English-American poet. This quotation is from “A Letter to her husband, absent upon publick employment.” Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson, The Puritans (New York: American Book Company, 1938), 573.
century America. Religious leaders and sociologists historically referred to religious intermarriage as “undesirable deviant” behavior. Yet, by the mid-twentieth century, intermarriage, among Protestants, Catholics, and Jews at least, had become more common. Sociological studies abounded on the subject, and religious communities worked feverishly to address the effects the phenomenon was having on their communities. In twenty-first-century America, religious intermarriage can no longer be classified as deviant; it is “so common a practice now that it should be accepted as a minor but normal type of marriage . . .” The major sociological studies on religion in America now have categories dedicated to measuring religious intermarriage rates. While there is virtually no statistical data on religious intermarriage in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, scholars widely agree that it has become increasingly common over time. One must ask, what changed in American society to make religious intermarriage swing from rare and taboo to common and acceptable?

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3 The data on religious intermarriage in the nineteenth century are quite limited. The subject of religious intermarriage did not become an area of sociological-scientific study until the mid-twentieth century. The statistics that do exist are limited, inconsistent and thus, unreliable. Therefore, this analysis is based on my own integration of historical studies on marriage and the archival research of Anne C. Rose in *Beloved Strangers: Interfaith Families in Nineteenth-Century America* (Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2001). In the beginning of the next chapter, I discuss the specific data limitations and my methodological approach for understanding religious intermarriage in the twentieth century.
In this chapter and the next, I explore the reciprocal cause and effect between the shape of religious intermarriages and the changing face of America’s cultural response to religious pluralism. I argue that there were two overarching social barriers to religious intermarriage in the early-nineteenth century that, for a significant portion of Americans, dissolved by the early-twenty-first century. The first barrier was that Americans lived in exclusive religious communities. The second barrier was that the vast majority of Americans, who were Christian, largely saw marriage as a Christian covenant. As America’s communities became more religiously integrated and as marriage became more liberal and contractual, versus Christian and covenantal, the social doors to religious intermarriage opened. An exploration of these social barriers in the nineteenth century and the early, mid, and late-twentieth century, reveals important changes in American religion, the institution of marriage, and the shape of religious intermarriage.

This social history of America, and more specifically, the evolution of civil religion and the relationships between religious communities, is not new. I borrow insights and conclusions from prominent historians and sociologists like William G. McLoughlin, William Herberg, José Casanova, and many others. What is new is my analysis of the nexus of American civil-religious history and the institutional and communal dynamics associated with religious intermarriage. The nature of both American civil religion and religious intermarriage shift through the centuries. What becomes apparent is that as the social barriers to religious intermarriage abate, so too do the boundaries between and among religious traditions and between the secular and religious spheres of society.
Terminology

Before exploring these social barriers in nineteenth-century America, it is helpful to develop grounding in terminology, namely what I mean when I refer to ‘religious communities’ and ‘religious intermarriage.’ I refer to America’s ‘religious communities’ often. I argue that intermarriage practices reveal that the boundaries between and among these religious communities have shifted over time. For the most part, the religious communities that I explore historically in the United States are limited to Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Jewish communities. In Chapter 5, I introduce Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist communities into my analysis on contemporary dynamics associated with religious intermarriage. I fully acknowledge the implications of this limited approach – it ignores important particularities of the various Christian and Jewish denominations and ethnic communities in the United States and it neglects, and thus discounts, the importance of historically marginalized religious and ethnic communities, like African Americans and Asians, for example, who brought distinct religious practices to the United States before the twentieth century. It would have been more edifying and instructional to include all religious communities in my analysis; however, this was neither practical nor necessary. An analysis of the intermarriage dynamics between a religious majority tradition, Protestantism, and two [historically] minority traditions, Catholicism and Judaism, reveals some of the ways in which the boundaries between and among these communities have shifted over time.

In the previous chapter, I used the phrase ‘religious intermarriage’ broadly to encompass marriages that cross the boundaries of religious traditions – including Catholic-Protestant unions and the marriage of a Christian to “a heathen, Jew, Turk, or heretic,” to borrow Luther’s phraseology. However, from this point forward, I employ three categories
of religious intermarriage in order to emphasize the most notable societal shifts from the nineteenth century, to the mid-twentieth century, to the twenty-first century. The categories are ‘intra-religious marriage,’ ‘interreligious marriage,’ and ‘interfaith marriage.’ My distinctions between ‘intra’ and ‘inter’ as well as ‘religious’ and ‘faith’ are deliberate.

The first category is ‘intra-religious’ marriage, which defines the predominant trend in late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century America. For most, marriage was a religious affair and men and women married people within their own religious community. In other words, Protestants married Protestants, Catholics married Catholics, and Jews married Jews.\(^4\) There were instances where a Catholic or a Jew did intermarry; in these cases, it was likely that they married a Protestant and disappeared into the Protestant mainstream. During this time, American society was dominated by Protestantism; any religious intermarriage was largely hidden behind closed doors, masked by the resounding trumpets of Protestant life.

The second category is ‘interreligious’ marriage which occurred in the nineteenth century but became more prevalent in the mid-twentieth century. In the decades after World War II, a new tenor of inclusivism began to unfold in American society.\(^5\) Catholics and Jews joined mainstream America; godliness and liberty took on new forms in the light of Cold War

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\(^4\) Individuals married within their ethnic group and within their religious group. It was only in the mid-twentieth century that sociologists began to observe that marriages were happening across ethnic lines, but still within the confines of an individual’s religion. In this analysis I do not look at inter-ethnic marriages. For more information on this shift in marriage patterns from marrying within one’s ethnic group to marrying outside one’s ethnic group, but within their religious group, see Ruby Jo Reeves Kennedy, “Single or Triple Melting-Pot? Intermarriage Trends in New Haven, 1870-1940;” *The American Journal of Sociology* 49, no. 4 (Jan. 1944): 331-339; William Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew: An Essay in American Religion Sociology* (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1956).

politics; and Protestants, Catholics, and Jews mixed, married, and interacted in new ways. Social identification as either Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish remained important for Americans. An era of intra-religious marriage under Protestantism faded into a new era of interreligious marriage under the Judeo-Christian God.

Up to and including this time period, I refer to Protestantism and Catholicism as different religions; this is why I refer to their marriages as interreligious and not intra-religious. The 1917 Code of Canon Law discouraged marriage between a Catholic and a non-Catholic. While Calvin, in his analysis of religious intermarriage, introduced the idea of distinguishing between marriages to Catholics versus non-Christians, the Catholic Church did not formally recognize this distinction until the latter part of the twentieth century. The reason is that it was not until after World War II that Catholic and Protestant theologians began planting the seeds of the ecumenical movement that would result in greater Christian unity in the following decades. Before 1959 and the Second Vatican Council, the “Catholic Church considered the search for Christian unity mainly . . . a matter of bringing back to the fold those who had wandered away.” After the Second Vatican Council, the Church changed its position on Catholic-Protestant marriage (“mixed marriage”) and distinguished between “mixed marriage” (Catholic to a baptized-non-Catholic) and “disparity of cult” (Catholic to a non-Christian).

Up through the mid-twentieth century, I include marriage of a Catholic to a Protestant as interreligious, just as marriage of a Catholic to a Jew was interreligious. However, by the late-twentieth century, I refer to Protestant-Catholic marriage as an

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ecumenical intra-religious marriage. This important definitional shift reflects the movement of the Catholic and Protestant communities toward one another in the latter part of the twentieth century. Their ecumenical efforts were reflected in the 1983 changes in the Catholic canon laws regulating intermarriage. The 1983 Code of Canon Law treats mixed marriage differently from disparity of cult. Both require a dispensation; however, the former can result in a sacramental marriage, whereas the latter cannot. The latter is recognized by the Church as a natural marriage.

Finally, the third category is ‘interfaith’ marriage. Interfaith marriage is the phrase I have chosen to characterize the new dimension of religious intermarriage in the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries – a dimension that is extra-religious or beyond the boundaries of distinct religious traditions. Intra- and inter-religious marriages continue to occur with greater frequency every decade. They also get more diverse. After the government removed the limits on immigration in 1965, greater numbers of Muslims and Hindus joined the mosaic of American religion. As new immigrant communities, they struggle with intermarriage, just as Catholic and Jewish communities did and do.

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8 Michael G. Lawler refers to these marriages “inter-church marriages.” Michael G. Lawler, *Marriage and the Catholic Church: Disputed Questions* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2002), 119. While more cumbersome, I have chosen to use the phrase “ecumenical intra-religious marriage” in order to make the phrase broadly applicable to multiple world religions, not only those who associate with the Christian church.

9 Lawler, *Marriage and the Catholic Church*, 118-121. Marriage between a baptized man and woman is a sacramental marriage, considered a valid marriage in the Catholic Church. An ecumenical intra-religious marriage, a marriage between a Protestant and a Catholic, both baptized, is a sacramental marriage. A marriage between a baptized and a non-baptized man and woman (disparity of cult) is considered a natural marriage. It is a legal marriage, but not a valid marriage in the Church. According to the Church, marriages between two Jews, a Jew and a Muslim, or two atheists, for example, are considered natural marriages. Marriages involving homosexuality, polygamy, or bestiality are not considered natural marriages, according to the Church.
At the same time, however, more and more Americans have been disaffiliating from their religious communities, joining multiple religious communities, adding Eastern religious practices to their lives, and/or becoming increasingly spiritual, if not religious per se. In the era of interreligious marriage, to have “a name and an identity” was important; this meant “belonging to a religious community . . . [Belonging] tells one what he is.” This need for religious belonging appears to be dissipating in this era of interfaith marriage as more and more Americans, particularly younger Americans, self-identify as “none” or “unaffiliated” when asked about their religious belonging. Many of these Americans are intermarrying. Because they often have faith commitments, but not exclusive religious commitments, I have decided to refer to their religious intermarriages as ‘interfaith.’ As I explained in Chapter 1 and as I will investigate further in Chapter 5, an exploration of hybrid religious identity, multiple religious belonging, and spirituality, as it relates to interfaith marriage, will enable me to examine religious pluralism from a different vantage point. I will now turn my attention to understanding the movement in American religion and the shifts from intra-religious marriage to interreligous marriage to interfaith marriage. As I will explain, through the centuries, as diverse religious communities move closer together and the institution of marriage becomes increasingly liberated from religious control, the barriers to religious intermarriage dissolve.

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10 Herberg, Protestant, Catholic, Jew, 53.

Barriers to Religious Intermarriage

In the eighteenth century, Americans inherited a social scenario from their predominantly Anglican and Calvinist predecessors that severely limited the likelihood of religious intermarriage. However, very quickly in the nation’s history, beginning in the early-nineteenth century, the social doors to intermarriage began to open. A review of the initial barriers, followed by an exposition of the shifts in the religious landscape and the institution of marriage over the centuries, provides important insights into why and how religious intermarriage has not only become more prevalent but has also changed and evolved.

The barriers to religious intermarriage that early Americans inherited by the late-eighteenth century fall into two categories. The first category has to do with religion and specifically with the boundaries that existed between and among religious communities. Because Americans were divided into distinct religious communities that were socially, politically, and theologically exclusivist, religious intermarriage was unlikely. There was religious diversity in early America that extended well beyond the rampant Protestant denominationalism and diversity. This religious diversity included Native Americans, Africans (who brought Islam and African religions to America), Roman Catholics, and small numbers of Jews.

Catholic Dominicans and Jesuits came to missionize the Indians. In addition, many Catholic families settled in Maryland, Pennsylvania, and New York. Jews settled in New York originally; many of the original settlers were part of a Spanish-Portuguese refugee community that migrated to America from Brazil. Later, European Jews migrated to settle in
America. Early on, many of these Jews intermarried with non-Jews. By the late-seventeenth century they had established their own synagogue and synagogue-community and religious intermarriage became increasingly rare. Non-Protestant minorities often lived somewhat separately from the Protestant mainstream. This was especially true for immigrant communities who migrated to the United States during the nineteenth century.

Jewish and Catholic immigrant communities prayed, socialized, worked, and went to school in venues separate from their Protestant neighbors. Unlike small Catholic and Jewish communities of colonial America, nineteenth-century immigrants were typically poor, had different cultural norms, spoke different languages, and did not immediately assimilate into early American public life. As a result, the boundaries between Protestants and non-Protestants were high, minimizing the likelihood that one would marry exogomously.

Religious affiliation was paramount and for religious minorities, at least, there were not many religious options. This dynamic empowered religious leaders to play a strong role in every aspect of the lives of their congregants, including marriage. Because religious communities were separate and interaction was minimal, this bred distrust of the religious other, further weakening the likelihood that one would seek to marry outside of his/her religious community.

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The second category of barriers has to do with marriage; the place of marriage in society is illustrative of the boundaries that existed between the religious and secular spheres in early, post-colonial, America. While civil marriage was legal, the concept of marriage was highly religious. In other words, marriage was not considered a secular matter or a purely contractual agreement. On the contrary, following in the Calvinist and Anglican traditions, Christian marriage meant a covenant was formed between the couple and Jesus Christ, binding them to their religious community and enabling them to be a support for Christian society. Even though religious law was not civilly binding, or established, the religious community played an integral role representing God during the marriage ceremony and supporting the couple in their marriage.

Marriage in early America was based on love and free-consent of the couple, ideas prevalent in European models of marriage, but these ideas of love and choice were subsumed under the rubric of Christianity and covenant. A Christian marriage was centered on perpetuating the core values of Christianity and holiness; it was substantively different from a non-Christian marriage or a marriage based solely on romantic love. Ernest van der Haag, Dutch-American sociologist and social critic, comments on the distinction between love in Christian marriage and the romantic love that became prevalent in the twentieth century:

Thus, love as we know it is a Christian legacy, though Christianity in the main repudiates romantic love where the object is worldly, and accepts passion only when transcendent, when God is the object – or when muted into affection: marital love.\(^{15}\)

While the state licensed marriage, marriage was far from solely a legal contract; it was a religious commitment to one’s spouse, community, and Jesus Christ. This Christian

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covenantal view of marriage, in combination with religious exclusivity and social separation from religious minorities, made religious intermarriage highly unlikely and very much taboo.

While the story of religion, marriage, and intermarriage in the nineteenth century is multidimensional and non-linear, what will emerge are three underlying messages. First, except for certain racial communities, religious intermarriage was legal, meaning individuals could exercise their right to marry across religious lines. Second, despite these liberties, there were clear societal reasons that intra-religious marriage remained the norm – namely that Protestant, Jewish, and Catholic religious communities were integral to lives of their constituents, minimizing the potential for marrying exogomously. Third, throughout the century, the doors to interreligious marriage were opening; Protestants were quietly absorbing Jews and Catholics into their communities and Jews and Catholics were beginning to stray from and challenge the authority of their synagogue and parish communities. Slowly, the American values of freedom, choice, and love began to chip away at the walls that separated religious communities.

**Protestant-Christian America**

Religious intermarriage in nineteenth-century America was largely swept under a vast Protestant rug. Native Americans, Mormons, and to some extent, Asians, fought against legal prohibitions to their marriage practices; Catholics and Jews battled social alienation, on the one hand, and religious assimilation, on the other. As Catholic and Jewish authorities grew increasingly concerned about religious intermarriage throughout the century, Protestants remained largely disinterested, as they often were the recipients of new converts in the infrequent scenarios when a Protestant would marry a Jew or a Catholic. At the beginning of
the century, the Second Great Awakening (1790s to the 1840s) set the stage for a Protestant hegemony; at the end of the century, the arrival of large groups of European Jews and Catholics on America’s shores set the stage for a new type of religious pluralism in the twentieth century— one that would become more inclusive rather than exclusive.

Early Protestant Americans held theologically exclusivist religious views. They believed that their religion was the one true religion and espoused that eternal damnation awaited anyone who did not profess their faith in Jesus Christ and live according to the scriptures. Evangelical preachers spread the word of God from pulpits in every corner of America and its ever expanding Western frontier. With their newly won religious freedom, they were embarking on their mission to Christianize America, its people and its culture, to ready the nation for the second coming of Christ. There was little room for non-Christians in the America they envisioned. These non-Christians, meaning non-Protestants, included Catholics, Jews, Native Americans, and Mormons. These religious groups were not considered true Christians for they either denied the authority of scripture (Catholics), the divinity of Christ (Jews), or engaged in practices like polygamy that society considered barbarous (Native Americans and Mormons).

The legal disestablishment of religion was counteracted by a de facto Protestant establishment that became engrained in nineteenth-century American culture. Multitudinous Protestant denominations cooperated with one another toward similar goals of Christianizing American society. Historian Daniel Walker Howe remarks that it is “scarcely an exaggeration” to say that interdenominational groups like the United Front and Benevolent

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Empire, aspired to “transcend America’s sectarian diversity and create the functional equivalent of an established church.” They cooperated with one another, but did not include Catholics or Jews in this effort. Christianity remained “an enduring element of imponderable magnitude in American life and thought . . .” during this time.  

According to the analysis of Nancy F. Cott, American historian and author of *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation*, nineteenth-century Protestant society largely understood marriage in America as Christian, but non-sacramental, and based on conjugal love. American Protestantism reflected the belief that civil authorities were vested in the institution of marriage. However, because of disestablishment in the states, no one particular Christian denomination could dictate civil marriage laws. Rather, states adopted non-sectarian Protestant Christian guidelines. These guidelines appeased the majority of citizens and consequently, appeared to be benign. A marriage based on Christian values was, at a minimum, a monogamous relationship between a man and a woman who would enter into a covenant with one another and with God. As Alexis de Tocqueville observed during his travels in the United States in the early part of the century, under the rampant formation of different denominations that accompanied the Second Great Awakening “Christian morality

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is everywhere the same.” United States Supreme Court Justice Joseph Bradley (1813-1892) affirmed this Christian conception of marriage. He wrote that marriage in America was to reflect “the spirit of Christianity and . . . the civilization which Christianity has produced in the Western world.” By the middle of the nineteenth century, America’s public figures pervasively spoke of marriage in terms of Christian morality.

From the beginning, happiness and love were also integral to the institution of marriage in America. These ideas complemented the Christian and covenantal nature of marriage. The 1776 Declaration of Independence revealed the American aspirations towards not only life and liberty, but also the pursuit of happiness. Tocqueville comments on marriage as follows: “Certainly of all countries in the world America is the one in which the marriage tie is most respected and where the highest and truest conception of conjugal happiness has been conceived.” Relative to Europeans, when the American man returns to “the bosom of the family . . . all his pleasures are simple and natural and his joys innocent and quiet . . . the regularity of life brings him happiness . . .” Ideas about romantic love appeared in the twelfth century and evolved in various forms in Western history. However, romantic love as a basis of marriage flourished in the United States. Sociologist Ruth Shonl Cavan explains that “many religions, the mobility of the constantly changing frontier, and the later conglomerate of immigrants in American cities brought people of diverse backgrounds

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21 Cott, 119, 197.


into close contact . . .” paved the way for a more prominent role for love.\textsuperscript{24} Happiness was grounded in “ideals of liberty and mutual consent in affective relations.”\textsuperscript{25} For most Americans during this time, the dual ideas of marriage as both Christian and based upon love did not conflict; rather, they complemented one another. However, the integral aspect of love and happiness would eventually play a more dominant role in the American conception of marriage, overshadowing its Christian and religious character for a significant portion of Americans.

State and federal legislators looked upon models of marriage that did not align with these two basic conceptions of marriage (Christian and love-based) as crude, deleterious to society, and anti-American. This affected laws prohibiting certain kinds of marriage. Christian and Enlightenment ideas contributed to a belief in “the progress of civilization.” This belief inspired missionary activity and colonialism and was part of the American ideology in the nineteenth century. Nancy Cott explains:

Neither the Christian nor the Enlightenment understanding of civilization excluded any people or culture from progressing along the scale. All humankind were imagined to have the possibility to see the light, to be converted or acculturated; all could look to the same promising destiny. Certainly missionaries claimed Christianity was a universal faith. But because it operated by ranking peoples along a linear and chronological development . . . the discourse of civilization profoundly separated the more civilized from the less, disparaging the latter. The intensification of racial categorization along with evolutionism in the last third of the century deepened this distinction, couching gradations of civilization in terms of race or color.\textsuperscript{26}


\textsuperscript{26} Cott, 117.
While the American state governments did little to put limits on religious intermarriage, they did limit racial intermarriage. Both African Americans and Native Americans bore the brunt of racial injustices. To be non-white meant to be non-Christian. Tocqueville’s travel companion, Beaumont, wrote a novel on America after returning to France. It was a “searing indictment of American racism” and prominently featured interracial marriage. While Tocqueville’s work was well received in the United States, Beaumont’s novel was not even translated into English until 1958. Not until the *Loving v. Virginia* Supreme Court decision in 1967 did it become fully legal for blacks and whites to marry. While there is an important history of black emancipation in America, I will not cover it here, as my interest is in religious, not racial, intermarriage.

Native American discrimination was both racial and religious. The Christian mission to convert Native Americans has had a long-history in North and South America. Native American forms of marriage were seen as animistic, undeveloped, and threatening to the patriarchal-commonwealth model of marriage that was believed to be integral to the stability of society. Some Native American practices that garnered concern by Anglo-Americans included matrilineal descent (common in many Eastern, Southern, and Southwestern tribes), the role of men and their involvement in multiple families and households, and perceptions regarding “failure to discipline children, female sexual promiscuity, and easy divorce.”

Native American societies were not arranged in stand-alone nuclear families with separate households and property rights. Economic ties, daily work life, and one’s self-identity were

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27 Howe, 307.

not necessarily tied to one’s marriage arrangement. Often husbands and wives would spend many months apart during hunting season. When they did come together, there would be large celebrations. Stephanie Coontz, historian of American families, explains the fluidity of these families in her description of these celebrations:

At these times there might be an exchange of members, with the next season’s small groups composed of different families, or even reconstituted families, since divorce was easy and child-exchange common.29

The white Christian Americans often viewed these practices as polygamous and anathema to the American ethos.

Intermarriage between whites and Native Americans could be problematic. In the nineteenth century, the government developed two methods of dealing with the Native American problem of intermarriage. The first was to ensure that Native American practices would not affect the purity of white Christian America. More than twelve states at one time or another in their histories made marriages between a Native American and a white person illegal. The states would make void any marriages between Indians and whites.30 The second method was to educate and assimilate Native Americans into the white Christian population. In the 1820s the federal government asked Reverend Jedidiah Morse, an evangelical Protestant minister, to investigate Native American practices. Morse was a proponent of providing the women with Christian education and then having them marry white men. This would enable children of these mixed couples to properly assimilate into [Christian] American society. While federal regulators in the Office of Indian Affairs sought

29 Coontz, 51-52.

30 David F. Fowler, Northern Attitudes towards Interracial Marriage (New York: Garland, 1987), appendix; in Cott, 237, n. 8.
to provide incentives for Morse’s plan, it was state regulators who dictated the limits of marriage policy.\textsuperscript{31}

Ultimately, Indian policy would remain unclear. Washington’s administration preferred to keep Native Americans separate; Jefferson’s sought to assimilate Native Americans into mainstream white Christian society.\textsuperscript{32} Jefferson welcomed religious intermarriage. In 1809 Jefferson declared the following to a group of Indian chiefs:

\begin{quote}
In time, you will be as we are; you will become one people with us. Your blood will mix with ours; and will spread, with ours, over this great island. Hold fast, then, my children, the chain of friendship which binds us together, and join us in keeping it forever bright and unbroken.\textsuperscript{33}
\end{quote}

Interrracial marriages between Native Americans and whites were common early in the nineteenth century. For example, mountain men in the fur trade business would frequently marry Native American women who would fill the role of companion, interpreter, and guide.\textsuperscript{34} However, intermarriage declined as whites grew more intolerant. Howe compares white Christian America to Russia and provides a critical analysis of the intolerance that was prevalent in this time.

In the nineteenth century, two territorially contiguous empires expanded rapidly across vast continental distances: the United States and Russia. The tsarist empire


\textsuperscript{32} Howe, 30.


\textsuperscript{34} Howe, 49.
was an absolute monarchy with an established church, yet in one respect surprisingly more tolerant than republican America. The Russians showed more willingness to accept and live with cultural diversity among their subject peoples.\textsuperscript{35}

The government was also quite concerned with any groups who believed in polygamy and/or arranged marriage. Both practices were contrary to the Christian-American model of marriage. While typically Native American men had only had one wife at a time, their unconventional family structures and practices led many early white Americans to think that all Native Americans practiced polygamy. The government believed that if Indians were going to be citizens then they would need to follow American marriage practices.\textsuperscript{36} The greatest stir came as a reaction to the Mormon practice of polygamy in their utopian communities. In the 1878 Supreme Court case, \textit{Reynolds v. United States}, the Court ruled that religious liberty was not a sufficient reason to declare anti-polygamy laws in the Territory of Utah unconstitutional. Chief Justice Waite in the majority opinion writes, “there cannot be a doubt that, unless restricted by some form of constitution, it is within the legitimate scope of the power of every civil government to determine whether polygamy or monogamy shall be the law of social life under its dominion.”\textsuperscript{37} In 1882 Congress approved the Edmonds Act, a federal statute that made polygamy a felony. It was clear that polygamy was contrary to Christianity and contrary to what was acceptable marriage in America. The anti-polygamy rhetoric in the 1870s and 80s was so strong that it “in effect made the Mormons over into nonwhites.”\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 30.

\textsuperscript{36} Shammas, 111.

\textsuperscript{37} Reynolds v. United States, 98 U.S. 145 (1878).

\textsuperscript{38} This statement is based upon commentary in the following articles: “Shall We Have a New Conflict with the Mormons?” \textit{New York Times}, Jan. 27, 1870; C. C. Goodwin, “The Political Attitude
Public policies reinforced the American ideal of a Christian civilization. A "refurbished alliance between national authority and Christian monogamous morality settled firmly in place, prepared to badger nonconforming citizens if not to make them disappear – and to weed out marital nonconformists among the foreigners thronging the gates."³⁹ In 1891 Congress revamped immigration laws to exclude polygamists, as well as prostitutes, felons, paupers, anarchists, and other undesirable groups. In 1907 the government extended the law against polygamists from those who practice polygamy to those "persons who admit their belief in the practice of polygamy."⁴⁰ This raised a red flag in the Ottoman Empire that the United States was discriminating against Muslims whose religious scriptures can be interpreted to permit polygamy.⁴¹ Despite a revision to the wording that distinguished between a belief in a religion that allows polygamy and a belief in polygamy itself, numerous immigration requests from a variety of countries were denied with polygamy as the rationale.⁴²

With immigration booming in the late-nineteenth century, protective American nativists demonized not only polygamy, but also other marriage practices and customs that did not reinforce American standards. For example, cultures that practiced arranged

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³⁹ Cott, 131.


⁴² Comm.-Gen. of Immigration to [the Secretary of State], April 14, 1910, and other correspondence, Jan.-April 1910, and 1913-14, U.S. Bureau of Immigration files, National Archives RG 85, entry 9, box 151, file 52737/499, in Cott, 268, n. 22.
marriages threatened the ideals of Christian marriage, namely liberty, consent, and love. Russian Jews, Japanese, and Chinese communities were the primary recipients of American disapproval for not putting love first. A Jewish yenta (matchmaker) or an Asian go-between who facilitated “picture-order” matches (also called proxy brides), was deemed to be in the business of prostitution. A prominent representative of the Department of Immigration, known as a “white slave hunter,” documented his feelings about arranged marriage, a practice he believed to be prostitution: “[T]he moment an American citizen stoops to be willing to marry a prostitute, I would declare him to be unworthy of his American citizenship, and if possible deprive him of it.”

In her book, Consent: Sexual Rights and the Transformation of American Liberalism (1999), social historian Pamela Haag demonstrates that during this period in American history, “in American literature, . . . the rhetorical device of true love versus arranged marriage simultaneously instructed readers in modern romance and American citizenship.”

Some ethnic and religious cultures were seen as racially and religiously incompatible with the American republic. In 1876, a joint committee report by the House and Senate on Chinese immigration reflects this sentiment.

An indigestible mass in the community, distinct in language, pagan in religion, inferior in mental and moral qualities, and all peculiarities, is an undesirable element in a republic, but becomes especially so if political power is placed in its hands. . . .

. . . Many people of the Pacific coast believe that this influx of Chinese is a standing menace to republican institutions upon the Pacific, and the existence there of Christian civilization.

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43 Haag, Consent, 101.

44 Ibid., 104.
The report definitively stated that “there is no intermarriage between the Asiatics and the Caucasian race.”45 Japanese immigrants also created consternation for many Americans. By 1913, eight states had laws that prohibited a white person from marrying a Japanese or Chinese person.46 While these groups were primarily discriminated against for their racial differences, their religious differences cannot be overlooked.47 Many were Buddhist, Daoist, or Confucian – they did not have the Christian values necessary to be “American.”

A few key points help to highlight the relevance of these laws and prohibitions for our understanding of how the social doors to religious intermarriage began to open. Despite disestablishment, the Protestant Christian conception of marriage penetrated “secular” civil marriage laws. However, these laws were not strictly Protestant in that they were shaped by what Tocqueville referred to as a common Christian morality that was “everywhere the same.”48 This broadly Christian conception of marriage provided a legal rubric that Catholics and Jews, as well as Protestants, could fit within. This is a forerunner to a different type of American civil religion in the twentieth century that would be seen as more Judeo-Christian, paving the way for greater interreligious marriage.


46 David F. Fowler, Northern Attitudes towards Interracial Marriage (New York: Garland, 1987), appendix; in Cott, 269, n. 36.

47 Female missionaries worked in China, for example, to instill “Christian habits of romantic love,” even though Asian-non-Asian marriage was not legal. Haag, Consent, 109.

Jewish and Catholic Immigrant Communities

With legal immigration and marriage restrictions in place for blacks, Indians, polygamists, and Asians, social concerns focused on the large numbers of Jewish and Catholic immigrants who came to the United States in late-nineteenth century from Eastern Europe, Russia, Poland, Italy, and Greece. From 1840 to 1890, the percentage of foreign-born Americans rose from 9.7 percent of the population to 14.8 percent. By 1920, the percentage reached 15 percent, a record high. Due to rising concerns over the masses of immigrants threatening the American way, in 1924 immigration was virtually stopped through national origins quotas. By honing in on the societal position of Jewish and Catholic communities throughout this period of immigration growth, barriers to and opportunities for religious intermarriage emerge.

The nineteenth-century American Jewish narrative is one characterized by faction, disaffiliation, and religious intermarriage. This is momentous, given the contrast to the shape of the Jewish community in the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries where central religious authority and religious affiliation were foundational to American Jewish life. From 1700 through the 1820s, the synagogue dominated Jewish life. Historian Jonathan D. Sarna explains that “the synagogue and the organized Jewish community became one and the same – a synagogue-community – and as such it assumed primary responsibility for preserving and maintaining local Jewish life.” For the Jewish people in America the synagogue was “the


representative body of the Jewish community; it acted in the name of all area Jews.” The synagogue meant tradition and deference to religious authority. Religious authorities had the “the power of herem” or the ability to excommunicate dissenting members.51

Disestablishment and religious liberty held great promise for the Jewish people. President George Washington in his letter to the Congregation Kahal Kadosh Yeshuat Israel in Newport, Rhode Island in 1790 affirmed the protection of the Jews on American soil.52 Despite their equal status under the law, they would remain a very separate community. For example, in Philadelphia, on July 4, 1788 a parade celebrating the ratification of the Constitution included rabbis and Christian clergy marching side by side, an epochal event for a minority that had been ghettoized and persecuted for centuries. But after the ceremony, Jews “ate separately at a special kosher table prepared on their behalf. . . . [This] defined the boundaries of interreligious relations from the synagogue-community’s official perspective.” They enjoyed “equal footing” but exercised their right to eat apart.53

Through the first half of the nineteenth century, during the Second Great Awakening, Jews battled intense prejudice and pressure to convert to Christianity. Many Jews chose to convert; others remained in their isolated Jewish communities. Under the leadership Isaac Lesser and others, some Jews sought to emulate and adapt Protestant practices – they started

51 Sarna, 12-16.

52 George Washington clarified that “[i]t is now no more that toleration is spoken of as if it was the indulgence of one class of people that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights. For happily, the government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens, in giving it on all occasions their effectual support.” American Treasures of the Library of Congress, “To Bigotry No Sanction,” http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/treasures/trm006.html, accessed 26 July 2010.

53 Sarna, 38.
their own Sunday schools, hospitals, charitable societies, and created an English translated
Anglo-Jewish bible, for example, all in an effort to stem conversions. The choice was
simple, however: remain in the synagogue-community or leave it and join the Protestant
mainstream. One was Jewish or one was American (i.e., Protestant).

From the 1820s to 1840s, the face of American Judaism changed significantly,
ultimately affecting the likelihood of religious intermarriage. Young Jews began to exercise
their freedom to break away from the established synagogue-communities. They began
forming their own congregations and rejecting the central Jewish authorities. Sarna explains
the effect of this “new American Judaism” as follows:

Inevitably, these synagogues competed with one another for members and for status.
As a result they had a new interest in minimizing dissent and keeping members
satisfied. Indeed, more than anybody realized at the time, synagogue pluralism
changed the balance of power between the synagogue and its members.

During the nineteenth century, the American Jewish community began to split along
ideological lines, each attempting to retain the essence of Judaism, but in very different ways.
Orthodox leaders tried to maintain traditional Jewish laws and practices, the Reform
movement attempted to develop and alter Jewish traditions to fit modernity and the American
Protestant culture, and organizations like B’nai Brith attracted American Jews who sought to
retain their Jewish ethnic and communal ties without a focus on religion or faith. As
immigration boomed from the middle to the end of the century, many Jews were opting for
Reform Judaism and/or not joining a synagogue at all. Many Jews were living in areas where

54 Jonathan D. Sarna and Jonathan Golden, “The American Jewish Experience through the
Nineteenth Century: Immigration and Acculturation,”

55 Sarna, xviii, 59, quotation on 60.

56 Ibid., 87-90.
there were no synagogues; others chose not to affiliate.\textsuperscript{57} In the United States, “unlike Europe, the [Jewish] Reformers had a relatively free hand to change Judaism as they pleased, for there were no official ecclesiastical structures and few long-established Orthodox bodies to stand in their way.”\textsuperscript{58} The decline of a central Jewish authority represented in the synagogue-community model, translated into diversification and disaffiliation – a recipe for religious intermarriage.

Despite the splintering of the American Jewish community, the Jews remained united by the fact that they were not Christian and that they shared a common past of persecution by Christians. By the end of the century, American Jews were reminded of their religious otherness by two dominant movements. First, in reaction to Darwinism and biblical criticism, evangelicals renewed their calls for a Christian America. Second, as anti-Jewish propaganda compounded in Germany, the security of Jewish people everywhere appeared to be uncertain. However, through the century, the Jewish community had grown in wealth and power and “liberal Jews and Protestants spoke warmly of universalism . . .” – an important development in Jewish-Protestant relations.\textsuperscript{59} These seeds of greater interaction between Jews and their Christian neighbors were harbingers of the changing relationships between and among religious communities in the twentieth century.

Like American Jewish communities in the earlier part of the nineteenth century, American Catholic life was largely centered on the local parish. Waves of Catholic

\textsuperscript{57} In 1850 there were 22 Jewish synagogues, almost 60 percent of which were in New York and Pennsylvania. Uriah Zvi Engelman, “Jewish Statistics in the U.S. Census of Religious Bodies (1850-1935),” \textit{Jewish Social Studies} 9, no. 2 (1947): 129; Sarna, 73; Spickard, 168-170.

\textsuperscript{58} Spickard, 170.

\textsuperscript{59} Sarna, 108, 124, 132-134.
immigrants came to the United States from Ireland, Italy, Poland, Germany, and French
Canada. By mid-century, Catholicism had become the largest religious denomination in the
United States. Immigrants were forming an ethnic mosaic of Catholic communities around
the United States. Many of these immigrants were poor, from rural areas, and not able to
speak English. They looked to their parish to help them navigate life, find jobs and homes,
and learn the language. The parish was not just a religious institution; it was a focal point for
the whole community.

In Protestant America, Catholics were unquestionably a religious other to the
majority of Americans. They not only worshipped separately, they lived in their own
communities and attended their own schools. The exclusivity of Catholic communities in
nineteenth-century America can be explained by two overarching dynamics. First, they were
not welcome by Protestants, on practical and ideological grounds. Many Protestants were
very uncomfortable with the “Catholic hordes” that were arriving on American shores,
especially the Irish. Prior to 1840, many Irish immigrants were Protestant. They were
young men seeking economic opportunity in America. However, by the fifties, after the Irish
Potato Famine, many Catholic families came to the United States. These Irish Catholic
families were not looked upon fondly; they were seen as competitors for jobs and nativists

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60 Daniel Walker Howe explains that “[l]argely because of its success in ministering to this
immigrant constituency, the American Catholic Church grew (according to the best estimate) by 1850
to a million members, about the same as the Presbyterians. By comparison, the Methodists then
counted 2.7 million and the Baptists 1.6 million. Not until after the Civil War did Roman Catholicism
surpass Methodism to become the largest single denomination in the country.” Howe, 201. For an
explanation of various statistics and the growth of the Catholic population, see Roger Finke and

61 Julie Byrne, “Roman Catholics and Immigration in Nineteenth-Century America,” Nov.
2010.
blamed them for congested and unhealthy conditions in urban areas of New York and Boston. Protestants generally believed that Catholicism was not compatible with democracy with its hierarchies and traditions. “Neighbors called Catholics names, employers refused to promote them, landlords rented them the worst apartments, newspapers blamed them for rising crime rates, and banks refused [to provide] them [with] loans.” By the end of the century Catholics were targets, as were Jews, of a continued evangelical crusade to Christianize America.

Second, there was centralized pressure from Roman authorities to retain the practices of the European church and reject forms of Americanization. A separate Catholic school system formed in America, not only because the public schools were distinctly Protestant (and anti-Catholic) in nature, but also because bishops urged Catholics to go to parochial schools. The Third Plenary Council of Baltimore in 1884 had the following stated goal: “Every Catholic child in a Catholic school!” Beginning in the early part of the century, historian Jay P. Dolan explains that “two schools of thought were manifest in the American Catholic community. One desired to fashion an indigenous church, an American Catholicism; the other wanted to transplant to the new nation a continental European version

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62 Howe, 826.

63 National organizations and secret societies formed to promote anti-Catholic sentiment, including but not limited to, the American Protective Association and the nativist secret society, the Know Nothings. Quotation from Julie Byrne, “Roman Catholics,” http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/nineteen/nkeyinfo/nromcath.htm, accessed 1 February 2010. See also Howe, 826-7.


of Roman Catholicism.” These two schools of thought would continue to push and pull at one another over time. As Chester Gillis emphasizes in his book, Roman Catholicism in America, the Catholic laity felt drawn to Catholicism, but wanted to prove their Americanism.

Social, economic, political, and religious outsiders in America, their Catholicism constituted an important part of their identity and a source of solidarity. In a society dominated by Protestant money and power, immigrant Catholics found strength and solace in their religion. At the same time, they were eager to fit in. Not only did they need to prove that they had severed political ties with their homelands, but they also wanted to confirm that they were really Americans.

At the same time, as American Catholic laity sought to convince their fellow Americans of their loyalty to the nation, Roman authorities continued to emphasize papal infallibility and the authority of the Church hierarchy. The ideal scenario for the Roman Church would be for the American Church to become the established or privileged church in America. This was, of course, exactly what Protestants feared about Catholics, fueling the anti-Catholic nativism that kept Catholic communities separate from Protestant communities into the twentieth century. Within this context, religious intermarriage between Protestants,

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67 Gillis, Roman Catholicism, 64.

68 In 1870, the First Vatican Council declared the infallible teaching authority of the Roman pontiff. See the fourth chapter of The First Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ (18 July 1870), http://www.dailycatholic.org/history/20ecume3.htm, accessed 26 July 2010.

69 In his 1895 encyclical, Pope Leo XIII writes the following: “[I]t would be very erroneous to draw the conclusion that . . . it would be universally lawful or expedient for State and Church to be, as in America, dissevered and divorced. . . . she [the Church] would bring forth more abundant fruits if, in addition to liberty, she enjoyed the favor of the laws and the patronage of the public authority.” Pope Leo XIII, Longinqua (Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII on Catholicism in the United States), Vatican, 6 January 1895, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/leo_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_06011895_longinqua_en.html, accessed 26 July 2010, section 6.
Jews, and Catholics was an anathema. However, neither Jews nor Catholics were immune to the desire to become more *American*; they exercised their civil liberty to stray from religious authorities who proscribed religious intermarriage.

**Religious Intermarriage**

One may expect civil freedom and religious diversity to promote religious intermarriage. However, in the early-nineteenth century there was minimal interaction between Protestants, Catholics, and Jews who lived in separate communities amidst a pervasive Protestant establishment. The structure of church (and scattered synagogue) communities was an organizing force in society; this structure kept relations between families of different religions limited to superficial interchanges. While infrequent, some early Americans did intermarry. Typically it was those who focused on “self-seeking individualism” and the “pursuit of happiness.” In the early republic, it was “the children of Enlightened parents that tipped circumstances toward mixing and tolerance” breaking the ground for future generations of young people to intermarry.

There was minimal discussion about religious intermarriage in these early Protestant communities. Protestant communities were largely unaffected by such unions. To discuss the presence of religious outsiders and debate their role or impact on the community would be

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70 Hutchinson, 30-58.

71 Fishberg, 195-196. “[I]n the beginning of the nineteenth century[,] intermarriages between Catholics and Protestants were comparatively rare in Europe and America [relative to the twentieth century]. It was only with the change of conditions characteristic of our age, with the spirit of toleration which has become dominant in some countries, that intermarriages have become more or less frequent in those countries.” idem, 206.

72 Rose, 47.
to recognize them and to recognize a flaw in the Protestant homogeneity that permeated society. In understanding the dynamics of religious intermarriage in nineteenth-century America, I rely upon the archival research and analysis of historian Anne C. Rose. She explains that “[d]eclining to mention strangers in their midst protected an impression of seamless hegemony and exerted pressure on mixed families to honor Protestant norms.” The reality was that in the case of religious intermarriage, often the non-Protestant would be absorbed silently into the Protestant tradition. Ministers were willing to do interreligious marriages as a form of evangelization.

However, by mid-century this “mixing and tolerance” gained the attention of Catholic and Jewish community leaders, fraught with the challenges of forming religious communities that would retain their traditions amidst American Protestantism. Jewish laws against interreligious marriage and Catholic ante-nuptial agreements that had to be signed by non-Catholic spouses promising to raise the children Catholic were not binding in American courts. As the religious landscape changed, the place of marriage in American society shifted and the social barriers to religious intermarriage waned. Jewish and Catholic religious communities would become increasingly concerned about the survival of their own

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73 As I discuss in the next chapter, it is not until the twentieth century that specific studies on intermarriage appear with frequency. As a result, there is limited information on intermarriage in nineteenth-century America. This is why Rose’s work helps play an important role in my analysis of the shifts among religions and between the religious and secular spheres. Where possible I cite Rose’s primary sources from archives and periodicals.

74 Rose, 62.

In Jewish communities religious intermarriage was seen as a pending “epidemic.” In Catholic communities, leaders expressed that these marriages would bring on “the utter depravity of mankind.” An understanding of Jewish and Catholic marriage traditions and prohibitions against religious intermarriage puts the nineteenth-century shifts in American society and intermarriage practices into context. What emerges is that during this time there continued to be many barriers to religious intermarriage. However, the actions of religiously rebellious Americans to engage in interreligious marriage and the reactions by religious authorities illuminate how the doors to these types of unions were beginning to open further.

**Jewish Marriage**

Religious intermarriage has remained one of the predominant struggles of modern Jewish communities. Where scripture, Talmudic law, and medieval policies prohibited religious intermarriage for most of the last thousand years, Jewish emancipation and assimilation have lessened the barriers that dissuaded Jews from intermarrying with Christians for so long. As a “migrating people from the earliest period in their history, the Jews constantly faced the problem of preserving their identity and their religious beliefs when confronted with prolonged contact with other peoples,” explains sociologist Milton L.

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76 Historically, religious communities had reacted to their precarious situation in society by formally setting more stringent boundaries on religious intermarriage. For example, between the fifth and thirteenth centuries, the Roman Catholic Church issued fourteen decrees on religious intermarriage between Catholics and Jews. Historian Salo Baron concludes that these decrees were based upon a belief in the Middle Ages that because Jews were often economically more secure than the masses of Christians that religious intermarriage would result in conversions from Christianity to Judaism. Salo W. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1937), 2:54, in Milton L. Barron, *People Who Intermarry* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1946), 35.

Barron. In the Jewish community, “intermarriage was tabooed” and highly unacceptable in nineteenth-century America.\textsuperscript{78}

Jewish marriage is a public act where a man and woman make promises to one another in front of representatives of God’s covenantal community. A Jewish marriage is \textit{qiddushin}. “This is a sacrament . . . conducted before God in the presence of representatives of the covenanted community.” These public and covenantal aspects of marriage were unique relative to the normative practices that pre-dated the Jewish people. “Generic marriage” only required that a man bring a woman to his home and consummate the marriage through sexual intercourse.\textsuperscript{79} As is evident from the analysis of Christian marriage models in the West in Chapter 2, these foundational ideas from Judaism became integral to the Christian, and later American, understanding of marriage.

The original biblical prohibitions to religious intermarriage are expressed in Deuteronomy and are limited to a list of neighboring countries that practiced idolatry.

When the Lord your God brings you to the land that you are about to enter and possess, and He dislodges many nations before you – the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, seven nations much larger than you. . . . You shall not intermarry them: do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons. For they will turn your children away from Me to worship other gods, and the Lord’s anger will blaze forth against you and He will promptly wipe you out. (Deut. 7:1-5)\textsuperscript{80}

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Interruption with these Canaanites fueled concerns about idolatry. Additionally, since marriage was often directly associated with property rights, intermarriage with these Canaanites also created consternation about the loss of land. After the death of Moses and prior to the conquest of the land of Israel by Joshua, the land was the “land of Canaan.” There was fear that if a Jew married a Canaanite, it “would give legitimacy to Canaanite claims on the land of Israel . . .”

Prohibitions against religious intermarriage widened beyond what was in scripture and became increasingly theological in their rationale. When the Jews returned to the land of Israel after seventy years in exile, assimilation of Jews with those who were living in the land became a larger concern. The Mosaic Torah became the constitution, and there was more centralized public Jewish authority than there was in the pre-exilic times of the First Temple. In the post-exilic period the Jewish leadership provided a stricter definition of what constituted a valid Jewish marriage. For example, Ezra, the Jewish priestly scribe who led the Jewish exiles back to Jerusalem in 459 BCE, calls assimilation and intermarriage a sacrilege. He expands the list of prohibited nations for intermarrying in Deuteronomy to include also “the Ammonite, the Moabite, the Egyptian, and the Amorite.” David Novak, a Jewish ethicist, notes that what emerged after Ezra was a sense that any Gentile was off-limits to a Jew. He provides an analysis of this shift towards Jewish theological exclusivity as follows:

It was not just Israel versus the seven or so Canaanite nations, with everyone else having a theological-political neutrality as it were. Now the lines of division are

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81 Novak, 36.

82 Ezra 9:1-2. For an analysis of Ezra see Fishberg, 221.
much more strictly theological, with no Gentiles being taken to be any better or worse, at least as regards Jews intermarrying with them.\textsuperscript{83}

The covenantal nature of Jewish marriage created further prohibitions against religious intermarriage. All Gentiles or persons not from the land of Israel were seen to worship false gods and therefore were not eligible marriage partners for a Jewish person. If a Jew were to marry a non-Jew, it was a “major covenantal violation.”\textsuperscript{84}

The post-exilic biblical texts and the work of Ezra emphasized the exclusivity of the Jewish covenant with God. They also firmly established the idea of matrilineal descent in the Jewish tradition, drawing on scriptural references to this in Deuteronomy.\textsuperscript{85} While religious intermarriage of a Jew and a Gentile was not a Jewish marriage, not \textit{qiddushin}, their child would be considered Jewish.\textsuperscript{86} Matrilineal descent would remain normative until developments in the Reform Jewish community in the late-twentieth century.

In addition to scriptural prohibitions, living in minority communities had always required Jews to preserve their identity and traditions in the presence of non-Jewish majorities. The very survival of Judaism and of Jewish communities depended upon Jews marrying Jews and raising their children Jewish. “Interruption without formal conversion [of the non-Jewish person] was regarded as a sin against God and the Jewish people. Both the Talmud and the Rabbinical Codes declared that such marriages were punishable by

\textsuperscript{83} Novak, 38. Novak advises his readers to see B. Kiddushin 68b re Deut. 7:4 (according to Rabbi Simeon).

\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., 40.

\textsuperscript{85} Deut. 7:4; Novak, 39, citing B. Kiddushin 68b.

\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., 39.
banning, tantamount to excommunication, of the guilty Jewish party.”\(^{87}\) This is called *herem*. Traditional orthodoxy considered the Jew who married a non-Jew to be dead. A death ceremony, including the reading of the *Kaddish* prayer, confirmed that this person would be excluded from the synagogue and thus, the community.\(^{88}\)

Jewish leadership insisted that non-Jewish spouses convert to Judaism before marriage. This would ensure a Jewish home, a Jewish upbringing for children, and a place for the family in the Jewish community. Dr. Louis Finkelstein (1895-1991), Chancellor Emeritus of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, explains why religious intermarriage was incongruous with Judaism:

> Because of the special place that the home occupies in Judaism as a center of religious life and worship, almost co-ordinate with the Synagogue itself, Judaism holds it essential that both parties to a Jewish marriage be members of a Jewish faith. . . . it is not possible for the home to function in the manner prescribed by Jewish law unless both husband and wife are of the Jewish faith.\(^{89}\)

For most of European history, the policies of Christendom requiring citizens to be Christian reinforced the Jewish opposition to religious intermarriage. “The best preventive of intermarriages of Jews is the Ghetto,” clarifies historian Maurice Fishberg. There were few marriages between Jews and Christians, except perhaps clandestinely.\(^{90}\) It was not until churches were disestablished in Europe and America that Jews were legally free to intermarry with Christians. Paradoxically, emancipation of the Jewish people led to increased fears of assimilation. “The threat to the survival of the Jew as a member of a minority people with a

\(^{87}\) Gordon, 178.


\(^{89}\) Dr. Finkelstein is quoted in Gordon, 178.

\(^{90}\) Fishberg, 209.
sacred literature, a distinctive religious philosophy, ritual and observances, proved real and foreboding.\textsuperscript{91} Additionally, emancipation of the Jews eventually led to dissent and disagreement over intermarriage and the declining influence of religious authorities – an issue that has yet to abate in the United States.\textsuperscript{92}

By the 1840s and 50s, a Jewish press was emerging in America. Articles on religious intermarriage appeared that warned against the dangers of the practice. No consistent or authoritative doctrine on religious intermarriage existed in the American Jewish community. On the contrary, the issue split the Jewish community and reinforced denominational differences and intra-denominational disagreement. Orthodox and Conservative rabbis firmly opposed religious intermarriage; Reform rabbis often held more liberal views.\textsuperscript{93} However, even Reform rabbis would disagree among themselves. For example, one the one hand, Bernhard Felsenthal (1822-1908), a Reform rabbi in Chicago, argued that religious intermarriages should be understood as “perfectly valid by Jewish rabbis and congregations, and the children of such families, if so desired by parents, should be recognized as Jews.”\textsuperscript{94} On the other hand, Rabbi Isaac Wise (1819-1900), also prominent in the Reform movement, expressed more conservative views on religious intermarriage in a public lecture in 1833. He urged rabbis to be more discriminating with which religious intermarriages they chose to officiate.\textsuperscript{95}

\textsuperscript{91} Gordon, 177.
\textsuperscript{92} Barron, \textit{Blending American}, 55.
\textsuperscript{93} Fishberg, 203.
\textsuperscript{94} “Who is a Jew?” \textit{Israelite} 36 (June 19, 1890): 5; quoted in Rose, 57.
\textsuperscript{95} Barron, \textit{Blending American}, 59.
Wise also discouraged rabbis from officiating at weddings where the couple to be married was irreligious and “whose parents happened to be Jewish on one side and Christian on the other . . .” He said that “no rabbi has the right to act the part of an ordinary stage actor – to go through a performance and pronounce formulas and benedictions to parties who believe in neither, and cannot consider themselves benefited by either, as the next justice of the peace can declare them man and wife without any performance or benediction.”

Here we see an early example of how the Jewish community was struggling with not only the dividing line between the Jewish and Christian traditions, but also the dividing line between a religious Jewish marriage and a secular civil marriage.

In nineteenth-century America, becoming more American meant becoming more Protestant. If Jewish religious authorities and communities rejected intermarriage with Protestants were they rejecting America? Jews had historically been looked upon with suspicion in the West. In Christendom, “[t]he isolation into which the Jews were . . . cast led in the course of time to a feeling of combined contempt and terror about them among the populace. . . . The ancients already had something of this feeling, and this was intensified when the Christian Church rose into power, regarding as it did, the Jew as the arch-heretic, the Deicide, the incarnate anti-Christ.”

Many of these prejudices carried over to the Jewish immigrants who were landing on American shores in the nineteenth century, moving into distinct neighborhoods, and shaping their own separate Jewish communities. If a Jew married a Jew and thus remained part of an isolated Jewish community, was he or she truly American in the patriotic sense? This tension between Americanism and Judaism that is

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96 Ibid., 59.
inherent in this question is paradigmatic of the experiences of many religious minorities in America.

In 1807, in Napoleonic France, the Jewish community faced the same question – literally. An assembly of Jewish rabbis called the Sanhedrin was gathered in an official meeting with Napoleon’s government officials who asked the rabbis the following question: “Can a Jewess marry a Christian, and a Jew a Christian woman? Or does the law allow the Jews to marry only among themselves?” Emancipation of the Jews, offering them citizenship, meant that they would have to integrate into French society. Becoming fully French required the willingness to intermarrry. Rabbis who were eager to embrace their newfound liberty and declare their allegiance to their nation explained that the Biblical mandate to refrain from intermarriage only pertained to those specific enemy nations named in scripture. “The prohibition in general applies only to nations in idolatry. The Talmud declares formally that modern nations are not to be considered as such, since they worship like us, the God of heaven and earth.” The Sanhedrin used a more liberal and theologically pluralistic interpretation of the scriptural prohibitions to religious intermarriage than rabbis had in the past in order to justify their position to the French government officials. They implied that because European Christians worship the same God, no theological issue exists.

Jews in the United States faced a different scene from their French counterparts and yet their fellow Americans would ultimately be asking them the same questions the Sanhedrin were asked. American Jews were guaranteed civic freedoms without having to be willing to marry gentile Americans. However, outsiders would hear Jewish debates on religious

98 Berger, “Judaism,” in Sex, Marriage, and Family in World Religions, 64-65; Fishberg, 222-223.
intermarriage and take note of rabbinic discouragement of the practice. The fact that rabbis discouraged these types of marriages would often be used to justify views that Jews were unpatriotic. This was articulated very clearly in an 1881 article in the *Nation* where Goldwin Smith “made Jewish opposition to intermarriage the centerpiece of his image of Jews as conspiratorial, unprincipled, and unpatriotic.”\(^9^9\) Smith argued that Jews were responsible for extortion of Christians; gentiles had reason to “guard ourselves [themselves] against their tribal bias . . .” Because Jews make their “race a religion” they are not “the very best of candidates for citizenship,” writes Smith. However, if Jews were to “lay aside tribalism and intermarry with their Gentile fellow-citizens” then they would gradually become patriots.\(^1^0^0\) Like early approaches to the Native Americans’ religious otherness, religious intermarriage would be a way to Christianize America’s Jews.

Despite the strong religious prohibitions against religious intermarriage and the requirement that non-Jewish spouses convert, nineteenth-century American Jews were beginning to marry Protestants at alarming rates. During the Second Great Awakening, missionaries sought to convert Jews. However, “[t]he gravest threat of all to the American Jewish community . . . stemmed not from apostasy but from love.”\(^1^0^1\) By 1825 the cohesiveness of synagogue-communities was beginning to weaken, frontier marriages between Jews and Protestants were becoming common, and prominent cases of interreligious

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\(^{99}\) Rose, 60-61.

\(^{100}\) Goldwin Smith, Letter to the Nation, dated Feb. 25, 1881, reprinted in “Professor Goldwin Smith and the Jewish Question.” *Israelite* 27 (March 18, 1881): 300; quoted in Rose, 60-61.

\(^{101}\) Sarna, 74.
marriages between Christian women and Jewish men seeking public office were emerging. These occurrences reveal that “[e]ven within the world of the synagogue-community, individual freedom was triumphing over the demands of Jewish tradition and law.” There was a disconnect forming between Jewish law and the realities of interreligious romance. The social doors to interreligious marriage were opening.

Jewish interreligious marriages were not without negative consequences. They rarely occurred inside the Jewish community. On the contrary, these marriages “occurred far from home, literally and figuratively, and were clouded by shame.” They represented a betrayal of Jewish tradition and the Jewish community. Protestant communities almost always absorbed these families.

Catholic Americans faced similar issues as Jewish Americans. While religious authorities would proscribe religious intermarriage, Catholics were not immune to the powers of love and the pressures to assimilate into mainstream Protestant-America. However, unlike the Jewish community, Catholic authorities attempted to address religious intermarriage with a unified voice and strict set of requirements that would dissuade couples from engaging in these marriages, but also allow them to join the Catholic community if they were granted a dispensation.

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103 Sarna, 45.

104 Rose, 37, 39.
Catholic Marriage

As discussed in the previous chapter, Catholic sacramental marriage strictly proscribed marriage to a non-Catholic. However, in fifteenth-century Christendom, the Church did not encourage, but validated clandestine marriages. With the Reformation and the spread of Protestantism in the sixteenth century and beyond, Catholic-Protestant clandestine interreligious marriage resulted in an alarming loss to the Roman Catholic Church. In reaction, the Council of Trent made clandestine marriage an impediment. Any marriage outside the Church, not officiated by a priest, would be “null and void.”\textsuperscript{105}

However, as European nation-states established their own churches and developed their own civic laws of marriage, the Roman Catholic Church compromised its stance. For example, in 1864 Pope Pius IX conceded that Catholic marriages were allowed in nations where the civil laws required that non-Catholic clergy officiate marriages on behalf of the state. “The form of solemnizing marriage prescribed by the Council of Trent, under pain of nullity, does not bind in cases where the civil law lays down another form, and declares that when this new form is used the marriage shall be valid.”\textsuperscript{106} According to Pope Pius IX, marriages entered into outside the Church were “abominable marriages” and dispensations would be given only “with sorrow and to prevent greater evils.”\textsuperscript{107}

In the nineteenth century the Catholic Church shifted its blame for apostasy from Catholic inaction regarding education to mixed marriage. While ‘intra-religious’ marriage was normative, there was evidence that Catholics were beginning to marry Protestants,

\textsuperscript{105} Gordon, 154.

\textsuperscript{106} Pope Pius IX, \textit{Syllabus Errorum} (Syllabus of Errors Condemned by Pius IX), Vatican, 8 Dec. 1864, \url{http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius09/p9syl.htm}, accessed 27 July 2010, no.71.

\textsuperscript{107} Gordon, 156.
engaging in “invalid” marriage according to the Catholic Church. The Catholic authorities were encouraging their flocks to resist assimilation and religious intermarriage to Protestants. Mixing the true religion with a false one would threaten the integrity of the Church. Pastoral letters during the time express the regret and sadness for marriages that took place outside the Church. In 1840 a Catholic pastoral letter following the Fourth Provincial Council warned against religious intermarriage.

From the earliest period of the Christian dispensation, we find the code of discipline invariably opposed to those marriages of members of the Church with persons estranged from her communion; . . . We have to lament that this wholesome discipline has been not every where in our province rigidly observed; and we have taken those steps that prudent counsel and our duty suggested, to cause the ancient salutary regulations in this regard, to be brought into full operation. We trust no Priest will be found negligent in the discharge of his duty; and that our effort to preserve unimpaired the doctrine and discipline of our province will meet with the cordial support of our faithful people.\footnote{Camilla J. Kari, \textit{Public Witness: The Pastoral Letters of the American Catholic Bishops} (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004), 15-16; “The Pastoral Letter of 1840,” Fourth Provincial Council of Baltimore (assembled on 16 May 1840, under the presidency of Archbishop Eccleston); quoted in Peter Guilday, ed., \textit{The National Pastorals of the American Hierarchy (1792-1919)} (Washington, DC: National Catholic Welfare Council, 1923), 139.}

The Church deemed disregard for the sacrament as sacrilegious and an affront to civilization. An increase in marriages outside the Church would lead to a decline in family ties to the Church and inhibit proper Catholic education for children. In \textit{Arcanum}, his 1880 encyclical on Christian marriage, Pope Leo XIII outlines the dreadful consequences of marriage to a non-Catholic. These marriages “give occasion to forbidden association and communion in religious matters; endanger the faith of the Catholic partner; are a hindrance to the proper education of the children; and often lead to a mixing up of truth and falsehood, and
to the belief that all religions are equally good."109 Bishops made practical arguments as to why Catholic women should not marry Protestant men. How could a Catholic woman raise children properly, as Catholics, without the support of her husband? Additionally, since Protestants allow divorce, “what guarantee has she . . . that she will not be put aside one day by her non-Catholic husband?”110

Where the Jewish community split on opinions about religious intermarriage, the Catholic Church spoke with one voice. However, bishops still had to struggle with the important issue of how to discourage religious intermarriage, yet retain families as part of the tradition if they chose to defy the Church. The Vatican would strive to find this balance, and in the process, became increasingly more liberal on their position. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the Vatican made a series of pronouncements on religious intermarriage that denounced the practice but also provided conditions for dispensation. The Church considered the possibility that a devout Catholic could eventually garner the conversion of his or her non-Catholic spouse.111 In 1877, the Catholic Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith provided sixteen canonical reasons to grant a dispensation for a mixed marriage, including the inevitability that the couple would be married by either a Protestant minister or

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111 Gordon, 154.
a civil magistrate. These guidelines held until Vatican II when even more liberal reforms materialized.\textsuperscript{112} Dioceses granted these dispensations and during the last third of the century, some dioceses printed dispensation forms to facilitate the process for interreligious couples.\textsuperscript{113}

The Church required that if a couple is granted a dispensation for “just and grave causes,” the non-Catholic must make certain promises and take certain actions. He/she must promise that he/she will not interfere with the free exercise of religion of the Catholic and “the Catholic partner to the marriage will be permitted to practice the Catholic religion.” Additionally, he/she must promise that children born of the marriage would be baptized and “unconditionally educated and reared in the Catholic faith.”\textsuperscript{114} Additionally, the non-Catholic spouse had to adhere to “the doctrine of the sacred indissolubility of the marriage bond.” The person may be able to obtain a civil divorce, but they were not permitted to contract another sacred (sacramental) marriage if their spouse was still alive. In order to be married by a priest and to have a valid marriage, it was also important for the non-Catholic to ensure that there would be no other marriage ceremonies before or after the ceremony with the Catholic priest. In some cases, the non-Catholic was also asked to promise not to use birth control.


\textsuperscript{113} Dispensation forms, for example, for the Diocese of Vincennes, Ind., dated Aug. 21, 187[4?] and Feb. 11, 1888, may be found in box 2, folder 13, CAUD (Ernest Audran Papers), Notre Dame. Even earlier, the handwritten parish records of Notre Dame du Lac church, Notre Dame, Indiana, include a separate section for dispensations beginning in 1844, which suggests that the practice was already accepted. See “Liber Dispensationum ab Matrimonium Spectantium, 1844-57, Notre Dame du Lac Ecclesiae,” Baptismal, Burial, Marriage, and Dispensation Records, Sacred Heart Church, microfilm roll 1, MSHC, Notre Dame; quoted in Rose, 225, n. 25.

\textsuperscript{114} Gordon, 155.
contrary to the teaching of the Church. The non-Catholic had to make these promises by signing his/her name on this ante-nuptial agreement. The contract would only become null upon death of one of the spouses. The Catholic also had to sign a statement with similar promises, essentially saying that they will live a Catholic life. Finally, the priest must promise that he has tried to dissuade the Catholic from marrying the non-Catholic. If he is not successful and if the couple meets the stipulated requirements, then the priest can recommend to the bishop that a dispensation be granted.

In stark contrast to the medieval situation where marriage was subsumed under the Catholic Church, nineteenth-century America posed dual challenges for the Church. First, civil courts married and divorced couples according to their own secular laws. Second, there was not a shortage of Protestant ministers available and willing to marry a Protestant and a non-Protestant. As the majority, they usually sought to gain a new church member and family with a religious intermarriage. Catholics opting to marry non-Catholics could easily be married if they were willing to leave the Church. During this time, however, being part of a religious community remained very important. In the mid-nineteenth century, “American interfaith families . . . allied themselves with religious institutions and raised their children in a faith.” This would shift through the next century as boundaries between religious and secular aspects of family life transformed.

Religious affiliation was particularly important for Catholic women who, like Protestant women at the time, played a strong role in the home and were the bastions of religious observance. During the Second Great Awakening often “wives and mothers led the

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115 Ibid., 156-157.
116 Rose, 148.
way in joining a church.” In antebellum congregations, women outnumbered men two to one.\textsuperscript{117} In general, men, by contrast, were more concerned with public affairs than with religious traditions. Within the realm of interreligious marriages that were forming during this time, it was not uncommon for a Protestant man to marry a Catholic woman. These particular unions were facilitated by three societal dynamics. First, because of the dominance of Protestantism in American society, it was better if a Protestant approached a Catholic or a Jew when they were seeking to socialize. In general, if a Jew or a Catholic approached a Protestant, then this could have resulted in rejection and humiliation.\textsuperscript{118} Second, tradition held that men were supposed to approach women, not the other way around. Given these two factors, it was more likely that a Protestant man would approach a Catholic. Third, because Protestant men were more focused on the public realm than the home and religious traditions, perhaps the effects of religious intermarriage on men would be less deleterious than on women.

Religious affiliation was important as one’s community during this time was anchored in religion and activities of the local church. However, we see the doors to religious intermarriage creek open a bit further in examining these marriages between Protestant men and Catholic women. Because men were less interested in religion than their female counterparts, they were often willing to make reasonable concessions to allow their wives to live Catholic lives. It was not uncommon for the women to raise their children Catholic, while her husband remained Protestant. Protestant husbands were “comfortable

\textsuperscript{117} Howe, 190-191.

\textsuperscript{118} Rose, 29.
raising the children Catholic, but not too Catholic.”¹¹⁹ A Catholic who marries a non-Catholic “without a dispensation commits a deadly sin according to his Church. . . . Such a marriage although legal is done in sin and is, in the Catholic view, entered into under the displeasure of God.”¹²⁰ However, once the Church validly married a couple, in other words, once they had the proper dispensation, they were welcomed into the community in the name of Christian charity. Nineteenth-century Catholic literature was hopeful; there was a fundamental belief that the Church would be restored. A Catholic woman and her Protestant husband could feel comfortable in the midst of a Catholic community.¹²¹

It is important to note, however, that the nature of these marriages clearly diverged from the norm of religious intermarriage in nineteenth-century America in two ways. First, families typically allied themselves with one religious tradition and raised their children in that religion. Second, interreligious families typically adopted a form of Protestantism, not Catholicism or Judaism. In general, scholars agree that because of strict Catholic requirements and the allure of Protestant acceptance, Protestant-Catholic intermarriages usually resulted in the family becoming Protestant, even if the non-Protestant spouse did not formally convert – which is not a requirement in Protestant congregations. Losing a Catholic to the Protestant community was a very real fear, a loss that Catholic families and clergy regretted. While religious intermarriage remained reprehensible for the Catholic community,

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 107.
¹²⁰ Gordon, 156.
it was becoming apparent that the tides were changing. Protestant-Catholic couples who decided to remain in the Catholic Church were forging new ground, pushing the boundaries of the Catholic tradition in new ways.

Perhaps these interreligious marriages were merely products of Americanism. As evidenced by the late-nineteenth-century encyclical of Pope Leo XIII, Catholics in the United States were not immune to this force:

These [American] dangers, viz., the confounding of license with liberty, the passion for discussing and pouring contempt upon any possible subject, the assumed right to hold whatever opinions one pleases upon any subject and to set them forth in print to the world, have so wrapped minds in darkness that there is now a greater need of the Church’s teaching office than ever before, lest people become unmindful both of conscience and of duty. 122

This continual agitation between the laity and the clergy on “the confounding of license with liberty” and religious intermarriage would eventually lead to greater theological reforms in the late-twentieth century and new social scenarios for interaction between Catholics and other religious communities.

In conclusion, throughout the nineteenth century, interreligious marriage was rare and remained taboo. While blacks, Native Americans, Mormons, and Asians would be prohibited from intermarriage by civil laws, Protestants, Catholics, and Jews were not. The Calvinist and Anglican marriage models of the past were translated into secular laws only as far as they reflected common Christian marriage values. However, social pressures kept religious intermarriage limited. At best Protestants tolerated Catholics and Jews; at worst, they questioned their patriotism and their place in American society. And yet, because Protestantism dominated American society, Protestantism could quietly absorb interreligious

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families. For Jewish and Catholic communities, religious intermarriage was often devastating. Families would lose sons and daughters to Protestant congregations. As a consequence, religious intermarriage marked the future dilution and demise of the religion.

While nineteenth-century Protestants were virtually silent on the matter of interreligious marriage, Catholic and Jewish authorities were doing what they could to dissuade young people from the practice. For those who did rebel, it is only reasonable to think that they did so out of love, out of a desire to become part of mainstream America, or to exercise the civil freedom that their grandparents and great grandparents did not enjoy. Whatever the reason, these couples were ushering in a new era in American history – one that over time would not be characterized by such a strong religious exclusivity. In the twentieth century, there would be dissolution of the Protestant hegemony, a metamorphosis in the role of religious authority in the lives of Americans, and a repositioning of the key attributes associated with marriage. These factors both contributed to and were affected by changes in religious intermarriage, illuminating the shifting boundaries between and among religious communities and between the religious and secular expressions of marriage in America. While intra-religious marriage remained normative in nineteenth-century America, the social doors to religious intermarriage had begun to open.
CHAPTER IV

AN ERA OF INTERRELIGIOUS MARRIAGE
Societal Doors Open in the Twentieth Century

“We change, whether we like it or not.”
Ralph Waldo Emerson

As America’s religious communities converged and diverged in new ways throughout the twentieth century, the nature of religious intermarriage was transformed in profound ways. The Protestant hegemony that defined the nineteenth century eventually morphed into a different sort of American civil religion, one that included Catholics and Jews. By the end of the century, there were signs that even greater religious diversity existed in American public life. The redefinition of social boundaries within, between, and among religious communities was only one of the primary factors contributing to the emergence of greater religious intermarriage; the other factor was the metamorphosis of the institution of marriage. Conceptually in society, it changed over the course of the century from being a specifically Christian covenant to a love-based institution protected by God to a Lockean liberal contract, at least for a substantial portion of Americans. All the while, religious authorities struggled to retain the integrity of their marriage traditions while also adapting to a new religious landscape, characterized by globalization, cosmpolitanism, and inter-religious interaction. In the midst of these dynamics the social doors to religious intermarriage opened more widely, ushering in an era of interreligious marriage that, by the end of the century, began to transform into a new era of interfaith marriage.
An understanding of the dynamics associated with religion, marriage, and intermarriage in three periods – the early part of the century, after World War II, and after 1960 – helps to reveal the progressive unfolding of new relations between and among religions and between the religious and secular spheres of society. Before engaging in this historical analysis, I will clarify my methodological approach to this research, particularly as it relates to the analysis of extensive, but often inconsistent, sociological research on religious intermarriage in the twentieth century. This is necessary in order to establish that religious intermarriage has become increasingly common.

Methodology and Data Limitations

Religious intermarriage did not become an area of sociological-scientific study until the mid-twentieth century. Therefore, in my analysis of the nineteenth century, I relied upon the archival research of cultural historian Anne Rose to depict the social barriers to intermarriage and the doors that were beginning to open. In the twentieth century, there is more scientific research on many aspects of religious intermarriage; however, this research has important limitations. As sociologist Larry Bumpass points out in his 1970 article on the subject, “Although there is a substantial literature on interfaith marriage, there is virtually no treatment of trends in this phenomenon in the United States – for the obvious reason that no official national data exists.” Over the last forty years, there has been some progress in this arena; however, there is still not sufficient data on the numbers of Americans who are in religious intermarriages, the delineations for specific religious groups, or changes over time.

1 “The question of who marries whom is of perennial interest, but only during the last half-century (1900-1950) has it become the subject of scientific research.” August B. Hollingshead, “Cultural Factors in the Selection of Marriage Mates,” American Sociological Review 15, no. 5 (Oct. 1950): 619.
There are three limitations of note. First, there is no comprehensive national data, as Bumpass points out. In 1957 the United States Census collected information on the religious affiliation of spouses. However, the government did not collect this type of information before, or after, the 1957 census. In the 1970s, the federal government passed Public Law 94-52 prohibiting the Census from asking questions on religious affiliation. From 1973 to 1994 a private group conducted the General Social Surveys (GSS) and included questions on religious affiliation of spouses. They did not conduct the survey in 1979, 1981, or 1992. After 1994, the GSS stopped asking questions on this topic.

In 2001 the American Religious Information Survey (ARIS) covered religious intermarriage rates; this was the most comprehensive source of information on religious intermarriage in the early-twenty-first century. The authors of the study write that “ARIS 2001 is the first national survey that has looked at the religious composition of marriage and domestic partners in large enough numbers to be able to make generalizations among different groups.” However, disappointingly, the 2008 ARIS used a different module to survey information and did not include the questions on religious intermarriage that had been included in the 2001 study. Finally, in 2008 the PEW Forum on Religion and Public Life completed its Religious Landscape Survey, a comprehensive view of religion in America. They did collect extensive data on religious intermarriage; however, because 2008 was the

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first year of the study, comparative data does not exist. Sociologist Allan L. McCutcheon reminds us that “the lack of national census data on interfaith association force analysts to rely on the information available in data from community and national survey samples” that are limited.

Second, these limited studies employ different methods to account for conversion of the husband and/or wife. For example, the 1957 Census data collected information on the current religious affiliation of each spouse, but not their original affiliation before or at the time of marriage. According to estimates, three-fifths to half of religious intermarriages resulted in a conversion. Therefore, this methodology would deflate intermarriage estimates. Additionally, it becomes problematic when comparing younger marriages to older marriages – the latter having more time “in which to yield to the pull of conversion.”

Third, in these limited studies, sociologists use different definitions and classifications which hinder effective comparison. Different religious traditions conduct their own surveys, yet comparative analysis (across and even within religious communities) is

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8 McCutcheon, 214-215.
limited due to different definitions and methodologies.¹⁹ Due to America’s tendency toward diversity and denominationalism, it is no surprise that there is disagreement over how to classify various Protestant denominations and other religious communities.¹⁰ Should Mormons be listed as a Protestant denomination? Are cultural Jews who do not believe in God listed as Jews or Atheists? Where is an unaffiliated Christian represented? As the American religious landscape moves, so too do religious groups and the boundaries that define them. This has been and will continue to be a challenge for sociologists of religion.

However, it is not my project to reconcile these studies, offer new data, or suggest a way forward. Rather, my project is to provide a broad historical understanding of how the theological, legal, and social doors to religious intermarriage opened through the centuries. As part of this effort, I will provide evidence that religious intermarriage has become increasingly common. Given the limitations on the data available, I draw on three different studies. Then I compare the data relatively, not absolutely. After examining the plethora of studies on intermarriage rates and comparing their methods and outcomes, it is clear that percentages of the incidence of intermarriage cannot be directly compared.¹¹ Without

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¹⁰ McCutcheon, 214.

manipulating the data, something that is out of the scope of this project, I am left to look at the outcomes of specific studies that compare intermarriage rates across crucial periods.

In each of the periods there is an increase in the numbers of Americans in religious intermarriages. While my analysis does not show that there is an absolute increase from circa 1870 to 1994 (the data from each of these time periods cannot be compared), specific studies reveal an increase during the time from 1870 to 1940, from 1957 to 1978, and from 1973 to 1994.\(^{12}\) Other studies, both quantitative and qualitative, support the claim that there has been an increase in religious intermarriage from the early-eighteenth century through the twentieth century.\(^{13}\) The analysis that follows is aimed at explaining the historical factors that have contributed to this dynamic.


\(^{12}\) The studies listed above show relative increases during the time from 1870 to 1940, during the time from 1957 to 1978, and during the time from 1973 to 1994.

\(^{13}\) The following represent only a small sample of the sociological articles claiming that there have been increases in religious intermarriage: McCutcheon, 214, 220; Sherkat, 608, 614; Samuel A. Mueller, “The New Triple Melting Pot: Herberg Revisited,” Review of Religious Research 13, no. 1 (Autumn, 1971): 21; Hepps and Dorfman, 324; Glenn, 557.
Early-Twentieth-Century America

The early-twentieth century ushered in a new era in Protestant fundamentalism that historians now recognize as the last gasp of the Protestant hegemony. The percentage of foreign-born Americans reached its record high in the early-twentieth century. By 1930, the foreign-born population was 14.2 million, compared to 2.2 million in 1850.14 Many of these settlers came from Europe. Not only did they arrive from northern and western Europe like earlier immigrants, but also from southern and eastern parts of the continent. “More and more native-born Americans believed the swelling flood of immigrants threatened the nation’s unity. Hostility which had boiled over against the Chinese in the 1870s now turned against Jews, Roman Catholics, Japanese, and finally, the new immigrants in general.”15

This was a time of Prohibition and the Scopes trial, attempts by Protestant evangelicals to abolish the moral evils of society and ensure a biblical interpretation of creation in America’s schools. With immigration came a hyperactive focus on race, ethnicity, and religion which led to restrictions on marriage between whites and Asians. Immigration also inspired the eugenics movement and policies like the *numerus clausus* meant to limit Jews and sometimes Catholics in establishments of higher education.

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Concerns over immigrant populations resulted in the 1924 Reed Act and “national origins” quotas that would severely limit immigration until the 1960s.\textsuperscript{16}

As I noted in the previous chapter, marriage was often a vehicle for immigration, prompting states to employ marriage restrictions in order to limit certain types of immigrants. Before 1922, the government did not allow a woman to marry a foreign man. If she did, she would lose her United States citizenship. A man could marry a foreign woman, but he could not marry an Asian, a polygamist, or a prostitute. There were also literary tests in place to prevent certain types of people from immigrating. After the Cable Act in 1922, a woman could marry a foreign man as long as he met certain restrictions.\textsuperscript{17}

In 1920 women gained the right to vote; this development would change their marriage and religious practices. Before 1920, many women engaged in the suffrage movement for religious reasons. Christian family values inspired women of evangelical Protestant denominations to become major political advocates for the prohibition of alcohol. If women could gain the right to vote, they would vote overwhelmingly for the laws prohibiting the sale of alcohol. In this way, the passage of Prohibition legislation and enabling women’s suffrage went hand in hand.\textsuperscript{18} Ironically, the result of suffrage was that some segments of women left their close ties to religion behind.


\textsuperscript{18} The Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) was founded in 1874. Their slogan was “Home Protection.” This “250,000 army . . . [was] undoubtedly, the nation’s most effective political action group in the last decades of the nineteenth century.” Daniel Okrent, \textit{Last Call: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition} (New York: Scribner, 2010), 7-23, quotation on 16; Lori D. Ginzberg, \textit{Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 203-213.
With new opportunities in public life and education, women became less interested in the home, raising children, and upholding religious traditions. They were having fewer children, getting divorced more often, and becoming less tied to their church lives. The views of one of the prominent leaders of the women’s suffrage movement, Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902), became increasingly relevant for the twentieth century. Stanton feared that women’s lives, educational opportunities, and political ideals were too tied to religion. Women, “in their present religious bondage,” writes Stanton, would use their political power to hinder the prosperity of the secular government. Stanton was urging her fellow female compatriots to value and support the religious neutrality of the state. She advocated that each woman “must turn the tide of her enthusiasm from the church to the state . . .”\(^{19}\) Stanton would not live to see the results of women’s suffrage, but by the early-twentieth century, the tide was beginning to turn.

Two dynamics resulted from this shift in women’s roles. First, the authority of religious leaders diminished as women looked less to their religious communities as their primary support. Second, some women began to break with the social and theological exclusivity that characterized much of early-nineteenth-century religion in America.

Men who experimented with ideas and dismissed personal piety were not new in America at the turn of the twentieth century. But women who were like them were. In interfaith marriages, wives and husbands increasingly found common ground in their work, and church or synagogue affiliation seemed dispensable. Even then, spirituality did not disappear. Free-thinking in fact encouraged religious experimentation.\(^{20}\)

\(^{19}\) Elizabeth Cady Stanton is quoted in Ginzberg, 212-213.

A new era began to dawn for women in America, one that would continue to have an important effect on American society, American religion, and marriage.

Early in the century, there were also signs that marriage was becoming increasingly associated with love – love that could stretch across the harsh boundaries of religious traditions and unite Americans. Americans experience a “dual socialization” when it comes to choosing a marriage partner. On the one hand, they are raised in a religious tradition that has a philosophy on marriage. On the other hand, they live in a society where romantic notions of love are associated with marriage. At the turn of the century there were early warning signs that the scales were beginning to tip towards the latter hand.

In 1908 Israel Zangwill’s *The Melting Pot* captured the attention of the nation. It was a love story of a Christian woman, Vera, and a Jewish man, David, who sought to marry, despite the family warnings and societal pressures to live separate lives. Their aspiration was that the love that crossed ethnic and religious lines in America would conquer the hatred, persecution, and separation that characterized the Old World. David declares the following:

> East and West, North and South, the palm and the pine, the pole and the equator, the crescent and the cross – How the great Alchemist melts and fuses them with his purging flame! Here shall they all unite to build the Republic of Man and the Kingdom of God. Ah . . . what is the glory of Rome and Jerusalem . . . compared with the glory of America.

After seeing the premiere, President Theodore Roosevelt endorsed the play’s message that “America is God’s Crucible, the great Melting-Pot where all the races of Europe are melting

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American popular culture was not only recognizing religious intermarriage, it was also creating a link between God, America, and marriage across European religious lines. This was predictive of a new type of American civil religion that would begin to materialize by mid-century. By mid-century, American civil religion and interreligious marriage would take place ‘under God’ versus ‘under Protestantism.’

Paradoxically, at the same time that Americans were beginning to pay less attention to established boundaries of religion, Jewish and Catholic religious authorities began making explicit statements about the do’s and don’ts of religious intermarriage. In the early-twentieth century the Catholic community was made up of a multitude of ethnic churches. Disparate groups of American Catholics from all over Europe were united, not in language or culture, but in their common connection to the Church. Central religious authorities continued to give direction to their flock in America. The 1917 revised Code of Canon Law confirmed the 1877 guidelines that “mixed marriage” between a Catholic and a baptized Christian who was not Catholic was not valid. “The church most strictly and everywhere forbids marriages between a Catholic and a person enrolled in a heretical or schismatic sect” (Canon 1060). The Church would only grant a dispensation for “good and weighty reasons” and only if certain conditions were met. As outlined in Canon 1061, the Church required the non-Catholic spouse to make certain promises to ensure the loyalty of the Catholic spouse.

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24 Ibid.

25 An early-twentieth-century example is the 1907 encyclical Pascendi Dominici Gregis. In this encyclical, Pope Pius X speaks out against the increased focus on race that had been occupying the minds of many Americans and eugenics advocates during the early 1900s. Pope Pius IX, Pascendi Dominici Gregis (Encyclical of Pope Pius X on the Doctrines of the Modernists), Vatican, 8 Sept. 1907, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_x/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-x_enc_19070908_pascendi-dominici-gregis_en.html, accessed 22 July 2010.
and the couple’s children to Catholicism. In 1930 Casti Connubii was yet another warning from Rome against mixed marriages. In this encyclical, Pope Pius XI declares the following:

They, therefore, who rashly and heedlessly contract mixed marriages, from which the maternal love and providence of the Church dissuades her children for very sound reasons, fail conspicuously in this respect, sometimes with danger to their eternal salvation. . . .

. . . For, where there exists diversity of mind, truth and feeling, the bond of union of mind and heart is wont to be broken, or at least weakened. From this comes the danger lest the love of man and wife grow cold and the peace and happiness of family life, resting as it does on the union of hearts, be destroyed.27

Two years later, in order to enforce these restrictions on Catholics and their non-Catholic spouses, the Church issued a letter listing potential punishment for couples who violated their agreements. Annulment, exclusion from church activities, burial restrictions, and public excommunication were among the punishments listed.28

The 1930s is hailed as the golden age of “social Catholicism.” It was a time when Catholic charities, schools, and hospitals were becoming prevalent around the United States.29 Disparate ethnic communities within the Catholic-American rubric were creating their own social networks, still distinct from the Protestant-American majority. However, there were signs that Catholics were increasingly able to be part of mainstream America. The


nomination of Al Smith, a Catholic, in the 1928 presidential election, simultaneously revealed the movement of Catholics into mainstream America as well as the enduring Protestant mistrust of Catholics. As Allan J. Lichtman states in his book, *Prejudice and the Old Politics: The Presidential Election of 1928*, “religion was undoubtedly the most sensitive emotional issue of 1928.” Smith’s nomination “rekindled religious strife” in the nation.\(^{30}\) Despite Al Smith’s loss to Herbert Hoover, it would only be a few decades before Catholics began playing an increasingly prominent role in American public life. This would ultimately affect their tendency to intermarry and the nature of these intermarriages.

The precariousness of the place of Jews in Germany in the early-twentieth century, in combination with domestic anti-Semitism arising from nativist concerns about immigration, kept Jews on the outside of American public life. Harvard University and other institutions of higher education had *numerus clausus*, the broad base of Americans did not welcome Jews in public office, and many conservative Americans often blamed Jews for unpopular social movements like the New Deal, which they called the “Jew Deal.”\(^{31}\) Into the twentieth century, Jews faced barriers when they went to buy a house or rent an apartment and “[n]o matter how rich they became, they could not get into exclusive private clubs.”\(^{32}\) When the St. Louis steamer carrying 900 Jews arrived on the shores of the United States in 1939, the United States government sent it back to Germany. All of these events made American Jews question their place in American life. Given this environment it was not surprising that many Jews snubbed intermarriage and sought to uphold the solidarity and strength of the Jewish


\(^{32}\) Bryant, “Immigration in the United States,” 8.
community. It was also not surprising that some young American Jews sought to leave their Judaism behind, marry into a Protestant family, change their name, and attempt to blend into the mainstream.

The Jewish American community became increasingly divided. Orthodox and Conservative rabbis clutched Jewish tradition and refused to officiate intermarriage ceremonies. The Reform congregations debated religious intermarriage and worked to develop their own unified voice on this subject—a subject about which rabbis were becoming increasingly concerned. The newly formed Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) would become a central voice of Reform Jewish authority. In 1909 the CCAR made a formal statement discouraging religious intermarriage.\textsuperscript{33} Evident in their statement was their struggle with authority, as their words were vague at times. They stressed that intermarriage “is contrary to the tradition of the Jewish religion and should therefore be discouraged by the American rabbinate.” They had rejected an earlier draft of the statement that said that a rabbi “ought not to officiate” a religious intermarriage.\textsuperscript{34}

The use of the amorphous language in the 1909 statement reflects the nature of the rabbinate. Rabbi means teacher; unlike Catholic priests who are part of a hierarchy of the Church and play a role in administering sacraments which confer grace, rabbis are part of no formal hierarchy and do not have the power to bestow God’s grace. Rabbis are technically free to officiate weddings they so choose. Reform rabbis and congregations were attempting to address interreligious marriage in their communities in different ways. For example, in

\textsuperscript{33} The Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) was founded in 1889. The 1909 statement on religious intermarriage is referenced frequently in the CCAR’s ensuing statements on the subject. See various statements at http://ccarnet.org/, accessed 27 July 2010.

1910, a Jewish temple in Detroit required interreligious couples to sign a statement before they were married, not unlike the Catholic practice.\textsuperscript{35} This was not the norm; nevertheless, it is an example of the type of experimentation in which rabbis engaged at the early part of the century.

As religious authorities became more attuned to the issue, so too did social scientists who began studying religious intermarriage demography. An overview of an important study, “Single or Triple Melting Pot? Intermarriage Trends in New Haven, 1870-1940,” conducted by sociologist Ruby Jo Reeves Kennedy in 1944, lends compelling insight into the phenomenon.\textsuperscript{36} Kennedy’s study contributed to the empirical basis for William Herberg’s seminal text, \textit{Protestant, Catholic, Jew}.\textsuperscript{37} Kennedy examined over 9,000 marriage records in New Haven, Connecticut during the seventy-year period before World War II. She examined marriage within and across ethnic and religious lines and marriage nuptials to determine what type of religious wedding ceremonies the couples had. New Haven, during the years of the study, was made up of seven predominant ethnic groups – Jews, Italians, British-Americans, Irish, Poles, Germans, and Scandinavians.\textsuperscript{38} These seven ethnic groups fell into three religious groupings – Jewish, Protestant (British-American, German, Scandinavian), and Catholic (Irish, Italian, Polish).

\textsuperscript{35} The statement read: “We, the undersigned, hereby pledge ourselves that in case children should be born of our marriage, we will, to the best of our knowledge and ability, rear them in the Jewish faith.” Rose, 132. Pledges, including signatures of the couples, came from Congregation Beth El, Detroit, Nov. 5, 1914, Jan. 3, 1916, and Dec. 22, 1918, Small Collections 5402, AJA. \textit{idem}, 256, n. 47.

\textsuperscript{36} Kennedy, “Single or Triple Melting-Pot,” 331-339.

\textsuperscript{37} Herberg, \textit{Protestant, Catholic, Jew},” 45-48.

\textsuperscript{38} Kennedy, “Single or Triple Melting Pot,” 332.
Kennedy found that intra-religious marriage was common. There were two important nuances, however. One, the Irish tended to marry other Irish. However, and most interesting, the second most common marriages for the Irish were not with Italians or Poles (other Catholics), but with British-Americans. Kennedy explains this deviation from her theory in two ways. First, the Irish were more established and thus, higher on the socio-economic scale than new Catholic immigrants. Thus, by marrying British-Americans (the “real Americans” and most established and desirable), Irish were able to maintain and even enhance their place in society. Second, according to Kennedy, most of these Irish-British-American couples opted for Catholic nuptials and thus agreed to raise their children Catholic.

Both of these dynamics were beginning to garner concern in Protestant communities. Kennedy concluded that while ethnicity was diminishing in importance, religion remained a prominent limit of marriage choice. While defying ethnic boundaries, generally Protestants continued to marry Protestants, Catholics continued to marry Catholics, and Jews continued to marry Jews. America, as represented by New Haven, was a “triple melting pot” versus a single melting pot (the idea popularized in Irving Zangwill’s play). She argued that America was still in an era of intra-religious marriage.

Notwithstanding her conclusion, Kennedy’s data reveal an increase in ‘interreligious’ across Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish lines from 1870 to 1940. Interreligious marriage for Jews went from zero percent to 5.68 percent; for Catholics from 4.65 percent to 16.29 percent; and Protestants from 0.89 percent to 20.28 percent. Kennedy’s sociological study

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39 Ibid., 334.

40 Ibid., Table 2 on 333. Sociologist August B. Hollingshead in 1950 evaluated the influence of ethnicity and religion, as well as race, age, and class on intermarriage. Like Kennedy, his study was also limited to New Haven. In 1948 and 1949, he interviewed over 500 couples and collected data from marriage licenses, family members, and other resources on an additional 1,457 couples. He
is very helpful in that it confirms many of the dynamics associated with intra-religious marriage in the nineteenth century. It also points to future developments. By mid-century, other sociologists would be challenging Kennedy’s conclusions, positing that Protestants, Catholics, and Jews were marrying one another at higher rates than initially suspected, creating more of a single than a triple melting pot scenario.

**Mid-Twentieth-Century America**

The developments in the nineteenth and early-twentieth century laid the groundwork for a new American civil religion, new focus for the institution of marriage, and more interreligious marriage between Protestants and Catholics as well as Jews and Christians. Sociologist William Herberg published his oft-cited book, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew* in 1955. Using Kennedy’s study as empirical evidence, he argued that ethnic and national boundaries are disintegrating, yet religious boundaries remained. Protestants are interacting with Protestants, Catholics with Catholics, and Jews with Jews. He also posited that religious diversity has created a social-religious arena in which the various denominations are losing their particularity; this is giving way to a new kind of civil religion that he calls the “American Way of Life.”

During the mid-century, Americans were still divided by their religious communities. However, they were “united in their acceptance of the tenets of the

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‘American Way of Life’ as the basic set of social values necessary for the operation of society.’\(^{42}\)

By the end of World War II, the Protestant hegemony that dominated American civil religion was beginning to give way to a national spirit that would include Catholics and Jews. José Casanova summarizes Herberg’s analysis:

America was defined as a “Christian” nation and Christian meant solely “Protestant.” But eventually, . . . [a] process of dual accommodation took place, whereby Catholicism and Judaism became American religions, while American religion and the nation were equally transformed in the process. America became a “Judeo-Christian” nation, and Protestant, Catholic, and Jew became the three denominations of the American civil religion.\(^{43}\)

This American civil religion would not however include small groups of religious minorities like Japanese Buddhists, Chinese Daoists, or Arab Muslims; it also did not include racial minorities like black and Hispanic Christians. Casanova argues that what these omissions reveal is that these groups remained “invisible . . . alien[s] at a time when European immigrants, Catholics and Jews, had been incorporated into the imagined community of the American nation.”\(^{44}\)

Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish communities fought on the battlefield together and found a common enemy in the Triple Alliance, the Axis Powers, and then the godless Communists in the ensuing Cold War. Protestants, Catholics, and Jews found their way to the suburbs and to institutions of higher education, thanks to the G.I. Bill and retractions of


\(^{44}\) Ibid., 69.
During the years of McCarthyism, God-fearing Christians and Jews came together to declare that the United States was a nation “under God” – a religious country with a Judeo-Christian heritage. It was a Catholic group, Knights of Columbus, that instigated the Congressional inclusion of the phrase “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance mid-century.  

America’s civil religion was changing in three important ways. First, to be “American” meant to be religious and affiliated with a religious community. Atheists posed a threat to American national security. Second, to be American meant to believe in the power and influence of the biblical God; it did not necessarily mean Protestantism, at least in the form of the nineteenth century and before. Third, the common morality that Tocqueville had observed (at least between various Protestant denominations and Catholics) had gone public. The focus was less on differences between religious communities and more on their shared values. An era of religious inclusivism emerged, one quite different from the theological exclusivism that characterized nineteenth-century America. The social doors to religious intermarriage were opening further.

The potential for interreligious marriage was also facilitated by new conceptions of marriage in the mid-century. Happiness and love began to supersede the sacred purpose and social utility that characterized marriage in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. While love and happiness were always part of the American conception of marriage, these

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aspects of one’s relationship with their spouse were housed within a broader construct of covenantal and social obligation to God and one’s community in the nineteenth century. Ruth Shonle Cavan notes, “In the United States over the past [nineteenth] century a strong belief inhered in marriage as a sacred, divine, and holy institution entered into as a permanent relationship.” Beginning in the 1880s, “the concept of marriage as sacred and inviolable yielded before contrary opinions [about divorce] . . . it tended to be replaced by the idea that marriage was a social obligation.” Cavan continues, “The sacred and social concepts were supported by some degree of necessity, for they were the outgrowth of a social situation in which not only social welfare but personal survival depended upon a strong and continuing family life.”

However, in the 1930s, as a reaction to the Great Depression, the New Deal enabled the government to begin taking on the role of social services. By post World War II, marriage changed again. Cavan explains:

As the necessity for the family to perform utilitarian functions declined, less was said about marriage as a social obligation. This concept, current from about 1880 to 1920, was challenged by a third concept . . . that marriage exists primarily for the personal happiness of husband and wife. If happiness is achieved, the marriage is successful. Sacred values are left to the church; social values to a number of other agencies.

Love and perfect happiness were the picture of American life in the 1950s. The “Leave it to Beaver” show and Frank Sinatra’s catchy lyric – “Love and marriage, love and marriage, go together like a horse and carriage” are only two examples of the new persona of marriage that emerged mid-century.

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48 Ibid., 23.
Nancy Cott emphasizes that not only was happiness integral to this conception of marriage, as Cavan argues, but there was a sense of liberty and freedom as well.

[T]he public rhetoric of war, while dwelling on the defense of democratic freedom against Nazi aggression and Japanese imperialism, emphasized the intimate, private, and familial aspects of the American Way of Life, centering on heterosexual love and marriage.\(^4^9\)

She continues, alluding to the shift that had occurred since the previous century.

Where mid-nineteenth century judges and other public spokesmen had hardly been able to speak of marriage without mentioning Christian morality, mid-twentieth century discourse saw the hallmarks of the institution in liberty and privacy, consent and freedom. Marriage and family and all the emotional and material comforts of home were personally chosen private freedoms and at the same time public emblems of the nation . . . \(^5^0\)

As Protestants, Catholics, and Jews mixed more frequently in society and the trajectory of the institution of marriage moved towards love, happiness, and freedom, and away from its sacred past, interreligious marriage became more tenable.

Sociologists provided evidence that marriage patterns were changing. In 1951, John L. Thomas published a study on Catholic intermarriage that challenged Kennedy’s analysis of Catholic-Protestant marriage rates and her earlier conclusion that there were three melting pots. He concluded that Catholic-Protestant marriage was happening at much higher rates than previously believed. Based on data from the 1950 Catholic Directory, Thomas found that from 1940 to 1950 approximately 30 percent of all Catholic marriages sanctified in the Church were mixed marriages.\(^5^1\) He looked across the United States, not just New Haven.

\(^{4^9}\) Cott, 187.

\(^{5^0}\) Ibid., 197.

\(^{5^1}\) Thomas, 488.
This was almost twice as high as Kennedy’s finding and it did not yet account for the Catholic mixed marriages that were not sanctified by the Church.

Thomas’s analysis of 132 parishes found that almost 40 percent of all Catholic mixed marriages were not sanctioned by Catholic nuptials. Based on his analysis, he predicted that Protestant-Catholic marriage would continue to increase in the future based on four reasons: 1) in post-World War II America, with horizontal and vertical mobility, there will be a decline in ethnic sub-groups; 2) religious intermarriage will have a cumulative effect since children of interreligious marriages are more likely to engage in interreligious marriages; 3) increasingly there is an attitude of tolerance and willingness of young Catholic people to marry Protestants (he does not mention Jews); and 4) the family and the church have increasingly lost control over marriage. Young people are more focused on marrying for love and romantic reasons and exploring their individuality. Thomas claims that the single melting pot theory is as valid as any other.

The entrance of Protestant religious leaders into the interreligious marriage discussion in mid-century, particularly regarding concern over Catholic restrictions on interreligious couples, also speaks to the increase in marriages that were crossing the lines historically drawn between Protestants and Catholics. Various Protestant religious groups issued statements on religious intermarriage. They rejected the Catholic pre-nuptial agreements that forced Protestants to agree to actions that were “repugnant to reason and conscience.” A 1940 statement by the Lutherans emphasized that to “become unequally

52 Ibid., 488.

yoked together with a Catholic” is “disastrous.” More specifically, marriages with Roman Catholics “fall short of the attainment of full marital happiness.”\textsuperscript{54} In 1948, the Episcopal Church warned against marriage to Catholics. The General Assembly, Presbyterian Church of the United States, American Baptist Convention (Northern), International Convention of Disciples of Christ, Southern Baptist Convention, and the Convention of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod echoed the Episcopal resolution.\textsuperscript{55} Protestants believed that the Church was limiting the religious freedom of interreligious couples. The Protestant concern over religious intermarriage marks a distinctive shift from the nineteenth century when Protestants were silent on the subject, quietly absorbing interreligious families. By the mid-twentieth century, the phenomenon had a direct effect on their religious communities and they could not afford to remain silent.

It was not until the last third of the twentieth century that Jews saw “a tremendous leap” in religious intermarriage rates. According to the National Jewish Population Survey, of the marriages that began before 1970, 13 percent were religious intermarriages. Of the marriages that took place in the decade after 1970, the percent of intermarriages jumped to 28 percent; it more than doubled. By the end of the 1980s, the percentage had increased to 43 percent.\textsuperscript{56} By mid-century, even though Jewish religious intermarriage remained rare, it was

\textsuperscript{54} This quotation is from the \textit{Messenger}, a religious publication of the Lutheran Church that is cited in the following manual for Roman Catholic priests and laymen. Honoratus Bonzelet, \textit{Mixed Marriages and Prenuptial Instructions} (Milwaukee, 1942), 28-29; quoted in Barron, \textit{People Who Intermarry}, 46, 363.


apparent that the nature of Jewish intermarriage was shifting. In the nineteenth century, Jews were overwhelmingly marrying Protestants if they married out. However, according to the 1957 United States Census, by the middle of the twentieth century, only 58.2 percent of Jews who were in religious intermarriages were married to Protestants. More than two-fifths, 41.8 percent, were married to Catholics.\(^\text{57}\) Also, a study in Washington D.C. revealed generational differences in one’s likelihood to intermarry. “Jews who were first generation Americans, only 1.4 percent intermarried, while in the second and third generations the figures are 10.2 percent and 17.9 percent respectively.”\(^\text{58}\) A public opinion poll in 1950 compared to a similar poll in 1962 reveals that Christians became less averse to marrying Jews. Fifty-seven percent said they would “definitely not marry” a Jew in 1950; in 1962, the percentage dropped to 37 percent.\(^\text{59}\)

In 1971 sociologist Samuel A. Mueller conducted an analysis of the sociological studies to date on religious intermarriage, evaluating the shifts in the cleavages between religious communities. He concluded from his analysis that “while the Jewish-gentile boundary line in mate selection is still strong, it appears to be in the process of weakening.”\(^\text{60}\) He also concluded that “the Protestant-Catholic cleavage was not as great in 1960 as in 1928” – a conclusion he reached after analyzing voting patterns in Richard Nixon’s election to


voting patterns in Al Smith’s election. Post-World War II America was a time of changes between these religious communities as well as in the institution of marriage. After the 1960s, many of the seeds for religious intermarriage would begin to sprout, not just for Protestants, Catholics, and Jews, but for newer American religious communities as well.

**Late-Twentieth-Century America**

In the late-twentieth century, Americans threw the doors to religious intermarriage wide open. The two major barriers to religious intermarriage in the early-nineteenth century were collapsing. Not only Protestants, Catholics, and Jews, but Americans of a wide variety of religions, faiths, and ethnicities were mixing and interacting at unprecedented levels. Additionally, while the family and communal pressures to marry inside the religious tradition did not disappear, these pressures diminished for many as secular marriage laws changed and Americans began to view marriage as a private contract between two people, a contract that was not necessarily bound to the confines of a religious community. As Jonathan Sarna emphasizes, “Acceptance of intermarriage on the part of Americans rose dramatically as the twentieth century wound down. To oppose marriages between men and women of different ethnicities, faiths, and races seems to many people to be un-American and racist.”

The 1960s were a tumultuous time, where vast changes took place in American society and the religious landscape. What specifically changed in American society to create such fertile ground for religious intermarriage? The answer is three-fold. First, the American

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62 Sarna, 361.
religious landscape was diversifying in new ways, altering the nature of American civil religion; second, for many Americans the institution of marriage was becoming increasingly secular and contractual; and, third, in select communities, religious authorities were allowing greater theological leeway for intermarried couples in the name of ecumenism and interreligious relationship-building. An understanding of these developments helps to illuminate not only why the doors to religious intermarriage are open, but also why a new era of ‘interfaith’ marriage is dawning – the subject of the next chapter.

The first change during this period involved the diversification of American religion and correspondingly, the character of America’s civil religion. The 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act provided the opportunity for people around the world to migrate to the United States. In 1970, the foreign-born population was at a record low. It was 9.6 million people, or 4.7 percent of the population. By 1980, it had climbed rapidly to 14.1 million people, or 6.2 percent of the population. It has steadily risen since. In 1990 it was 19.8 million, or 7.9 percent and by 2000 it reached 28.4 million, or 10.4 percent.63 The nature of these immigrants differed substantively from past waves. Non-Europeans and individuals from countries that were not predominantly Christian emerged, including Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, in addition to large numbers of Latin American Catholics.64 While these minority religions (e.g., Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism) remained and continue to remain small


relative to the Christian majority in the nation, their influence on the religious landscape had and has the potential to be significant. Casanova writes, “[T]he most striking new development with extraordinary potential repercussions, both national and global, is the arrival of increasing numbers of Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, indeed of representatives of all world religions.” Robert Wuthnow reinforces this view. This new religious diversity, in all of its manifestations, “holds potential for profoundly altering America’s historic self-identity, especially its civil religion, which, from the start, has emphasized the Christian tradition.”

Religionist Stephen Prothero attests that “the Protestant paradigm . . . has given way to a new pluralist paradigm that sees the United States as a nation of religions whose skyline is punctuated not only by church spires but also by onion domes and minarets.”

These groups have not assimilated like the European immigrants of the past. Samuel J. Huntington, Harvard political scientist, comments on this dynamic in his 2004 book, Who Are We? The Challenges to America’s Religious Identity:

America’s third major wave of immigration that began in the 1960s brought to America people primarily from Latin America and Asia rather than Europe as the previous waves did. The culture and values of their countries of origin often differ substantially from those prevalent in America. It is much easier for these immigrants to retain contact with and to remain culturally part of their country of origin. Earlier waves of immigrants were subjected to intense programs of Americanization to assimilate them into American society. Nothing comparable occurred after 1965. In the past, assimilation was greatly facilitated because both waves substantially tapered off due to the Civil War, World War I, and laws limiting immigration. The current wave continues unabated. The erosion of other national loyalties and the assimilation

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67 Prothero, 4.
of recent immigrants could be much slower and more problematic than assimilation has been in the past.\textsuperscript{68}

Scholars agree that post-1965 immigration was more diverse and that the incorporation of these immigrant communities into American society has not been through assimilation, but through a process that is much more multicultural, cosmopolitan, and global. Diana Eck describes it as “the image of the symphony, not the melting pot.”\textsuperscript{69}

This symphony has also included new religious movements (NRM) and new forms of spirituality. Eastern religious practices began to permeate society, enabling Americans to integrate Eastern ideas into their religious traditions. Increasingly young people have been exploring these new forms of spirituality. “For those experiencing spiritual hunger, today’s world offers a catalogue of offerings including UFO cults, neo-pagan groups, New Age gurus, Eastern mystics, and self-improvement programs, along with a confusing array of Christian-sounding groups all claiming to have Jesus on their team.”\textsuperscript{70} While scholars of religion had historically labeled these movements “cults,” by the 1970s, scholars in the San Francisco Bay area began popularizing the term “new religions” which has become normative.\textsuperscript{71}

\textsuperscript{68} Samuel Huntington, \textit{Who Are We? The Challenges to America’s National Identity} (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 18. While scholars generally agree on the important demographic and sociological changes introduced to American religiosity by this new religious diversity, scholars disagree as to whether the changes have had a positive or negative effect on the nation. While Samuel Huntington argues that the American identity will continue to erode if the nation does not make an effort to return to its Anglo and Protestant roots, Diana Eck argues that the nation’s strength lies in embracing religious diversity. idem, 12, 19-20, 96; Eck, \textit{New Religious America}, 6, 31, 47, 56.


As I discussed in Chapter 1, the growing numbers of Americans disaffiliating from established religious traditions reflect the new spaces this religious diversity is creating between religious communities and between what has traditionally been considered religious and secular space. Even more than in decades past, many young people are experimenting with multiple belonging and various forms of spirituality, sometimes as part of a single religious community, sometimes in the form of bricolage or religion à la carte.\(^\text{72}\) No longer is America a triple or a single melting pot dominated by Protestants, Catholics, and Jews. It appears to be becoming “the first new global society.”\(^\text{73}\)

The second change that affected religious intermarriage had to do with the place of marriage in American society – a society increasingly defined by culture wars in the public arena. American society had not only become more religiously diverse, multicultural, and global, it had become more religiously polarized. The Vietnam War, the civil rights movements for blacks, women, and homosexuals, and the increased religious diversity of society sparked what some deemed to be secularization and moral relativism in an historically Christian nation. The courts removed school prayer from public schools, recognized the privacy of couples to use contraception, and legalized abortion.\(^\text{74}\) This mobilized evangelical Christians to engage in politics and ultimately inspired the American Catholic Church to also


\(^{73}\) Casanova, “Immigration and the New Religious Pluralism,” 72. Casanova cites Prothero, \textit{A Nation of Religions}.

step into the public arena. This “deprivatization” of religion meant the emergence of “public religions” in the 1980s.\textsuperscript{75} “Christian fundamentalists, Orthodox Jews, and conservative Catholics . . . joined forces in a battle against their progressive counterparts for control of American secular culture.”\textsuperscript{76}

Much to the dismay of conservatives, the institution of marriage was increasingly being treated as a liberal contract, rather than a sacred or even social institution. Where liberals celebrated the shifting role of women in society and the passage of no-fault divorce legislation, conservatives mourned the loss of “traditional family values.” While divorce had been on the rise throughout the twentieth century, it increased significantly in the 1970s. Before no-fault divorce in the late 1960s, “anyone who wanted to end their marriage was going to have to prove allegations of adultery or cruelty.” With no-fault divorce legislation, one could dissolve a marriage for any reason including irreconcilable differences.\textsuperscript{77}

Rising divorce and no-fault divorce laws reflected the shift in the institution of marriage from a public religious covenant to a private contractual matter. Historically, “[m]arriage differed from a love affair inasmuch as it continued regardless of love. . . . [Marriage was] a deliberate rational act, a public institution making the family independent of Cupid’s whims.”\textsuperscript{78} But the emerging mid-twentieth-century idea that marriage was

\textsuperscript{75} Casanova, Public Religions.

\textsuperscript{76} James Davison Hunter, Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America (New York: Basic Books, 1991), back cover.


predominantly about happiness, love, and freedom led to a new contractual model of marriage that became more prominent in the United States towards the end of the century. John Witte Jr. describes this shift:

[A]t the turn of the twenty-first century, this traditional lore and law of the family has been largely spurned, notably in America. Today, a contractual view of marriage has come to dominate American law, lore, and life—largely unbuffered by complementary spiritual, social, or natural perspectives, and largely unreceptive to much of a role for church, state, or broader community. Marriage is viewed increasingly at law and at large today as a private bilateral contract to be formed, maintained, and dissolved as the couple sees fit.79

The “constitutional principles of sexual autonomy and separation of church and state” have largely eclipsed American ideas that marriage is a religious covenant.80 Marriage, once clearly aligned with the religious sphere of society, appeared to have migrated into the secular realm.

Religious conservatives have taken a number of steps to combat and reverse this secularization of marriage to try to return America’s families to “traditional” or covenantal ideas associated with marriage. For example, in the late-twentieth century, Louisiana (1997), Arizona (1998), and Arkansas (2001) made ‘covenant marriages’ legally enforceable. Over twenty-five other states have considered, or are considering, covenant marriage legislation. Covenant marriage licenses are alternatives to the regular state-issued licenses in these states. When a couple applies for a marriage license, they are provided with a pamphlet on covenant marriage, describing its features. If a couple opts for a covenant marriage, they agree to pre-marital counseling (typically by a religious authority of the couple’s choice), waive their rights to unilateral no-fault divorce, and are able to supplement state marriage laws with their

80 Ibid., 195.
own religiously mandated norms in order to make the dissolution of marriage more difficult. Tony Perkins, the President of the Family Research Council, a conservative Christian think-tank, as well as Mike Huckabee, an ordained Southern Baptist minister, a 2008 presidential candidate, and currently a conservative commentator on the Fox News channel, helped lead the covenant marriage movements in Louisiana and Arkansas, respectively. 81 The mere presence of these reactionary covenant marriage laws illuminates the predominantly secular and contractual nature of marriage in contemporary American society.

This secularization of marriage and the reaction by religious conservatives has had a direct effect on patterns of intermarriage in the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries. Increases in intermarriage have been significantly more substantial for mainline Protestant denominations than conservative Protestant denominations. Those individuals who are “reared in religious traditions that claim exclusive access to the supernatural rewards . . . will be more likely to link marital choices to religious qualities.” 82 A number of late-twentieth-century sociological studies confirm this dynamic. For example, in one study, the author compared intermarriage for younger and older cohorts. The older cohort was born before 1930 (and therefore potentially married after 1950); the younger cohort was born after 1970 (and therefore potentially married after 1990). For Presbyterians and Episcopalians, there was a 15.6 percentage point increase in intermarriage from the older to the younger cohort. There was an 18.9 point increase for Methodists and a 24.7 point increase for Lutherans. In the study, these denominations were considered mainline Protestant. For conservative

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82 Sherkat, 610.
Christians the increase was relatively small – only a 3.8 point increase from the older to the younger cohort. Conservative Christians included twenty-nine denominations ranging from Baptist to Evangelical Free Church to Pentecostal. Conservatives encourage their fellow Americans to return to the time when marriage was considered a religious covenant and intra-religious marriage was the norm. These conservative voices stand in direct contrast to more progressive voices that seek the continual liberalization of marriage from religious constraints. This secularization of the institution of marriage has not been inconsequential for creating a social environment that enables religious intermarriage.

The third change affecting interreligious marriage in the late-twentieth century was theological developments in Christian and Jewish traditions. Since the 1948 World Council of Churches (WCC), various denominations of Protestants have been undergoing ecumenical and interreligious dialogue in order help to build “Christian unity,” but also “the unity of all mankind” including Roman Catholics, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Humanists, Traditional African Religions and Communists, and those who ascribe to “secular ideologies.” The WCC claims the following: “Dialogue offers the promise of discovering

83 McCutcheon, 219. In this study, McCutcheon includes cross-Protestant denominational marriages in his statistics. These percentage point increases should be interpreted to reveal the relative willingness for mainline versus conservative Protestants to marry outside of their religious denomination. Many other sociological studies have confirmed that religious intermarriage has become much more prevalent in liberal or mainline denominations compared to conservative denominations. For example, in a 2004 study, the author concluded that Mainline Protestant groups have had significantly greater increases in intermarriage than conservative Christian groups throughout the twentieth century (Sherkat, 613). An analysis of the 1987-88 National Survey of Families and Households also revealed that “there has been no perceptible change in the probability of marrying outside the religion for exclusivist Protestants,” yet religious intermarriage for “ecumenical Protestants” has increased significantly over the decades (Evelyn L. Lehrer, “Religious Intermarriage in the United States: Determinants and Trends,” Social Science Research 57, no. 3 (1 Sept. 1998): 245). The 2008 U.S. Religious Landscape Survey also confirms this split. Within the Protestant family, Mainline Protestants are more likely than evangelicals or those associated with historically black churches to be in a mixed marriage (PEW Forum on Religion and Public Life, U.S. Religious Landscape Survey (2008), 34-35).
new dimensions of understanding our faith.”\(^\text{84}\) While Protestant denominations do not have the strict theological barriers to religious intermarriage as do Catholics or Jews, these ecumenical and interreligious efforts since the middle of the twentieth century have allowed certain denominations of Protestants to think more inclusively about non-Protestants, and perhaps religious intermarriage.

The Roman Catholic Church has always had strict theological barriers to religious intermarriage, which is why ecumenical and interreligious developments in the tradition are crucial to understanding shifts in Catholic ideas on interreligious marriage. Since the 1960s, sociological studies reveal that “there has been a sharp upturn in the amount of religious intermarriage” for Catholics in the United States. Sociologists believe that it is plausible that this upturn may be associated with the Church’s decisions regarding other religious communities during the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965).\(^\text{85}\) Vatican II played a crucial

\(^{84}\) Member denominations of the World Council of Churches include: African Methodist Episcopal Church; African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church; American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.; American Lutheran Church; The Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of New York and all North America; Christian Church (Disciples of Christ); Christian Methodist Episcopal Church; Church of the Brethren; The Episcopal Church; Hungarian Reformed Church in America; International Evangelical Church; Lutheran Church in America; Moravian Church in America (Northern Province); Moravian Church in America (Southern Province); National Baptist Convention of America; National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc.; National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.; National Council of Community Churches; The Orthodox Church in America; Polish National Catholic Church of America; Presbyterian Church in the United States; Progressive National Baptist Convention; Reformed Church in America; Religious Society of Friends - Friends General Conference - Friends United Meetings; United Church of Christ; The United Methodist Church; The United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. M. H Reynolds, ed., “The Truth about the World Council of Churches,” \textit{FEA News and Views}, \textbf{Fundamental Evangelistic Association}, http://cnview.com/on_line_resources/world_council_of_churches.htm, accessed 6 June 2010.

role in helping the Catholic Church build ecumenical relationships with other Christians. Historically the Church had taught that the Church of Christ was identical with the Roman Catholic Church; this made all baptized Protestants part of “an heretical or schismatical sect” and thus ineligible for marriage (1917 Code of Canon Law, Canon 1060). However, the Second Vatican Council determined that the Church of Christ “subsists in the Catholic Church” but is not identical to it. This theological development allowed for baptized Christians, Catholic or not, to be part the Church of Christ. \(^86\) As a result, in March 1966, “the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued a decree, *Matrimonii Sacramentum*, in which it prescribed a number of pastoral changes in the form of celebration of mixed marriage, at the same time lifting the excommunication which had hitherto been incurred by Catholics marrying before a non-Catholic minister.” \(^87\)

The Second Vatican Council also made important statements regarding religious liberty. In *Dignitatus Humanae*, the Declaration on Religious Freedom, they emphasized that “the principle of religious freedom makes no small contribution to the creation of an environment in which men can without hindrance be invited to the Christian faith, embrace it of their own free will, and profess it effectively in their whole manner of life.” \(^88\) The Second

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Vatican Council’s ecumenical theology and support of religious freedom was reflected in the Church’s revisions to the Code of Canon Law in 1983. The canons allow for the possibility of sacramental marriages between Catholics and Protestants and no longer require non-Catholic spouses to sign a form promising to support their spouse’s Catholicity and raise the children Catholic (Canons 1124-1129). Many Catholics were concerned that having non-Catholic spouses make promises regarding the religious upbringing of their children was a violation of the principles of religious freedom that were lauded by the Church.

Relative to the 1917 Code of Canon Law, the 1983 Code not only softened the language associated with “mixed marriage,” it also provided for the possibility of and conditions for a dispensation from the impediment of “disparity of cult” (Canon 1129). Disparity of cult refers to marriages between Catholics and non-Christians. The genesis of this development has its roots in the Second Vatican Council. The Second Vatican Council created the possibility for enhanced interreligious relationships with Jews, Muslims, and to a lesser extent Hindus and Buddhists. These ideas are most clearly articulated in Nostra Aetate, the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions.

[O]ther religions found everywhere try to counter the restlessness of the human heart, each in its own manner, by proposing “ways,” comprising teachings, rules of life, and sacred rites. The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she

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90 Lawler, Marriage and the Catholic Church, 411.
holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men.\footnote{Pope Paul VI, \textit{Nostra aetate} (Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions), no. 2, Vatican, 28 October 1965, \url{http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html}, accessed 10 December 2009.}

The theological significance of this statement is that the Church recognizes that there is truth outside of the Roman Catholic Church. While \textit{Nostra Aetate} helps move the Church from an exclusivist toward an inclusivist theological position, the Church stopped short of adopting a pluralist theological view – the Church clarifies that other religions cannot provide the fullest of religious life.\footnote{These terms are defined in Chapter 1.} “Indeed, she proclaims, and ever must proclaim Christ ‘the way, the truth, and the life’ (John 14:6), in whom men may find the fullness of religious life, in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself (\textit{cf.} 2 Cor. 5:18-19).” Catholic scholars of theology of religions and interreligious dialogue continue to try and understand the implications of \textit{Nostra Aetate} on the Church’s relationship to and with other religious communities. The Second Vatican Council and the ensuing revisions to the Code of Canon law have provided greater theological leeway for the possibility of religious intermarriage between Catholics and Protestants and Catholics and non-Christians.

In the final decades of the twentieth century, Jewish religious leaders had also been engaged in discussions regarding the Jewish community’s relationship to Christian communities. The scholarship and diplomacy of French historian Jules Isaac (1877-1963) at the onset of World War II helped to pave the way for better relations between Christians and Jews. He wrote extensively about the social and theological roots of anti-Semitism in

\footnote{\textit{Nostra aetate}, no. 2.}
Christianity, seeking to rectify centuries of dogma that perpetuated negative stereotypes of Jews and resulted in hatred and injustice towards Jewish communities throughout the West. As one of his many attempts to work with Christian leadership on these issues, in 1949 Isaac met with Pope Pius XII to revise the Good Friday Prayer to remove derogatory statements towards the Jewish people. Many of Isaac’s efforts began to come to fruition during and after the Second Vatican Council. Since the 1960s, there have been ongoing theological discussions between Catholics and Jews.

At the same time Jewish leaders were working with Christians to deepen their understanding of one another’s tradition, sociological studies revealed that Jewish intermarriage was rising at alarming rates. Orthodox Judaism has held its stance on denying interreligious marriage; Orthodox rabbis cannot officiate a religious intermarriage and members of Orthodox congregations risk being banished from the community if they marry a non-Jew. The Conservative Jewish movement has struggled to clarify its position. The official Conservative stand has been that a rabbi may not “officiate at the marriage of a Jew to an unconverted non-Jew . . .” and “intermarriages should not be publicly acknowledged in any recognized forum within the congregation.” Throughout the late-twentieth century,

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many Conservative Jewish congregations were becoming increasingly concerned with losing intermarried families; by rejecting them from synagogue-life, there was no hope that the children of these couples would be raised in the Conservative Jewish faith. In the 1980s, the Conservative authorities began discussing and then implementing policies that had to do with *Keruv*, which is Hebrew for “bringing close.” These initiatives sought to allow non-Jewish spouses limited involvement in the synagogue as long as there was evidence that they would raise their children Jewish and eventually convert to Judaism. The aim of *Keruv* was two-fold: to enable the “unaffiliated intermarried couple to affiliate with a Conservative synagogue . . .” and to provide an opportunity for the non-Jewish spouse to “transition” to Judaism.  

Walking the fine line between prohibiting intermarriage and building relationships with the intermarried has led to a number of questions – Should there be a special category of synagogue membership for non-Jewish spouses? Can a non-Jewish spouse be buried in a Jewish cemetery? Can children of these religious intermarriages be enrolled in the religious school? The Conservative movement continues to be against religious intermarriage; however, they continue to find ways to engage Jewish-non-Jewish intermarried families. There has been and likely will continue to be movement within the tradition to stem the effects of Jewish intermarriage.

Reform and Reconstructionist congregations have become increasingly liberal on the issue of religious intermarriage. Rabbis are willing to officiate religious intermarriages and

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98 Ibid., 14-17.

99 Ibid., 14-15.

provide an opportunity for non-Jewish spouses to become members of the synagogue. This has had a profound effect on interreligious and interfaith families who have sought to retain their connection to Judaism. One of the most significant theological developments regarding Jewish interreligious marriage in the final decades of the twentieth century was the Reform community’s 1983 decision on patrilineal descent. Jewish tradition had upheld matrilineal descent. This meant that any child born to a Jewish mother was considered Jewish. However, the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) embarked upon an effort to develop the tradition in such a way as to meet the demands of the modern world. The primary issue they sought to address was attrition of interreligious families. They explained in their statement that with the rapid increase in religious intermarriages, “almost half the American Jewish community remains unaffiliated, and their children receive no Jewish education.” In order to address this situation, they “redefined Jewishness to reflect both nature and nurture: a child is Jewish if either parent is Jewish and the child is raised as a Jew,” explains Michael S. Berger, Jewish studies scholar. In the statement, the rabbis explain their rationale for this decision:

We, and virtually all Jews, recognize a civil marriage between a Jew and a Gentile as a marriage although not *qiddushin*, and have done so since the French Sanhedrin of 1807. We are morally obliged to make provisions for the offspring of such a union when either the father or the mother seek to have their children recognized and educated as a Jew . . .

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101 Sarna, 363.
103 Berger, “Judaism,” 73.
As the phenomenon of religious intermarriage became more common, the level of interaction between and among religious communities grew, and the institution of marriage became more secularized, the gap between what American families were doing and what religious authorities asked them to do was widening. Studies show that religious intermarriage continued to increase throughout the later part of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century. The PEW Forum reported in their 2008 American Religious Landscape survey that 27 percent of marriages are religious intermarriages and that the growth is with the younger generations. Many of these marriages are Protestant-Catholic. Because of the prevalence of these marriages and the progress that has been made on the ecumenical front, it is likely that these ‘ecumenical intra-religious’ marriages between Protestants and Catholics will continue to increase. A substantial number of these marriages are ‘interfaith,’ between Christians and the “Unaffiliated” – which is now the fourth largest ‘religious’ group in the United States, making up over 16 percent of the population. The majority of the married people in the United States who self-identify as Unaffiliated, Buddhist, or “other faiths” are in an interfaith or interreligious marriage.

105 Sociologist Norval D. Glenn compared the United States Census data from 1957 on religious intermarriage with the General Social Surveys (GSS) data collected between 1973 and 1978. Glenn concluded that there had been an increase in interreligious marriage for Protestants, Catholics, and Jews, over the two decades. Glenn, 557. In a separate study using GSS data from 1973 to 1994, Darren E. Sherkat found that religious intermarriage increased for the following religious groups: Liberal Protestants, Episcopalians, Moderate Protestants, Lutheran denominations of Protestants, as well as Catholic and Jewish groups. Baptists only increased slightly whereas Mormons and non-denominational [Christian] groups declined in the incidence of religious intermarriage from the older to the younger cohort. Sherkat, 613.

106 PEW Forum on Religion and Public Life, U.S. Religious Landscape Survey (2008), 34-35. PEW includes in these figures respondents who indicate that they are living with a partner, even if they are not married.
the religious intermarriages reported by the PEW Forum are ‘interreligious’ marriages between people of distinct religious traditions. As long-standing American Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish communities work to improve their relationships with one another and to address the continuing challenges of religious intermarriage, new immigrant communities, especially Muslims and Hindus, are beginning to fight their own battles to retain their marriage traditions amidst a society that values freedom and religious choice.

To conclude, we live in a time when it is not uncommon for individuals to identify themselves as spiritual, not religious, unaffiliated with a religious tradition, and/or associated with many traditions. Forty-four percent of Americans do not belong to the faith in which they were raised. One-third of Americans report to have attended more than one religious service, usually a faith that is not their own (for reasons beyond weddings and funerals), and more than half of American Christians say they believe that another non-Christian religion can lead to eternal life.\textsuperscript{107} For many Americans, the social and theological exclusivity that dominated Western culture and early American life is now foreign. In this environment of movement, change, multiple affiliations, and no affiliation, marrying someone of another religion is not extraordinary.\textsuperscript{108} For some, it is even seen as advantageous for one’s self and for one’s children who would be given the opportunity to learn about another religion.


This openness is a relatively new development in the history of the West. In the fourth century, one could be publicly executed for religious intermarriage. In the thirteenth century, the Roman Catholic Church, the predominant legal authority on marriage throughout Christendom, forbade Christians to dine with Jews or eat food prepared by Jews; marrying a Jew was out of the question. When the Protestant Reformation erupted and Luther rejected the Catholic sacramental model of marriage the theological door to intermarriage opened, at least for Protestant Christians. With disestablishment in late-eighteenth-century America, the legal door opened. And finally, throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the social doors to religious intermarriage opened for many Catholic, Jewish, and Protestant Americans who no longer felt bound to the parameters for marriage outlined by their respective religious communities.

In the nineteenth century, Americans lived in exclusive religious communities where religious authorities held immense power to influence the lives of their parishioners and congregants. Acceptance by one’s ethnic and religious community was essential to one’s livelihood. Marriage during this time was a religious event that tied two people to one another, to their community, and to Christ, or Yahweh for the Jews. By the mid-twentieth century, after World War II, a new tenor of inclusivism unfolded. Catholics and Jews joined mainstream America. At the same time, love, happiness, and freedom, not Christianity, came to define the institution of marriage.

When the doors to immigration opened in the late-twentieth century, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and other non-European religious communities joined the American religious mosaic and new types of religious intermarriages began to form. After years of fighting an uphill battle, some Jewish and Christian religious authorities in the late-twentieth
century began softening their historically rigid positions on intermarriage in the name of ecumenism, interreligious relationships, and religious liberty. For many Americans, despite these new positions by religious authorities, their marriage priorities and opportunities were becoming even more removed from the confines of established religious traditions. Ultimately, as America’s communities became more religiously diverse and religiously integrated, and as marriage became more liberal and contractual, versus religious and communal, the social doors to religious intermarriage opened.

In the next chapter, I will explore the dynamics of contemporary religious intermarriage, and in particular, the increasing prevalence of not only ‘interreligious’ marriage, but also ‘interfaith’ marriage. Religious communities in America continue to try to find their place in the lives of these interreligious and interfaith families, just as these interreligious and interfaith families continue to try and find their place in the religious communities of America. What results from this symbiotic dynamic between Americans and their religious communities, is a new dimension of religious pluralism in America, one that will likely continue to play an increasingly important role in shaping the American religious landscape.
PART II

Contemporary Intermarriages: A Story of Negotiation, Innovation, and the Defiance of Boundaries
CHAPTER V

DEFINITIONS AND PARAMETERS
Normative Boundaries among Religions and between the Religious and Secular

“We need the courage as well as the inclination to consult, and profit from, the ‘wisdom traditions of mankind.’”

E.F. Schumacher

The American religious landscape is in the midst of transformation. An historically Protestant country has morphed into one not only characterized as Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish, but also Muslim, Hindu, and non-believing, to borrow from President Barack Obama’s 2009 inaugural address. Another era in the religious history of the nation is dawning. Throughout this dissertation, I have argued that religious intermarriage could be a lens to see this transformation in American religion. Religious intermarriage is both a reflective and predictive material representation of the continual movement and redefinition of the relationship among religions and between the religious and the secular in the United States.

In the previous chapters, I chronicled how intermarriage was slowly liberated from theological, legal, and societal constraints as the American religious landscape changed, the role of religious authorities shifted, and the institution of marriage acquired new meanings. I looked at this transformation by exploring the macro shifts in church, state, and society over many centuries. My focus was on Catholicism, Protestantism, and Judaism since these three

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religious traditions offer the dominant narrative of interreligious marriage through the mid-twentieth century.

The liberation of religious intermarriage from various societal constraints has proffered new religious possibilities for twenty-first-century interreligious couples. In the ensuing chapters, I look inside twenty-first-century intermarriages to understand what they tell us about the future of American religion. Because the narrative of American religion in the twenty-first century can no longer be limited to Protestants, Catholics, and Jews, I introduce Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists to the analysis. While Christianity remains the dominant religion in the United States, these minority religious traditions are contributing to the mosaic of marriages and families in neighborhoods throughout the country.

This look inside contemporary intermarriages helps to answer questions that form the basis of the remaining chapters. First, how does the religiosity in these intermarriages align with traditional parameters of religious traditions? To address this question, I present basic normative parameters for assessing the boundaries that have traditionally separated religious communities. I also provide basic parameters for assessing how one may gauge what constitutes a “religious” marriage and family-life versus a purely “secular” marriage and family-life. To argue that boundaries among religions and between the religious and secular are shifting, I will first define those boundaries. This is the focus of Chapter 5. In Chapters 6 and 7, I then introduce insights from interviews with 43 religious intermarriages to compare the role of religion in their lives to the normative parameters I outlined in Chapter 5. This analysis enables me to reach conclusions regarding whether and how contemporary intermarriages are challenging traditional boundaries among religions and between the religious and secular. I find that these individuals and families live outside the boundaries of
religious traditions. However, their lives are not at all devoid of religion. They are reforming religion to meet their needs and are introducing new conceptions regarding religious identification, belief, practice, and community-involvement.

The second question is what effect (if any) do these intermarriages have on their religious communities and their religious traditions? What do their beliefs and behaviors suggest for the future of American religiosity and scholarship on religious pluralism? I address these questions in Chapter 8. Intermarriages breed, literally and figuratively, new forms of religiosity every day. As couples negotiate their differences, they are essentially re-negotiating the normative boundaries tied to their religions and religion in general. As non-Christians enter America’s churches and homes through intimate familial relationships, Christianity is being transformed. As Christians enter temples, synagogues, and mosques by way of intimate familial relationships, non-Christian traditions are being transformed. The negotiation and innovation in these intermarriages is contributing to the shifting boundaries and the emergence of a new space in the American religious landscape. This new space is not secular or atheistic, although it often defies and ignores the boundaries and beliefs proposed by religious traditions. This new space promises to be an important area of exploration for scholars of religious pluralism.

**Introducing Normative Boundaries**

Questions like “What makes someone Jewish?” or “Who is considered a Hindu?” or “What is a Christian?” continue to vex religious authorities and lay Americans, particularly in an age of rampant disaffiliation from religious establishments. There are no definitive answers to these questions or others that stem from them, including – can a baptized child
also be a Bar Mitzvah? Is a Christian who questions the divinity of Jesus of Nazareth still a Christian? Can a non-Indian really be Hindu? “Is a Buddhist who believes in a Creator God really Buddhist?” Even in religious communities where there are central religious authorities who provide guidance on these types of questions, there is ambiguity because those practicing these religions freely choose to ignore or adapt new or revisionist views of their own. This is an American phenomenon. Not all Catholics who claim to be Catholic understand, agree with, or follow the dictates outlined in papal encyclicals. Not all Muslims who feel strongly that they are Muslim fast during Ramadan, pray multiple times a day, or abstain from drinking alcohol. There are disconnects between what one’s religious tradition mandates and what one chooses to do in his/her personal life – religious liberty enables Americans to make their own religious rules with no civil consequences. Individuals in interreligious marriages are no exception.

Framing traditional or normative boundaries between and among religious traditions and differentiating religious ideas of marriage and family with secular ideas of marriage and family is a complex and risky endeavor. First, to focus on what differentiates religious traditions risks minimizing what religious traditions have in common. Scholarship in comparative religion reveals that they share many commonalities. However, as Stephen Prothero argues in his book, God is Not One, each religion seeks to answer a different problem; not all religions are the same. Buddhism seeks to address the problem of suffering, Christianity – the problem of sin, and Judaism – the problem is exile, for example.2 Despite

efforts to uncover common ground across traditions, particularities cannot be ignored. These particularities establish boundaries that separate insiders from outsiders. Sometimes these boundaries are formally articulated by religious authorities in the tradition; other times, they are informally in place through a long history of interpretation in the community.

Second, while I have chosen to focus on five world religions – Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Judaism, I recognize that there are dozens of denominations, ethnicities, and often clashing authoritative voices within, across, and outside of these traditions that warrant inclusion in this discussion on the American religious landscape. However, to be all-inclusive would detract from my task which is to uncover broad trends in the American tradition, not nuance the particularities of all of the religious denominations. For example, the Unification Church (known as the Moonies) actually encourages religious and ethnic intermarriage and has a very specific process for arranging these unions and sanctifying them in the church. Relative to the vast majority of American Christian groups, the Moonies are an anomaly. Thus, I do not include them in the general parameters I provide. Additionally, I do not focus on ‘intra-religious’ or ecumenical provisions that religious communities offer regarding religious intermarriage. The developments in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Church communities regarding intermarriage, for example, have been important for ecumenical relations; yet, to delineate the progress in this realm would be too

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nuanced for the purposes of this analysis.5 Because my focus is on the American religious tradition, and not each particular religion in itself, I focus on general boundaries and parameters of five world religions, not specific groups or denominations.

Third, every religious tradition is continually developing and changing. Traditional or normative boundaries, so to speak, are continually under pressure from those within the tradition who seek to apply ideas, interpretations, and laws to their lives. Every generation of theologians wrestles with new issues as well. I do not dispute this process of development; I fully recognize it. In order to get a sense for the unique contribution of twenty-first century interreligious families in this process of change, and the ensuing redefinition of traditional boundaries, I must paint a few broad strokes and put a few stakes in the ground as to what separates these religious traditions from one another.

I ask my readers to picture five circles on a sheet of paper. Each circle is labeled with a religious tradition. The white space between circles is secular space; this implies a secularist definition of the secular. Why does each tradition have its own circle or name? What sets it apart? I want to provide a few parameters to answer these questions as a starting point for analyzing insights from interreligious couples. These circles and parameters do not fully reflect reality on the ground; the American religious landscape is much muddier and integrated than this simple graphic suggests. In daily life, religiously different people and non-religious people interact and intersect in all sorts of American venues.6 Additionally,

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6 See Kate McCarthy, Interfaith Encounters in America (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007).
many religious people see no distinction between religious and secular space— all is God’s creation and every aspect of their life is in Jesus or for Allah, for example. It is this muddiness and integration of these circles that I seek to investigate through the lens of intermarriage. To do this, I must begin with a baseline of parameters. I need to establish the foundational aspects that distinguish religious traditions and differentiate religious marriage from purely secular marriage, to be able to highlight how interreligious couples are not only pushing their way through these traditional partitions, but in many cases going around them all together. In the process, they are contributing to larger dynamics in the American religious landscape.

**Boundaries among Religious Traditions**

Boundaries between and among religious traditions are based upon an integrated system of religious beliefs, practices, and expectations for community involvement. Beliefs, practices, and community involvement are not distinctive parts of a religious tradition; on the contrary, they are intricately bound together, mutually reinforcing core tenets of the religion. Attending mass and taking communion, for example, are not removed from one’s faith in Jesus Christ. There are innumerable particularistic aspects of each tradition. I highlight only a few aspects of each tradition, by no means exhausting the parameters of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. For those searching for more comprehensive information, there are many detailed scholarly works on these world religions. The aspects

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of each tradition that I choose to highlight are ones that can and often do either come into question or are compromised in religious intermarriages.

**Christianity**

Central to Christian traditions has been the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, the sacramental or covenantal meaning of a Christian marriage, and the essential nature of baptism as entry into Christian life. Numerous denominations understand, emphasize, and explain these core tenets of Christianity differently; however, for most denominations they are foundational and, in part, distinguish Christianity from other world religions. As I discussed in Chapter 1, Christian theologians continue to discuss and debate complex questions regarding the uniqueness of Jesus Christ in humankind’s salvation. This discourse is centered upon an ingrained Christology that was first codified in the Council of Nicea (325 A.D.) and has continued to be central to the tradition. Theologian of religions Harold Netland reinforces this view:

Christians have traditionally maintained that God has revealed himself in a unique manner in the Scriptures and preeminently in the incarnation in Jesus of Nazareth, and that sinful humankind can be reconciled to God only through the sinless person and atoning work of Jesus Christ, the one Lord and Savior for all people in all cultures. Allowing for certain distinctives of time and theological tradition, it is safe to say that this has been a central tenet of Christian orthodoxy throughout the past twenty centuries.⁸

In both Protestant and Catholic churches this traditional view is what has prompted missionary activity around the world.⁹ If one does not have faith in Jesus Christ, one’s salvation is at risk. This core belief distinguishes Christianity from other religions.

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⁹ Ibid., 26.
Christian marriage brings two Christians and their families into a more intimate relationship with Christ and the church. In Catholicism marriage is a sacrament; in Protestantism it is widely understood as a covenant. While the social importance of marriage and family is absolutely integral to the Christian conception of marriage, sacramental and covenantal aspects are equally or more important. In the Protestant tradition one’s religious journey is often equated to a pilgrimage. Marriage is an integral part of the “larger pilgrimage of faith” as couples are asked to nurture one another “in the roles of Christian pilgrim and disciple.”

Michael Lawler’s exposition on Catholic marriage also emphasizes the life-long exploration of Christianity in marriage.

A sacramental marriage is not just a wedding to be celebrated; it is also, and more critically, an equal and loving partnership to be lived for the whole of life. . . . [When two people marry] they commit themselves to explore together the religious depth of their life together and to respond to that depth in the light of their mutual covenant to Christ and to the Church in which he abides.

A Christian marriage and family-life are in many ways defined by discipleship which implies “both a call from Jesus and a response from a believer.” A husband and wife seek to explore life as a disciple and pass this onto their children, first through baptism and then through a Christian education that reinforces the word of Christ in their lives. Baptism symbolizes the “birth of a new life in Jesus Christ” and is a gateway to becoming part of the Christian church and community.

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12 Ibid., 15.

Traditionally in Christianity, interreligious marriage has been explicitly prohibited, as was the case in the Catholic and later the Anglican Church. The Protestant Reformation opened the theological door to Christian religious intermarriage; however, religious intermarriage remained strongly discouraged, particularly in those denominations and congregations that were born out of Calvinist covenantal marriage theology. Many mainline Protestants do not take official positions on the matter; many evangelical Protestant denominations strongly frown upon it. The Southern Baptist congregation, for example, “actively opposes” religious intermarriage based upon Saint Paul’s statement in II Corinthians 6:14 – “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers.”\textsuperscript{14} While different traditions within Christianity have differed on their interpretation of scripture on this matter, it is widely believed that a marriage to a non-Christian risks compromising the sacramental and/or covenantal nature of marriage, poses a grave danger to the Christian faith of the Christian spouse, endangers the Christian upbringing of children, and compromises the family’s ability to effectively partake in Christian pilgrimage and discipleship.\textsuperscript{15} A Christian marriage, faith in Jesus Christ, and baptism are only a few of the boundaries that distinguish Christianity from the other world religions.

\textit{Judaism}

Religion and ethnicity are intertwined in the Jewish tradition. Judaism is not a proselytizing religion; one is born into Judaism. If one is born to a Jewish mother, Jewish tradition considers that child to be Jewish. Before they are born, Jews are chosen by God

\textsuperscript{14} McCarthy, \textit{Interfaith Encounters}, 130.

“and commissioned by Israel’s God to be among God’s witnesses on this earth. . . .”16 As a community, the Jewish people are “the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who assembled before Mount Sinai to receive the Torah from God, and their descendants through time . . .”17 Traditionally, the Jewish people, as part of their covenant with God, were expected to follow God’s commandments and laws of which there are 613 distinct laws or mitzvot. Modern movements beginning in the nineteenth century have provoked continued debate over the meaning of Judaism as a religion or ethnicity and the necessity of following Jewish law.

It is difficult to become Jewish if one is not born Jewish. Rabbi Rodney Mariner in his essay, “Conversion to Judaism: A Tale of the God, the Bad and the Ungrateful,” explains: “For one not born as a Jew, there remains only one point of entry, as unfair as it may seem. A born Jew may choose to identify through peoplehood or culture, the proselyte may only enter through the door of religion.”18 The conversion process is neither short nor simple. Proselytes must begin by convincing a rabbi that they wish to become Jewish because of their sincere interest in the religion and the Jewish community. This often requires frequent attendance at synagogue and repeated attempts to convince the rabbi of their authentic motives. Traditionally, rabbis do not consider the desire to marry a Jewish person an acceptable rationale. Once a rabbi agrees to teach and guide a hopeful proselyte, the rabbi

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expects him/her to complete a course in Jewish liturgy, Jewish history, Jewish rituals, and
Hebrew. Once the student is ready, he/she goes before a rabbinic board (Beit Din) that tests
his/her readiness to join the Jewish community through questioning. The rabbis do not make
the person Jewish or affect change in that way; rather, they “only recognize through
questioning, that such a change has truly taken place.” 19 At that point the candidate is
welcomed into the Jewish community. This process reinforces the distinctiveness and the
seriousness of being Jewish.

Jewish marriage is intricately linked to the Jewish community and the community’s
covenant with God. After accepting the Torah at Mount Sinai, Jewish marriage became
unique relative to general marriage practices that only required that a man and woman have
sexual intercourse to be considered married. Jewish marriage required public consent in the
presence of witnesses before the man and woman consummated their relationship. 20 The
witness of at least ten Jewish men at the wedding ceremony is required for a Jewish wedding
– the ten Jewish men represent the “whole covenantal community.” 21 A Jewish marriage is
called qiddushin because it takes place in the presence of God and the Jewish covenantal
community. 22 The couple promises to live “according to the law of Moses and Israel.” 23

19 Ibid., 100.

in Comparative Perspective, eds. John Witte, Jr. and Eliza Ellison (Grand Rapids: William B.

21 Ibid., 28.

22 David Novak defines it as “a sacrament, which is a relationship initiated and conducted
before God in the presence of the representatives of the covenanted community.” Novak, 31-32. Note
that the word qiddushin is also used to mean betrothal. Kieran Scott and Michael Warren, Perspectives
Marriage is not something that a couple does on their own and then seeks community approval; on the contrary, Jewish marriage is a duty to the community for the benefit of the community and the community’s covenant with God. Judaism and feminism scholar Blu Greenberg explains this: “Marriage is not only the optimal way to live, but it is also central to the theology of Judaism. The entire success of the covenant rests on the marriage premise and its procreative impulse. The biological family, born of marriage, is the unit that carries the promises and the covenant, one generation at a time, toward their full completion and realization.”

As I discussed in earlier chapters, traditionally intermarriage to a non-Jew has been strictly forbidden. Only conversion of the non-Jew would enable a qiddushin marriage. This proscription is based upon scriptural rationale, historical developments in the tradition, and the necessity of preserving the Jewish community in ghetto and diaspora communities around the world. With religious liberty and emancipation came greater challenges in keeping Jewish people from intermarrying their gentile neighbors. Orthodox communities traditionally considered someone who married out of the community to be excommunicated. Neither Orthodox nor Conservative rabbis are allowed to perform ceremonies (although many Conservative rabbis do). Rabbis resist performing intermarriages based on the central tenet that Jewish marriage is for “the sake of maintaining and perpetuating the covenant of Sinai.

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In the late-twentieth century, Reform and Reconstructionist congregations began to change their stance on intermarriage, allowing rabbis who chose to do so, to preside at the marriages of these couples.

Marriage proscriptions have traditionally served to separate the Jewish religion from other religions. Jewish family-life also has many practices that distinguish the tradition. I will only mention a few here. A Jewish baby boy is ceremonially circumcised at a bris. While circumcision has become a common secular medical procedure in the United States, this practice historically distinguished Jews from gentiles. Throughout childhood, boys and girls prepare to become a Bar/Bat Mitzvah – “son/daughter of the commandments.” A Bar/Bat Mitzvah becomes responsible for Jewish religious obligations, independent of their parents. Traditionally, these ceremonies (bris and Bar/Bat Mitzvah) were essential to being part of the Jewish tradition in addition to keeping kosher at home and being an active part of the synagogue community. While many Jewish scholars have argued that these practices are not essential to being Jewish and many Jews in America do not follow them, this overview provides some basic parameters for understanding what separates Judaism from other world religions and/or from living a non-religious life.

Islam

There are numerous aspects of traditional Islam that separate it from other religious traditions and from secular notions of marriage and family-life. In Islam, there is no distinction between what is sacred and what is secular – “every aspect of life is the creation of Allah . . . [and] carries religious significance.” The Qur’an is the literal word of God

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26 Novak, 40.

(Allah); it is Allah’s final revelation. To become a Muslim, one recites the *shahada*—“I bear witness that there is no god but God, and I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of God.” A sincere profession of the *shahada* means that one is a Muslim and is expected to act accordingly, following the core tenets of the tradition. The *ummah* is the worldwide community of Muslims or those who submit to Allah in all aspects of their lives. If one does not understand the integral role of the Qur’an and Muhammad in his/her life, one is not part of the *ummah*. In these respects, a boundary is created between Islam and other religions. In Islam, one submits to God or one does not; there is no in-between.

Marriage is expected of young men and women; it is foundational for Muslim society, the *ummah*. While Muslim scholars and jurists debate whether marriage is a duty, the reality is that in “virtually all Muslim societies over the centuries, the family has been such a basic institution that there really have been no alternatives; what Americans used to call bachelors and spinsters have been virtually nonexistent in the Muslim community.” To understand Muslim marriage is to understand this core idea that everything in one’s life is

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29 If someone recites the *shahada* and then professes or practices another religion, the consequences can be very unfortunate in some Islamic countries. United States Council of Catholic Bishops, “Catholic-Muslim Marriage Preparation: A Resource for Pastoral Ministers,” (draft to be published in 2011).

30 Neusner, 145-146.

31 For a good explanation of the core theological concepts, see Huston Smith, 235-242.

tied to God. In the Qur’an, marriage is a relationship based on tranquility, mercy, and affection (30:21). It is a “solemn covenant” (4:21), often understood as a contract or as mithaq. Prophet Muhammad described marriage as a contract superior to all other contracts. A contract, however, is not simply a civil contract, devoid of religious obligation. Because all of life is tied to God, marriage is a religious contract in Islam.

Muslims are bound by Sharia law. Sharia law does not distinguish between things sacred and secular. “In Islam, law originates from God. The faithful, in turn, seek to discover and understand that law, not to create it themselves.” Sharia law outlines the rights, responsibilities, and obligations of a husband and wife. Abiding by these laws has soteriological consequences. Islamicist Lois Lamya Ibsen al Faruqi explains this:

> Both men and women are regarded as deriving substantial benefits from the institution of marriage, but they are also bound to its obligations by actual Qur’anic perspectives and by the legal elaboration and interpretation of the scriptural passages. . . . It is in these laws that the most detailed enunciation of both the woman’s and the man’s rights and obligations is to be found. Complying with the fulfillment of those mutual responsibilities is therefore regarded as a religious obligation for both parties. The acquiescence of the failure to comply is regarded as an act carrying divine reward or punishment, and therefore is not a matter to be taken lightly.

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35 Ibid., 166, 168.

36 Ibid., 166.


38 Ibid., 744.

Sharia law reinforces the public nature of marriage in the Muslim community. Marriage is not simply a private matter between two people; rather, it is an institution of Islamic society. For a marriage to be a Muslim marriage, the families of the husband and wife must explicitly consent to the marriage. Additionally, two Muslim males witness the signing of the marriage contract.40

The Muslim tradition has a “strong patriarchal ethos . . .”41 In the tradition, men are widely viewed as having authority over their wives, play the role of head of the household, and dictate the religion of their children.42 This traditional patriarchal view is debated in modern societies. It is based upon the following verse in the Qur’an:

Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in (the husband’s) absence what Allah would have them guard. As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (Next), refuse to share their beds, (And last) beat them (lightly); but if they return to obedience, seek not against them Means (of annoyance): For Allah is Most High, great (above you all).43

Parameters for religious intermarriage are not unrelated to this patriarchal ethos. Muslim jurists widely agree a man may marry a Jewish or Christian woman (People of the Book), whereas a Muslim woman must marry a Muslim man.44 In many Islamic countries, a marriage between a Muslim woman and a Christian man is at best not considered a marriage;

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40 Ibid., 403.
41 Leeman, 757.
42 Ibid., 757.
at worst, it is considered adultery and is thus, punishable by death.\textsuperscript{45} If a Muslim man marries a non-Muslim woman, the expectation is that their children will be raised Muslim, as the father is the authority of the household. Non-Muslim women are expected to raise Muslim children. There are two primary reasons that traditional Muslim jurists provide for these prohibitions. First, in the Qur’an, men are given express authorization to marry People of the Book, whereas women are not given this express permission. Second, if a Muslim woman were to marry a non-Muslim man, it is highly likely that she will be restricted in her ability to practice her religion because the male is the head of the household.\textsuperscript{46} Islamic scholar Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na’im provides historical perspective on this dynamic:

\begin{quote}
[I]t can be argued that when lineage became patriarchal, women became viewed as the ones who adulterate the race by marrying men from unacceptable groups. The same concern began to be expressed in religious terms for those communities where religion was either closely associated with ethnicity, or became a strong bond among believers. The historical control of women and their reproductive functions continued throughout history, whether justified in religious, ideological or other terms.\textsuperscript{47}

There is tremendous pressure for non-Muslim men as well as non-Muslim women who marry Muslims to convert to the faith.\textsuperscript{48} Conversion requires one to publicly state the \textit{shahada}.\textsuperscript{49} While there has been wide discussion over whether making a sincere public
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{46} Leeman, 762.

\textsuperscript{47} Abdullahi, 28.

\textsuperscript{48} “A Christian woman who marries a Muslim man is not legally obliged to convert, but pressures from community to provide a home context in which children are not subjected to conflicting faith expectations and practices are high. Non-Muslim men who marry Muslim women are subject to even greater pressures . . .” Jane I. Smith, 215.

\textsuperscript{49} Dutton Yasin, 153-154.
statement of faith is enough to join the community, this has remained the only formal requirement for conversion. The expectation, however, is that one will live by what is decreed in the Qur’an and in Sharia law. Essential pillars of the faith include profession of faith, prayer or worship, almsgiving, fasting, pilgrimage to Mecca. These practices and expectations for involvement in the ummah help to guide Muslims on a straight path. In the first surah of the Qur’an it is written, “Show us the straight way. The way of those whom Thou has bestowed Thy Grace, those whose (portion) is not wrath and who go not astray.” In the words of Huston Smith, the Thomas J. Watson Professor of Religion Emeritus at Syracuse University, “Islam spells out the way of life it proposes; it pinpoints it, nailing it down through clear injunctions.” These strict guidelines regarding marriage, religious belief, practices, and community-involvement are meant to preserve the integrity of Muslim families and the Muslim community, thus reinforcing boundaries between Muslims and non-Muslims.

**Hinduism**

Hinduism is traditionally associated with India and the caste system. The vast majority of Hindus are Indian. It is not a proselytizing religion; rather, it is a religion that is intricately linked to ethnicity and culture. Hinduism emphasizes one’s connection to ancestors, that one’s actions affect their current and future place in the world, the movement

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50 Ibid., 154.  
51 Neusner, 147-150.  
52 Qur’an Surah 1 (Yusuf Ali English Translation).  
53 Huston Smith, 243.  
54 The majority of Indians are also Hindu. See Abdullahi, 31.
of one through various stages in their life, and the importance of ritual praxis and purity.\textsuperscript{55} The caste system, an elaborate social structure, has historically served the social purpose of keep various groups of people separate in Indian society; this serves the theological purpose of maintaining purity within these groups. The four major castes are Brahmins (priests), Kshatriyas (warriors), Vaishyas (merchants and peasants), and Shūdras (servants).\textsuperscript{56} The dalit (untouchables) are outside the caste system, at the lowest position in society. Where the Brahmins are the most pure, traditionally it has been believed that the dalit embody extreme impurity. The definition of Hinduism has historically been very closely linked to the caste system. Brian K. Smith, professor of religious studies, explains this: “[C]aste is sometimes identified as one of the only, if not the only, definitional features of the many-sided religion we call ‘Hinduism.’”\textsuperscript{57}

Marriage has a very important religious purpose for Hindus. Marriage, as one scholar of Hinduism explains it, “is the foundation on which the edifice of Hinduism as a social system rests.”\textsuperscript{58} It is of crucial importance in maintaining proper and pure connections to one’s ancestry and in aiding in the ultimate end of all religious activity – moksa, the release from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. This is because marriage is tied to the householder


\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 8. Also see, Ekta Singh, Caste System in India: A Historical Perspective (Delhi: Kalpaz Publications, 2005).

\textsuperscript{58} Scott and Warren, Perspectives on Marriage (1993), 413.
stage of life, a stage that is crucial for all Hindus, regardless of their class.\textsuperscript{59} It is a social duty and also a moral and religious obligation. While it is the duty of both men and women to marry, marriage is different for a man, as his identity does not change. Marriage and siring male children is how a Hindu man pays homage to his ancestors.\textsuperscript{60} For a woman, in marriage she becomes the “half body” of her husband.\textsuperscript{61} Her father gives her away, literally, to her new husband’s family; this means that she leaves her family behind and dedicates her life to her husband, her husband’s family, and raising children. Patrilineal descent in almost all Hindu traditions (there are exceptions) means that she and her husband strive to have a son of their own to carry on the family name and blood-line. Any daughters they have will eventually be given away in marriage when they come of age. As part of his family, and no longer her birth family, the wife must adhere to the dictates of the more senior women including her mother-in-law and her husband’s sisters.\textsuperscript{62} As a married woman, she devotes herself to the well-being her husband and her husband’s family. This devotion often requires the daily orchestration of religious practices (\textit{pūjās}) in home shrines and the preparation of the household for holidays and festivals.\textsuperscript{63}

\textsuperscript{59} For an explanation of the importance of this stage of life for all Hindus, regardless of class, see Scott and Warren, \textit{Perspectives on Marriage} (1993), 412-413.


\textsuperscript{62} Lindsey Harlan and Paul B. Courtright, eds., \textit{From the Margins of Hindu Marriage} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 8. For a detailed explanation of traditional Hindu marriage rituals that solidify the literal transformation of the woman, see Ariel Glucklich, \textit{The Sense of Adharma} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

While there is very little written on Hindu religious intermarriage, traditionally a member of one caste is prohibited from marrying someone in another caste. Despite legal prohibitions to caste discrimination, it is still highly unlikely in India, especially the villages, for someone to marry outside of his/her caste.\(^6^4\) Because of the importance of Hindu marriage and caste restrictions, Hindu marriages are traditionally arranged by parents and families. Marriage is so important that pairing a bride and bridegroom is not left to the young people themselves. It is not uncommon, in a traditional Hindu marriage, for the bride and groom to meet for the first time the day the wedding ceremonies begin. Arranged marriage ensures the preservation of lineage and the purity of one’s family and community. Other considerations beyond caste include the social and economic affinity of the families and the horoscopes of the young man and woman.\(^6^5\)

“Love marriages,” as they are called, as opposed to arranged marriages, have traditionally been viewed as having “tragic results for the couple and for their close kin.”\(^6^6\) Love is a result of marriage; it is not reason to embark upon it. The deep ties between Hinduism and Indian ethnicity, the focus on caste and maintaining purity, and the arranged marriage system reinforce the importance of caste and family in Hindu society.


\(^6^5\) Harlan and Courtright, 7.

marriage tradition are only a handful of the ways that Hinduism is set apart from other religious traditions.

**Buddhism**

Buddhism does not have a theology of marriage, a stance on religious intermarriage, or a catechism or creed. However, there are core aspects to Buddhism that do differentiate it from other religions, creating boundaries, even if those boundaries do not necessarily preclude someone from being Buddhist and another religion as well. Buddhism is more about experience than belief. This experience is characterized by the goal of reaching nirvana and putting an end to one’s suffering, a natural, but explainable human condition. Core to this experience is ridding oneself of the idea that there is a self, a separate distinct Cartesian being called “I.”

Nirvana is the goal of Buddhism. To reach nirvana is to extinguish the boundaries of one’s finite sense of self and reach a place beyond our imagination. To reach a place beyond imagination is not to be with one’s Creator-God, for there is no Creator-creature distinction. There is also no concept of soul in Buddhism, expressed in the truth of anatman (nonsoulness). Siddhartha Guatama of the Sakyas was the Buddha and his experience forms the foundation of the Buddhist tradition. The Buddha means “Awakened One” – the

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67 “One of the distinguishing marks of the Buddhist tradition is its emphasis on experience over belief. Buddhism never had a creed or a catechism until the American convert Henry Steel Olcott decided in the late-nineteenth century that any self-respecting religion needed both. This relative indifference toward religion’s doctrinal dimension is rooted in the Buddha’s celebrated refusal to speculate.” Prothero, *God is Not One*, 173.

68 Hudson Smith, 114.

Buddha himself is not divine and his story is not revelation. On the contrary, his experience informs the desired experience of those who identify as Buddhist. The Buddha provided Four Noble Truths having to do with the inherent nature of suffering. He then offered an Eightfold Path to help in the elimination of suffering.70

There is no doctrine of marriage in Buddhism. Stephen Prothero tells the story of the Buddha: “Siddhartha allows his spiritual desires to override the duties of filial piety. He says good-bye to his father and wife and son, walks out of his palace one last time, rides to the border of what would have been his vast inheritance, shaves his head, takes off his fine clothes, and puts on the life of a wandering holy man.”71 Traditionally, in Buddhism, clergy deemed family life to be detrimental to one’s spiritual development.72 However, in some Buddhist societies, Buddhist clergy sought to support and help stabilize family structures. “[O]ne important reason is that the Buddhist monasteries relied on the families to support them financially.”73 In matters of family law and practice, Buddhists borrowed heavily from the Hindu tradition. As Buddhism spread to different regions of the Eastern world, marriage and family practices took on the cultural norms of the regions. As religious studies professor Alan Cole explains, “[T]here are many zones of family praxis and law that Buddhist thinkers were happy to let others legislate and oversee.”74

70 Prothero, God is Not One, 172.

71 Prothero, God is Not One, 171.


73 Ibid., 307.

74 Ibid., 299-300.
There are no known prohibitions to religious intermarriage in Buddhism; however, ethnicity remains an important boundary separating the cultures and families of many Buddhists from other ethnic and religious communities. Most American Buddhists are white and converted to Buddhism. Given that ethnicity is not a major boundary for the majority of non-Asian Buddhists, perhaps it is not surprising that in 2008, Buddhists had the highest percentage of religious intermarriage of any religious group. To live as a Buddhist is to seek to live by the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path. Where monks seek nirvana and make Buddhist practice the central focus of their daily life, lay Buddhists seek to incorporate these ideas into their lives. Many meditate. For others, “[t]heir piety consists largely of bhakti-style devotion to various Buddhas and other supramundane figures. They worship these Buddhas in temples, pray to them at home, and go on pilgrimage to sacred sites associated with their exploits.” For many, Buddhism is a philosophy and a way to minimize suffering; it is not a rigid set of laws or doctrines.

In general, the religious traditions have fundamental aspects that define who is an insider and who is an outsider. With the exception of Buddhism, many have restrictions regarding who can marry whom, as intra-religious marriage is integral to upholding the religion and the religious community. These traditions also have normative rituals and practices that are expected to be part of one’s life and one’s family-life. I have explored only a few of these parameters; however, they help to illustrate tangible examples of what


76 See Huston Smith, 99-112 for a clear explanation of the four noble truths and the noble eightfold path.

77 Prothero, God is Not One, 177.
separates religious traditions from one another. When I refer to “boundaries among religious traditions,” these are the boundaries to which I am referring.

**Boundaries between the Religious and Secular**

In the section above I focused on what differentiates each religious tradition from the others. In this section, I focus on what differentiates a religious marriage and family-life from a secular marriage and family-life. My aim is to provide broad parameters for what I mean when I refer to “boundaries between the religious and secular.” Anthropologist Talal Asad, in his exposition of the genealogy of secular and the definition of secularism, argues that “[t]he modern nation as an imagined community is always mediated through constructed images.”

78 The secular takes on different forms and meanings in different societies and in different times in history. It is a narrative that is shaped differently by different peoples. Hence, this construction of religious or secular marriage and family-life must be within the American context. This is why the historical background in Chapters 2 through 4 was a necessary presupposition to this discussion.

**Definitions of Secular**

The ‘secular’ is what is ‘not religious.’ As José Casanova articulates, “the secular” is “a central modern category . . . to construct, codify, grasp and experience a realm or reality differentiated from ‘the religious.’”

79 To borrow a few phrases from Webster’s dictionary, 

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the secular is “relating to or connected with worldly things; disassociated from religious teaching or principles; not devoted to sacred or religious use.”

Understanding constructed images in the context of the imagined community in the United States is complicated by the different vantage points from which one can assess secularity versus religiosity. Who determines what is ‘religious’ and what is ‘not religious’ – is it religious institutions or is it individuals themselves?

There are two primary ways to conceive of the secular. I will briefly define each one in order to provide a framework for understanding the normative boundaries between religious and secular forms of marriage and family-life. First, there are institutional definitions of the secular. With the effects of “the Protestant Reformation; the formation of modern states; the growth of modern capitalism; and the early modern scientific revolution,” scholars understand modern societies to have distinguished between religious and secular spaces, a concept largely unheard of in Western Christendom. Many activities were transferred from religious institutions to secular institutions – a process known as secularization. In the United States, the government/state and the capitalistic business market are deemed to be secular spaces. These spaces “generally do not refer us to God or to any religious beliefs; the considerations we act on are internal to the ‘rationality’ of each sphere . . .” Charles Taylor explains.

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80 Webster’s Deluxe Unabridged Dictionary, 2d ed., s.v. “secular.”


Religious institutions are deemed to be religious spaces, not secular spaces. In the American context, there are three levels of religious institutionalization – first, the congregation or local religious community; second, the denomination, defined broadly as either a Protestant denomination like Baptist, a national church like the American Catholic Church, or a doctrinally distinct group in a religious tradition like Reform Judaism; and third, the “imagined community” called America’s civil religion. In *Public Religions in the Modern World*, Casanova focuses primarily on the interplay between these institutional forms of the secular and religious. He evaluates various ways in which “public religions” (at the congregational and denominational levels) “deprivatize” and enter the public sphere to bring religious consideration to traditionally secular realms like the state and market. He argues that if something like an American civil religion exists, it is likely that it is an “adaptation of a living [religious] tradition to modern conditions.” In other words, it is a projection by and from institutional religious communities onto the American ethos.

I would like to return to the visual of a sheet of paper with circles that encompass religious traditions and white space that reflects the secular realm. If we borrow from Casanova’s analysis of the religious and secular from an institutional vantage point, we can more fully understand what is in the circles and what is outside of the circles. This will be helpful for assessing religious and secular marriage and family-life. Inside the circles are what I have been calling religious traditions and religious communities – congregations and

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84 Casanova, *Public Religions*, 5-6.

85 Ibid., 61.
their respective denominations. Outside the circles are the state, the market, and other aspects of society that are not controlled or dominantly influenced by religious traditions and religious communities. American civil religion does not fit neatly into either a circle or white space; civil religion is a projection from religious groups into the white space of secular society.

Marriage and family-life also cease to fit neatly into religious or secular categories. Many of America’s “culture wars,” the public debates that have polarized the American public into conservative and progressive camps, are fought over this very issue. Is marriage a civil contract to be legislated by the state with no regard to religious institutions’ ideas of marriage? Or, is marriage a religious affair, instituted by God with certain parameters, meant to be protected, not shaped, by the state? Are non-traditional models (often meaning non-Christian and non-religiously-based models) of family-life an affront to society? Should religious views of marriage and family-life be allowed to influence civil laws, which are part of the realm of the state, deemed to be secular?

Unlike the state or the market that are decidedly secular (or religiously neutral) in the American context, marriage and family appear to straddle institutional control. On the one hand, marriage can be secular – a civil contract issued by the state offering civil protections to two citizens who enter into this contract with one another. As a purely secular affair, marriage would require no religious ceremony, no religious authorities present, and no

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87 Co-habitation, single parenting, gay marriage, and gay parenting are only a few examples of the issues that conservative and progressive religious and political groups debate. See Allan Carlson, Conjugal America: On the Public Purposes of Marriage (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2007); Michael J. Rosenfeld, The Age of Independence: Interracial Unions, Same-Sex Unions, and the Changing American Family (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).
recognition by religious communities. A couple registers their marriage by going to city hall; if they choose, a justice of the peace may perform a brief ceremony devoid of explicitly religious language or any reference to God or a transcendent. This civil or secular marriage is fully valid according to government authorities. On the other hand, marriage can be a highly religious affair, with a religious ceremony, religious authorities present, and recognition of being validly married, not just civilly, but religiously. Couples who have a valid Catholic sacramental marriage or a Jewish marriage that is qiddushin are also granted marriage licenses from the state; however, their valid religious marriages can be deemed religious and not secular in that their religious institutions recognize them. But are state and religious institutions the sole arbiters of what is considered religious and what is not? Can individuals be “religious” if they do not follow the normative parameters for religious inclusion, outlined in the previous section? If their religious institution does not recognize a couple’s marriage as valid, does that mean that their marriage is devoid of religious belief or meaning? This leads us to the other definition of secular.

Second, there are definitions of secular that relate not to institutional space as much as to personal piety. The genesis of this second association with the word secular develops out of the “old paradigm” of secularization theory. The process of secularization, as I described above, means the transference of activities from religious institutions to secular institutions. The old paradigm of secularization theory widely dictated that “if the churches

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lose power, personal piety will fade; if personal piety fades, the churches will lose power.”[^90]

This link between religious institutions and personal piety continues to complicate as well as stimulate a lively debate over the relationship between the religious and the secular in the United States and in societies around the world.[^91]

Charles Taylor’s central focus in *A Secular Age* regards personal piety. Taylor argues that religious belief and practice are the issues “that people often want to get at when they speak of our times as secular, and contrast them, nostalgically or with relief, with earlier ages of faith or piety.”[^92] His central thesis is that unlike in ages past, religious piety is a choice – people can chose to believe, not to believe, to practice, not to practice, to affiliate, or not to affiliate. Despite the fact that there are very pious people in the United States, Taylor characterizes the American citizenry as widely secular compared with Muslim and Indian societies. This is because, in the United States, belief is largely an option. In many non-Western societies, religion is not optional and truth claims are not widely contested.[^93]

In considering piety in marriage and family-life, historically individuals in the West did not have the options or the choices to which Taylor refers. The Catholic sacramental model dominated married life in Christendom, the government of England set strict parameters for marrying in the Anglican Church, Jewish minorities had little choice but to marry within their synagogue communities, and throughout much of American history, social taboos limited marital choices. In late-twentieth and early-twenty-first-century America,


[^91]: For up-to-date discourse on the secularization debate, see *The Immanent Frame*, http://blogs.ssrc.org.

[^92]: Taylor, 2.

[^93]: Ibid., 3.
there is much wider freedom for individuals to marry and have families that do not fit traditional religious expectations, not only in terms of religious intermarriage, but in terms of affiliating with religious institutions and engaging in religious practices. While post-1965 immigrant communities from the East bring with them fairly conservative ideas about marriage and family-life, they experience a sense of liberation – sometimes legally, sometimes theologically, sometimes socially – from traditional religious norms that they experienced in their native countries. When it comes to marriage and family-life, one might conclude that many Americans no longer default to thinking of their marriage as a Christian covenant or a religious agreement with their religious community, ancestry, or God. In this sense, their marriage could be considered secular.

**Characteristics of “Religious” Marriages and Family Lives**

One can think of the ongoing nature of marriage and family-life in terms of being secular or religious, using piety and belief as well as institutional involvement as proxies. Again, it is widely recognized that many American families do not fit neatly into these realms – either in the circles of religious traditions or in the secular white space outside of them. However, in order to use religious intermarriage as a lens to this reality, it is important to establish initial parameters or boundaries between the religious and secular realms. Sociological studies attempt to determine how people align generally with the secular and religious arenas. In a national study of religiosity by the international research firm, Bertelsmann Stiftung, they sought to differentiate between religious and non-religious, or secular, respondents. “Highly religious” is a designation for people “for whom religious matters play a key role in their personality.” “Religious” is a designation for people for whom “religious experiences and practices matter, but do not play a central role in their
personality.” “Non-religious” is for people for whom “religious practices, beliefs and experiences hardly feature in the lives of these individuals.” In the 2001 American Religious Identification Survey, they asked respondents the following question to delineate where they fell in regards to the secular or religious categories: “When it comes to your outlook, do you regard yours as . . . (1) Secular, (2) Somewhat Secular, (3) Somewhat Religious or (4) Religious?”

The question is how to apply parameters for religious and secular to marriage and family-life. In their multiple studies, sociologists Loren D. Marks and David C. Dollahite use three categories to depict a “religious” family-life. First, the family follows the religious beliefs of the tradition. Second, the family engages in the religious practices of the tradition. This may include prayer, reading from sacred texts, and conducting rituals. Third, the family participates in the life of the religious community. This could include service, participation in group ceremonies and prayer, holiday celebrations, and the like. Clearly these three categories are not mutually exclusive; however, they do enable one to gauge what a “religious” family may be like, versus a non-religious or “secular” family that does not follow religious beliefs, engage in religious practices, or participate in a religious community.

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In Marks’s and Dollahite’s definition, there is an institutional component represented by the family’s involvement in a religious community. The more active and central the religious community is in the family’s life, the more “religious” the family is. There are also personal piety components to ongoing marriage and family-life; these are represented by beliefs and practices. The closer the beliefs and practices align with the parameters of a religious tradition, the easier one could classify the family’s life as “religious” or inside a circle of a religious tradition, to refer to the visual I painted earlier. If families do not believe and/or practice, they would fall into the secular white space. While religious life in America does not fall neatly into these constructs, these base-line parameters enable one to differentiate between a “religious” marriage and family-life and a “secular” marriage and family-life.

In 2005 Marks released a study and in 2006 Dollahite and Nathaniel M. Lambert released another study on the role of religion in ongoing marriage and family-life of very “religious” people across an array of religious traditions including Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and Mormonism. As a proxy for religiosity, Marks included married people with school-aged children who “reported financial contributions of a mean of over 8% of their incomes to their faith community and spent a median of 10 hours a week in voluntary religious activities.” Lambert and Dollahite included married couples who leaders of religious communities identified as very involved in their congregations. In an analysis of the comments of the people they interviewed in their studies, I proffer four key ideas that emerge that characterize “religious” families. I am not focused on how religious Muslim families differ from religious Christian families, for example, for that was the focus of the

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97 Marks, 85-111; Lambert and Dollahite, 439-449.
prior section of this chapter; rather, I use these four themes as ways to imagine how religious family-life differs from secular or non-religious family life. If one can imagine that there is a difference between religious and non-religious family life (or between white secular space and religious space), then there is an opportunity to gauge how religious intermarriages fit within and/or challenge these baseline parameters.

First, for these “religious” families, religion is integral to every aspect of marriage and family-life; religion is not relegated to certain realms or activities. A non-denominational Christian father explains as follows: “Our family is all oriented in the same way. Christ is king. He’s the center, He’s what it’s all about. . . . our faith informs our relationships and everything about us.”98 A Catholic mother emphasizes this: “Faith is so much a part of who I am that I couldn’t separate faith and family . . .”99 Second, these couples refer to their religion and faith somewhat synonymously, but do not speak of spirituality very often. Angie, who converted to Islam later in her life and married a Muslim man, reinforces this idea. She says: “Every minute of every day we devote to faith. Our religion is our way of life. We fit our life into our religion, not [our] religion into our life.”100 Third, shared family prayer is important; prayer is not an individual activity. “I love my wife [and we love] to worship together, to pray together, our family especially likes to [sing] together,” explains Oui, a Korean Christian father.101 An African American Baptist mother provides a similar

98 Marks, 104.
99 Ibid., 107.
100 Emphasis mine. Ibid., 93.
101 Ibid., 89.
sentiment: “As a family, we strongly believe in prayer, and so we encourage one another with prayer.”\textsuperscript{102}

Fourth, these couples find marital intimacy in their shared religion; they highly value unity in religion. A non-denominational Christian mother explains this: “We pray about things together and the Lord can help us work things out . . . The Lord, He’s the best [marriage] counselor you could ever have.”\textsuperscript{103} In keeping a marriage strong, Kari, a Missionary Alliance schoolteacher relays the following: “When you’re both praying to the same God, He’s giving you the same answers. . . . you’re both reading the Bible that has the same answers for your marriage and life . . .”\textsuperscript{104} There is a strong sense from these couples that unity in religion, and the culture associated with that religion, is essential. To not have unity would drive two people apart. A Jewish father of two expresses this: “I always believed, and still do, that the cultural upbringing of being Jewish is so deep that being married to someone who is not Jewish, they just wouldn’t get it. They wouldn’t laugh at the same jokes. They wouldn’t enjoy the same foods I enjoy on the same levels, you know?”\textsuperscript{105} Shared religion is a way to bring two people together on important issues, explains Ed, a senior systems analyst and Seventh-day Adventist. “But, the important thing is that when you have an authority, a loving God in your life who you’re trying to emulate, then you can

\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., 105.
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., 97.
\textsuperscript{104} Lambert and Dollahite, 442.
\textsuperscript{105} Marks, 104.
go to the Word that describes his love and his way of dealing with others. And, you can measure yourself against that. And, that generally brings us back to a common ground.”

These ideas of unity enabling marital intimacy, shared family prayer, and religion and faith being a part of every aspect of life are key themes that emerge in research with “religious” couples who describe the role of religion in their marriage and family-life. They provide a benchmark for understanding what a “religious” marriage and family-life is relative to a non-religious or “secular” marriage and family-life. Many American couples and families do not fit neatly into either of these categories – they live in a space that straddles religious and secular spheres as I have defined them here. As I will explore in the next few chapters, religious intermarriages are a lens into this very dynamic.

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106 Lambert and Dollahite, 441.
CHAPTER VI
STORIES OF CONTEMPORARY INTERMARRIAGES
The Defiance of Boundaries

“But in the end all religions tend to point to the same light. In between the light and us, sometimes there are too many rules.”

Paulo Coelho

In this chapter, I introduce the stories of couples in religious intermarriages. In their daily lives, they experience religious diversity first-hand. The ways that they navigate their religious terrain and incorporate religion into their lives is far from traditional. Because they exercise great choice and freedom in terms of what to believe and how to practice their religion, their lives could be characterized under the rubric of what Charles Taylor calls the “secular age.”\(^1\) However, their lives are not secular or necessarily exemplary of secularization theory. It is possible that their lives are harbingers for changes in religion and not the demise of religion. In a 2000 lecture, Peter Berger emphasized the importance of understanding the effects of religious diversity on religious beliefs and practice – effects that may not be characteristic of secularization: “I would propose that pluralism affects the how rather than the what of religious beliefs and practice – and that is something quite different from secularization.”\(^2\) Much can be learned about religious pluralism in America from the choices the individuals in these religious intermarriages make.

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Every marriage is different. However, after analyzing in-depth-interviews with over forty individuals in Christian-Jewish, Christian-Muslim, Christian-Hindu, and Christian-Buddhist intermarriages, common themes consistently emerge. These couples defy the normative or traditional boundaries of their respective religious traditions – they are living in a religious “no man’s land.” In many ways, their lives are characterized by paradox and ambiguity. Religious identity, religious practice, and religious education for their children appear important, yet the interviewees diminish the importance of central aspects of their religions. They clearly distinguish between religion and spirituality – using each to serve a different role in their lives. Also, couples value and find intimacy in and through their religious differences but at the same time, emphasize what is common in their different religions. These couples’ marriages do not fit the institutional and personal piety criteria for being “religious marriages”; however, they are not devoid of religion and thus are not purely secular either. A review of my research and analysis methodology, an introduction to the lives of some of these individuals in religious intermarriages, and a detailed analysis of how these couples defy normative boundaries, provide context for the discussion on what we can learn from these intermarriages.

Qualitative Research Methodology

In January 2008, Chester Gillis, theology professor at Georgetown University, helped to secure funding and resources through the Georgetown University Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs for a study on religious intermarriage. He appointed me Director of the initiative which would involve a year-long research endeavor with ten undergraduate students whom we selected. I had spent over ten years in a professional
setting designing qualitative research studies based upon grounded theory and inductive analytical methods. Throughout this time, I also designed and implemented quantitative studies; my projects involved a combination of both methods to achieve the research goals. I taught these methods in a graduate course at the University of Chicago and was a partner at a consulting firm dedicated to helping clients use these research processes.

As the Director of the Berkley Center initiative, I trained and carefully oversaw the content of the project, the methods employed, and most important, the quality of the work on a weekly and sometimes daily basis throughout the year. The ten students were actively engaged in the process, the recruiting of research participants, and the interviewing. Using the coding methods I taught them, the students analyzed the problems, challenges, and benefits of being in a religious intermarriage. Some of the common themes that emerged were: growth through understanding the other, tension in uniting two families, and concern for how children will be raised. They identified specific challenges and benefits particular to Christian-Jewish, Christian-Muslim, Christian-Hindu, and Christian-Buddhist marriages as well. The analysis in these chapters builds upon these findings, but goes beyond them. Many of my ideas and perspectives originated in my research and in discussions with the students. In the analysis that follows, I used the raw data from the interviews as well as materials from other studies to form my findings and conclusions. If these findings and conclusions overlap in any way with the students’ findings and conclusions, it should be deemed as confirmation of what the interviewees relayed and emphasized. In describing the

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methodology and findings, I sometimes use “we” as the subject and other times use “I.” I do this in order to differentiate between group work and my own decisions and analyses.

This research project and my findings are based upon grounded-theory methodologies and analytic induction. The simplest way to explain this method is to begin by explaining what it is not. This is not a research project that utilized classical scientific method or deductive analytics. The deduction analytic process (the opposite of what I use here) involves testing working hypotheses to deduce information that confirms, refutes, or modifies those hypotheses. A project on religious intermarriage using deduction analytics could be shaped as follows: The study would analyze Christian-non-Christian dual wedding ceremonies. My hypothesis would have been that dual ceremonies draw on scriptural references that are universal and pluralistic in nature, and do not refer to particularistic aspects of religious traditions that may alienate the religious other and his/her family. I would test this by exploring numerous ceremonies using a variety of sources and research techniques. I would either prove or disprove my hypothesis and be able to provide a litany of very specific examples of the scriptural references in dual-religious ceremonies. This would be a very viable and interesting research project; however, it is not the project I have embarked upon, either in the form of content or methodology.

In grounded theory and analytic induction there are no initial hypotheses; rather, concepts and hypotheses emerge from the data. Grounded theory was first articulated as a viable method for social sciences by Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss in their 1967 book *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. They had collaborated on a study together that

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focused on dying patients in hospitals. Since then, social scientists have studied and used their methodology quite widely. The objective of grounded theory is neither to be descriptive of a phenomenon nor to aim for uncovering truth. If a researcher provides description, as I will do with the stories of religious intermarriages, it is meant to be illustrative of concepts that emerged. Glaser and Strauss emphasized that unlike the scientific method, the researcher doing grounded theory and analytic induction is altogether prohibited from developing hypotheses. The objective of grounded theory is to discover the concerns and experiences of people in a certain research situation and understand how they resolve those concerns.

The research situation in my particular study was religious intermarriage in America—a fairly broad space. My objective was to understand the experiences of married couples who identify as two different religions and determine whether and how they fit within and/or defy religious boundaries. As part of understanding their experiences, it was helpful to get them to share and describe the problems and challenges they associate with religious intermarriage, the benefits and opportunities they associate with religious intermarriage, and how they resolve or negotiate their religious differences. The interviews, in combination with a thorough review of the vast literature on religious intermarriage, would enable me to look across the differences in religion, lifestyle, and community dynamics to larger, more macro

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concepts that explain some of the core aspects (seemingly) characteristic of their interreligious experiences.

To understand this research situation, we chose to do in-depth-interviews (IDIs) with individuals or couples in religious intermarriages. Because the objective was to explore a situation and then induce from the data emergent themes and concepts, qualitative research, not quantitative research, was the appropriate approach. Additionally, because of the sensitivity and personal-nature of the subject, we opted for IDIs instead of other methods like focus groups which would hinder uncovering the details of an individual’s specific marriage dynamics. One important intention was to ensure the comfort of interviewees; we allowed them to decide whether they would like to speak with us alone or with their spouse. We conducted the interviews over the phone to allow for geographic diversity and scheduling flexibility. We used the common technique for transcribing qualitative interviews, typing exactly what interviewees said, putting in parenthesis any expressions like laughter or discomfort, and “cleaning up the write-up” by filling in gaps, editing spelling, and clarifying language.

Our sampling strategy primarily utilized judgment sampling which is also referred to as purposeful sampling. For qualitative research, this is a very common technique. Where quantitative research seeks a representative sample from the population where the results can be generalized based on probabilities, qualitative research is done with much smaller samples of people with no intention of generalizing results onto the broader population. Random sampling and probability approaches are often very efficient and effective for quantitative work; they are counterproductive for qualitative work, as there “is no evidence that the

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6 Gilgun, 12.
values, beliefs and attitudes for the core of qualitative investigation are normally distributed, making the probability approach inappropriate.”7 With judgment sampling, the researcher “actively selects the most productive sample to answer the research question.”8

The recruiting goal was roughly forty interviews with individuals who were in an intermarriage that involved someone who self-identified as Christian and was married to someone who identified as Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, or Buddhist. Ideally, there would be a spread across religious traditions, yet we recognized that a perfect spread was not necessary for our purposes. Again, the goal was not to learn about the intricacies of Christian-Hindu marriage, for example; the goal was to discover common themes that surface in American intermarriages across an array of religious traditions. In addition, with qualitative research, numbers are not as important as content. Once we began to hear the same themes over and over again (this is called “data saturation”), this was a sign that we had completed a sufficient number of interviews. In the end, we conducted 43 interviews; these were more than enough to reach the point of data saturation. With more time and funding, we could have done additional waves of research, capitalizing on the iterative nature of grounded theory work. In that case, we could have then used theoretical sampling which would seek out individuals who could help go deeper and/or answer new questions that would get to the next layer of complexity.9 This would be appropriate for a follow-up study in the future.

We developed a framework to guide our judgment sampling approach. We sought to get a mix of Catholics and Protestants, a mix of couples with and without children, a mix

8 Ibid., 523.
9 For a description of theoretical sampling, see Marshall, 523-524.
of older and younger couples, and some geographic diversity. We did not recruit homosexual couples, yet recognized that this would be an interesting arena for a future study. We did not pose limits on the numbers of males versus females we spoke with; instead, we asked if both husband and wife would like to speak with us. If only one said yes, we interpreted this as a sign that this person would be more forthright in sharing his/her experiences. We also recognized that those who agreed to speak with us may have been more interested in and/or contemplative about religion than others who were not willing to be interviewed; this was a trade-off we were willing to make. We found couples by calling religious, interfaith, and social organizations as well as asking our professional and personal contacts for leads. We also employed “snowball” recruiting techniques where we asked interviewees for additional contacts.

I explicitly decided before the research not to limit our recruiting to couples who were “religious” in their beliefs, their practices, and/or their involvement with religious communities. It was acceptable if individuals or couples had these characteristics, but I did not want to limit the sample or skew the sample in this direction. This decision raised many questions with the team. However, I felt very strongly about this issue. I believe that this dissertation and my findings regarding these twenty-first century intermarried couples make a contribution to the literature on not only religious intermarriage, but also the literature on religious pluralism because they are based on research that includes those who would be categorized as “not very religious” by common sociological metrics. Common sociological metrics for one’s level of religiosity include how often someone prays, how often he/she attends church or religious services, and how well his/her theological beliefs align with a
religious tradition. To specifically recruit for “religious” people as Marks, Dolihite and Lambert did in their studies, would be to purposefully ignore all those Americans who identify with a religion but do not fit neatly within the traditional boundaries of the religious tradition. By their very nature, those Americans who engage in religious intermarriages often step outside the boundaries of their religious traditions. To ignore those who are not “religious” by traditional or normative parameters (the ones outlined in the last chapter) would be to ignore what is perhaps most interesting about not only intermarried people, but also about large segments of Americans in general.

I do not deny that there is a valid rationale for studying “religious” intermarried people. As evidenced by the American Protestant and Jewish communities, the more “religious” one is (by traditional or normative parameters), the less likely he/she is to be in a religious intermarriage. Evangelicals and Orthodox Jews have much lower intermarriage rates than mainline Protestants and Conservative and Reform Jews, respectively. One could certainly embark on a research project to understand this niche. However, in my aim to understand what forms of religiosity these couples adopt and how they negotiate their religious differences, this research requirement would be directly contrary to my interests in this particular project.

The very fact that persons married other persons outside of their religious traditions shows that they have a minimal propensity to step outside the conventional bounds of their religion. What else do they do that breaks convention? To keep this research arena open, in

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the recruiting phase, interviewees were asked if they identified with a religion, but they were *not* asked questions to get to their level of religiosity. They also were not excluded if they identified with more than one religion. In other words, each spouse had to identify with a different religion (one Christian and the other Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, or Buddhist), but did not have to meet pre-determined levels of religiosity or religious singularity. How religious this person was, was not considered in selecting them for an interview. The person did not have to have certain religious beliefs, partake in certain religious practices, or be involved with his/her religious community in any way; as they simply had to identify as Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, or Buddhist. For example, if a wife was a practicing Hindu and her husband was a non-practicing Catholic, this was considered sufficient for an interview. If a Muslim man has a wife who converted to Islam from Christianity but attends a Christian church presently, this was sufficient as well. Again, to recruit only those who fit minimum criteria for intensity or degree of religiosity would be to skew the research.

During the recruiting process, a number of insights emerged that led to important learning about the complexity of religious intermarriage in different religious traditions. While initially frustrating for many of the students, this type of iterative learning is exactly what emerges in grounded theory methodology. We learned that in the recruiting, we had to account for the different dynamics within different religious communities and remain flexible with our recruiting criteria. It was much more difficult to find and recruit individuals from Christian-Hindu and Christian-Muslim marriages than it was from Christian-Jewish marriages. Interreligious marriage has been a phenomenon in the American Jewish community and Jewish authorities have been discussing, debating, and studying it for years. Rabbis know many Christian-Jewish couples, many publications and groups exist to cater to
the needs of these interreligious families, and many people know these families through school, work, or their neighborhood involvement. Hindus and Muslims, as newer immigrant communities to the United States, are not as integrated into America’s neighborhoods and religious intermarriage is not nearly as common as it is for Jewish Americans.\(^{11}\) As a consequence, these couples are more difficult to identify. Discussions on religious intermarriage are in their infancy and there are few organizations dedicated to working with these couples.

It was also difficult to recruit people from Christian-Muslim intermarriages who had not converted to Islam. In the Muslim community, there are significant pressures for a non-Muslim to convert. Even though it is permissible for a Muslim man to marry a Christian woman, it is the norm for women to convert as well.\(^{12}\) Thus, if Christians who converted to Islam still identified as Christian to some degree, we included them as potential interviewees. To not interview these people, would be to exclude individuals who considered themselves in an interreligious marriage and used conversion as one way to deal with their religious differences.

Identifying and recruiting individuals in Christian-Buddhist marriages contributed to our understanding of Buddhist intermarriage. The Buddhists with whom we spoke in this study did not recognize the category of religious intermarriage – it was not relevant for the way they understood religion or marriage. They did not see Buddhism as a particular

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religion, one that disconnected or separated it from other religions. Additionally, they did not see marriage as a religious affair. After calling organizations, talking to scholars, and engaging with individuals who practice Buddhism, we abandoned the phrase “interreligious marriage” in our recruiting efforts. Instead, we sought to find individuals who identified with Buddhism who were married to someone who identified with Christianity. Leaving out the phrase “interreligious marriage” was helpful in recruiting more people to interview.

Analyzing the insights from the interviews has been an ongoing iterative and cumulative process based upon informal analysis through reading and discussions as well as formal data analysis. In the formal data analysis of the interviews, I used a thorough and well-established coding schema. I began by using open coding to label “meaning units” (or select quotations) with a tag as to what the quotation was about or meant. I did this vertically – in all the Christian-Jewish, Christian-Muslim, Christian-Hindu, and Christian-Buddhist interviews. I also did this horizontally – across the religious traditions by each area of the interview guide. After open coding, I used axial coding to flag what concepts surfaced consistently. I needed to determine what concepts were substantial enough to warrant further attention. This is one of the most important, exciting, and complex aspects of qualitative research analysis. It is both an art and a science. It is the phase of the analysis when I must judge what is core and what is peripheral in the data. After axial coding, I utilized selective coding methods to “dimensionalize” the core concepts. This was the phase when I began to map the core concepts to the normative parameters of religious traditions and religious versus secular marriage and family-life. In this phase of the analysis, I select quotations and examples to use to illustrate the key points.\textsuperscript{13} In line with inductive analytics, my intent is to

\textsuperscript{13} Gilgun, 13.
introduce concepts and themes that stretch across many religious traditions and characterize complex aspects of religious intermarriages in America.  

In order to introduce these core concepts and common themes that emerged from research with individuals in religious intermarriages, I begin by sharing stories from five of the 43 interviews. In Chapter 7, I share the detailed findings from this analysis to substantiate my broader conclusions. For each finding, I offer select quotations from the interviews. These stories and quotations are not simply interesting narratives; rather, they are illustrative of important and complex dynamics that surfaced throughout the interviews. As Harry F. Wolcott, Professor Emeritus in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Oregon, emphasizes in his book Writing Up Qualitative Research, “Good qualitative research ought to confound issues, revealing them in their complexity rather than reducing them to simple explanation.” Corrine Glesne at the University of Vermont and Alan Peshkin at the University of Illinois reinforce the importance of discovering complexity in their book on qualitative research – “Throughout the research process, they [qualitative researchers] assume that social interaction is complex and that they will uncover some of that complexity.”

I emphasize that the stories, the findings, and the supporting quotations are illustrative of common themes, they are not necessarily representative of all religious marriages. To gauge representation, I would need to embark upon a quantitative research study, one that would allow me to measure the frequency, commonality, and component parts of the dynamics I discuss using a statistically significant sample size as well as substantively

14 Harry E. Wolcott, Writing Up Qualitative Research, 3d ed. (Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, 2009), 32.

different research methods and analysis techniques. Glesne and Peshkin clarify the difference between quantitative and qualitative research:

Quantitative researchers seek explanations and predictions that will generalize to other persons and places. Careful sampling strategies and experimental designs are aspects of quantitative methods aimed at producing generalizable results.

Meanwhile, since qualitative researchers deal with multiple, socially constructed realities or “qualities” that are complex and indivisible into discrete variables, they regard their research task as coming to understand and interpret how the various participants in a social setting construct the world around them.\(^{16}\)

An important aspect of qualitative research technique is probing or digging into issues. Our interview guide allowed for this, as it was simply a guide and not a survey. The benefit of in-depth interviews (versus a quantitative survey) is that there is an opportunity to ask interviewees “why,” to ask them to provide examples that support their statements, and to allow them to answer open ended questions as they see fit without giving them predetermined lists of potential answers. An open-ended qualitative interview question to a Christian in an intermarriage asks, “What challenges did you have with planning your wedding ceremony?” A close-ended quantitative survey asks, “Please rate how problematic the following issues were in planning your wedding ceremony: a) the uniqueness of Jesus Christ; b) the vision of marriage as a Christian sacrament or covenant; c) the fact that your spouse was not baptized; d) getting your marriage recognized as religious or valid by your religious community.” The best quantitative surveys are written based on extensive qualitative research. Qualitative research in the open-ended manner I have described seeks to surface the issues naturally and understand the language that research participants use.

\(^{16}\) Ibid., 6.
It is of paramount importance not to “lead” an interviewee towards an answer or give him/her an answer by putting words in his/her mouth.\textsuperscript{17} Consensus or closure is not the objective. Wilcot emphasizes the following to the qualitative researcher who must relay his/her findings to others: “Rather than striving for closure, see if you can leave both yourself and your readers pondering the essential issues that perplex you.”\textsuperscript{18} The interview guide in this study focused on the role of religion in one’s marriage, the benefits of religious intermarriage, the challenges, difficulties, and complexities of intermarriage, the effect of religious intermarriage on their own sense of religiosity, and what advice they would give to other couples in their situation. We prompted specific questions on the wedding ceremony, the reactions of one’s family to his/her marriage, how they did or will raise their children, how they spend the holidays, and on the ways in which religion plays a role in their personal and family-life. We did not ask interviewees about all of the normative parameters I outlined in the last chapter. Those parameters are defined by language and categories shaped by religious traditions and religious authorities. They are not necessarily understood, relevant, or important to Americans in religious intermarriages. By raising those parameters directly, we risked “leading” interviewees toward those topics, thus skewing the research. We also risked offending them or making them defensive.

It is hardly possible to think of two topics that are as sensitive as religion and the personal dynamics of one’s marriage. Nations go to war over religion; married couples divorce because they cannot work through their differences. If the researcher is not sensitive to these dynamics and does not structure the research well to account for them, the


\textsuperscript{18} Wolcott, 115.
agreeableness of the interviewees and the quality of the research would be compromised. Especially given the sensitivity of these topics, it was vital in this research that we did not shut down lines of communication, offend, and/or put an interviewee on the defensive. It is very possible to imagine offending interviewees by asking questions that implied that he/she should be more concerned with certain tenets of his/her religion or that he/she does not communicate well with his/her spouse because they do not discuss the array of differences that characterize the religious traditions to which they identify.

One of the most important objectives of these discussions was to see what interviewees voluntarily or naturally brought up as issues, concerns, problems, needs, benefits and opportunities in their interreligious marriages. By asking open-ended questions and carefully choosing where to inquire further, we were able to gauge what was on their minds, what was important to them, and what aspects of religion were relevant in their personal experience, their marriage, and their family-life. If a Christian interviewee did not raise the topic of whether his/her marriage is a covenant with God, neither did we. If a Jewish interviewee did not bring up the issue that his/her religious intermarriage was not considered qiddushin, neither did we. If a Hindu woman did not discuss her family’s reaction to her choice of a “love marriage” over an arranged marriage, neither did we.

As it turned out, many interviewees did volunteer information on their religious beliefs, practices, and community involvement. However, many did not mention a number of the normative parameters that one would suppose would be issues in their religious intermarriages. This is an important finding in and of itself. It could be that these parameters were not important enough to the interviewees to raise. However, with this said, the most significant trade-off or draw-back to this approach is that there is no way to know why an
interviewee did not deem a topic important enough to bring up. Did he/she forget that something was an issue, certainly a possibility for people who have been in a religious intermarriage for many years? Does he/she not know enough about his/her religion to realize that something could have or should have been an issue? Does he/she just not care about an issue (i.e., they are indifferent)? And/or is an issue just not relevant to his/her marriage, family, or life-situation? In this particular study, we were not able to gauge forgetfulness, ignorance, indifference, or relevance. We decided that this was an acceptable trade-off given the objective of the research which was to uncover core themes that are on the minds of interviewees and reflect their experiences (positive and negative) in intermarriage. We recognized that this was a foundational research endeavor, one upon which future qualitative and quantitative studies could and should build, gaining greater clarity into the reasons why people comment or do not comment on how they deal with many of the normative parameters that separate religious traditions. If other scholars raise additional questions and hypotheses as a result of this qualitative research project, then the project has successfully made its intended contribution.

The Stories of Religious Intermarriages

I begin here by telling the stories of five intermarried couples. I then offer a detailed analysis that draws upon all 43 interviews. In the next chapter, I map quotations from all 43 interviews to the normative parameters outlined in Chapter 5. My aim in beginning with the five stories is to introduce “names and faces,” as well as a more holistic view of these couples’ experiences than select quotations that I selected from a myriad of interviews can
provide. In other words, these stories are meant to complement the analysis in the following chapter.

What one will quickly realize in these illustrative stories is that the boundaries that divide religious traditions and divide religious marriage and family-life from secular marriage and family-life do not resonate and/or are not important to these intermarried people. Their lives are strikingly different from the very religious families I quoted from the Marks and Lambert/Dollahite studies and do not qualify as “religious” according to the institutional and piety parameters I provided. However, religion is a part of their lives. Many of these people in religious intermarriages affiliate with a religious institution and/or have personal piety. It is my supposition that in many ways their understanding of religion is not wholly unrelated to growing groups of Americans who disaffiliate, affiliate with more than one religion, believe there is truth in many religions, identify themselves as spiritual, and/or are shape lives that cross religious bounds and secular/religious bounds. For better or for worse, these stories are American stories.

Annika and Tim

“I want her [my daughter] to have a connection with both her parents’ heritage.”

Annika is a Hindu and Tim is a non-denominational Christian. While they may come from different religious backgrounds, they have remarkably similar views on God, spirituality, and how they want to raise their daughter. Annika and Tim both see God as ubiquitous, distinguish between religion and spirituality, dismiss the concept of hell, and put

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19 Aliases are used to protect the privacy of the interviewees.
a high value on cultural diversity. They both grew up in open and tolerant households. Neither of them has felt shunned by their families.

Annika and Tim value their individual relationship to God, what they call spirituality. They diminish the communal and ritualistic aspects of religion. “I pray to God on pretty much a daily basis, but that’s not being religious. To be a Hindu, being religious is about the rituals, having the statues and the flames and being in a certain place. I’m not into organized religion, I’m more spiritual. I believe in God.” Tim also says that he is “more spiritual than religious.” He explains, “I believe in God, spirituality guides my interactions with others, my life. I don’t go to church on a regular basis. My spirituality is personal for me. I don’t need to go to church, or make others think the way I do.” Being spiritual, not religious, allows Annika and Tim to have separate relationships with God – “we talk about spirituality, but we don’t pray together.” Tim did not go to church very often growing up. Annika did; however, temple was still a personal experience for Annika, not a communal one. “No one said to us what to pray or think. We all went to the temple together, but when you are there, you are in your own space, in your own head, praying how you want to.”

Their individualistic and spiritual outlook on religiosity is closely related to the high value that Annika and Tim put on religious diversity. Annika’s dad grew up Hindu, but went to school with Catholic Malyalis; her mom grew up in Mumbai, went to a Catholic school, and was surrounded by many different religious communities.

20 “We have always been open to religions when growing up because for us, religion and spirituality were an individual thing. You can pray in a mosque, a cathedral, a temple, in your bedroom, in the yard because God is everywhere. There is no label to stick on God.” Tim echo these sentiments, “It

20 The Malyalis live in Goa, a small state in the southwest of India.
doesn’t matter what religion you are, what name of God you use in your prayers. That’s what I grew up with; that’s what I believe.”

A core belief in God is important for Tim; having faith in God and being a good person is what makes him a Christian. He believes in an afterlife. He does not believe in hell though, which he realizes may put him at odds with other Christians. Clarifying how he differs from other Christians, Tim explains that “many say that if you’re not part of this church, you can’t be saved; when you die, you will go to hell.” Annika doesn’t believe in hell either. She laughs and says, “my mom says that hell is here on earth.” Annika is not sure if she believes in heaven though. “I’m iffy on the concept of heaven. I believe in the afterlife. Sometimes I think it is like reincarnation, that spirits come back, and sometimes I picture my dead relatives in heaven.” Annika and Tim have discussed heaven and the afterlife. They have determined that they do have a consistent message for their daughter, which is important: “If our daughter asked, we would both say that souls go to heaven, so we’re consistent there.”

They want their daughter “exposed to everything,” not only Hinduism and Christianity. When asked why, their answer was twofold: First, there are basic concepts about being a good person and helping others that extend across many religions. Tim grew up in an ethnically and religiously diverse family with Christians, Koreans, Native Americans and others. Tim believes this diversity will have a positive influence on his daughter – “I hope it makes her a more tolerant person.” He explains, “Part of the reason we want her to know about all religions is to appreciate . . . people of all religions. At the core, people all want the same things.” Second, there are multiple ways to look at and experience God. Annika explains: “I would probably encourage her to think about all of the religions as part
of a culture. Hindu religion is basically a culture and heritage. It’s a cultural perspective on how to look at God. If she asks how can God be this if he is that, I’ll tell her it is people looking through different lenses.”

While Tim and Annika emphasize spirituality over religion, their lives are not devoid of religious ritual. They had a traditional Hindu rice ceremony for their daughter. This is a ceremony and celebration at six months when the baby begins to eat solid food. “There was a bunch of foods of different tastes and textures at the ceremony, and there were many blessings and prayers.” The couple also wants to get their daughter baptized, but they have not done so because it has taken a while to find a church they feel comfortable attending. Tim explains that he “didn’t want to have her baptized in a traditional church because [he] didn’t want to have to choose a denomination.” He and Annika are considering a non-denominational church that incorporates practices from different religions. If they join this church, they will do the equivalent of a baptism called a “blessing ceremony.” This would be “ideal” for Tim. They also talk about joining Baha’i because it is an open community and would expose their daughter to “different ideas, religions, and people.” While Annika’s dad has said that the broad exposure could confuse a child, Annika and Tim insist that this is how they will raise their daughter.

Right now the family celebrates Christmas and Easter. They do Easter with Tim’s family. Annika admits, “I don’t do much with the Hindu holidays.” Her parents call her on the Hindu holidays of Vishnu and Onum, and her relatives send her e-cards. She would like to start celebrating these holidays since they bring back “great memories as a kid.” They have been to temple a few times as a family though and Annika would also like to have a shrine at home, like her mom did. Tim is fine with this. But Annika also really wants the
family to go to church together. She fears that if they do not, their family religious “default may end up being going to temple.” This concerns her because their goal is balance. She would be happy to partake in church-going – “It won’t make me less of a Hindu to go to church.” It seemed as if Annika was almost holding back on doing more Hindu activities until they have a church to attend as well. When asked about advice for other interreligious couples, she said: “The last thing you want is for someone to say five years from now, ‘why don’t we ever go to church?’”

The couple had a Hindu-Christian wedding ceremony on the same day, as part of an integrated service. They were very clear that they thought that doing separate ceremonies on separate days would make one appear “real” and the other “show” – a violation of their principle of balance in the religions. They also wanted the service to be multi-cultural. As an example of the multi-culturalism they reference, they had the reception in an Italian restaurant and the ceremony in a Japanese garden. The couple is very pleased and proud of how it worked out. They had a Hindu priest and a Christian pastor and incorporated elements from both traditions. “We did this Hindu part of the ceremony with three circles . . . Then we walked three steps to where the Christian pastor was.” “We had the Christian part last for the exciting moment at the end of the ceremony where he pronounced us man and wife.”

Annika and Tim express deep satisfaction with their multi-ethnic and multi-religious relationship. They both value diversity, openness, and exposing their daughter to different cultural ways to view God. On a practical level, Annika expresses that maybe her life is better for having married a non-Indian. “One of my cousins married an Indian of the same religion and culture and she told me, ‘you’re so lucky you’re not married to an Indian. Tim will cook for you, help you with the kid, and he doesn’t mind.’ Indian men often have this
notion of what a woman and man should do.” It seems as if Annika and Tim are making their own decisions about what to do.

**Julie and Rick**

“My husband goes to church on Sundays. My children don’t affiliate with either. I light candles for Shabbat myself on Fridays.”

Religion for Julie and Rick is a deeply personal and individual experience. It is something that is “ingrained in you” that you cannot ignore. Their shared belief in the personal nature of religion is what allows Julie and Rick, and their children, to go their separate religious ways, so to speak. Julie explains: “My husband goes to church on Sundays. My children don’t affiliate with either. I light candles for Shabbat myself on Fridays.” While this may sound lonely or unfeasible for a long-term marriage, Julie begs to differ. “We’ll have been married 23 years in October, so I think it’s working out,” she laughs. Respecting one’s personal choice in religion, compromising, and being creative have been keys to success for Julie and her husband. An overview of their religious paths helps illuminate some of these dynamics.

Julie grew up in a very “secular” Jewish family – her parents rejected Judaism, were atheists, but did celebrate Hanukkah. Rick grew up Baptist in an evangelical Christian family where religion was very important in their lives. When Julie and Rick decided to marry, Julie was excited to have the opportunity to be a part of a religious community – something for which she had always yearned. “[E]ven though I grew up in an atheist family, I always felt somewhat spiritual and wanted to find something more. His family was a nice, warm, loving family – so I thought I would embrace Christianity.” She thought she would give Christianity a try, but she never converted. Julie went to a Methodist church with her husband for seven
years. She was very active and was the President of the church choir. When they had children, she would read them stories from the New Testament. As an American child, Julie’s family had a Santa Claus, but they did not celebrate Christmas. Surrounded by Christmas imagery, she had always longed to really celebrate Christmas. For many years, she did all the preparations for Christmas for her family.

But after seven years of sincerely trying to embrace the tradition, Julie could not go on. When her children would ask her tough questions about Jesus being the son of God, she would be honest with them. She would tell them “I am not sure – it might be true; Daddy believes it and Grandmom and Grandpop believe it.” At Christmas, she began to bemoan all the preparations. “I still didn’t feel as though it [Christmas] was my holiday. I had been looking forward to it for so long, but I just couldn’t get into it that much or take any ownership of it,” she laments. When she decided to stop going to church, her husband “was definitely disappointed, but not angry.” “He always knew that I was sincere in my attempts with Christianity.”

At the same time that Julie was reevaluating her religion, Rick was as well. He had wanted to go to a church that was more like the one in which he grew up, so he switched to a Baptist church. Julie knew for sure that the Baptist church did not fit her needs. After taking an online survey titled, “What Religion is Best for Your Beliefs,” she scored very strongly on Reform Judaism. Even though she had rejected Judaism as a child (or her family had), it was what aligned best with who she was and what she believed. She took an introductory course and “realized that I found what I had been looking for.” Judaism does not tell you the answers, “Judaism is all about searching for or struggling with God.” Julie joined the
synagogue choir, attends services, lights Shabbat candles, and has introduced a new type of Passover Seder to her family and friends.

Julie and Rick’s children never took to Christianity, the religion to which they were primarily exposed when they were young. Julie knows that “interfaith marriage involves a lot of sacrifice, in knowing that there are some things that you won’t be able to pass on” to your children. But now that Julie has found a home in the Jewish community, she realizes that when it comes to helping her children find a religious place that is comfortable for them, all she can do is “enjoy being Jewish in front of them.” Her husband enjoys being Christian in front of them as well. Because religion is a personal thing, their children will need to make their own decisions and find their own paths.

Julie and Rick live an interfaith life that affects many people around them. Julie’s innovative way of celebrating Passover is one example of how she and her family are building bridges among different communities of people. The Haggadah is the book that sets out the order of the Passover Seder, includes scriptural texts, instructions for rituals, songs, and the like. Julie decided to develop her own Haggadah when she decided to make Passover an annual tradition for her family and children, her synagogue friends, her atheist brother, and Rick’s Christian friends and relatives. She chose the scriptural passages carefully and found that the “process of writing it was very revealing.” Her ‘home-made’ Haggadah also helped to build bridges between the religious people at the Seder and those who saw themselves as more secular or non-religious. “For the religious Jews . . . I included some blessings in Hebrew, but I left out any translations so that the religious language wouldn’t bother anyone who was a self-proclaimed atheist.” She found a theme that would resonate with everyone
there. “I looked to the heart of the celebration for its meaning: a celebration of freedom.”

One part of the Seder allows each person to express their thoughts about freedom.

Julie’s work to bridge the disparate religious voices in her life is not only done at the Seder table, but also through music. She currently sings with her synagogue. On Thanksgiving Day the choir at the Methodist church to which she used to belong with her husband partnered with her synagogue for an interfaith event. “It was a wonderful coincidence.” All of her friends from the church were thrilled to see her. “[S]inging with both choirs was such a beautiful and special experience. Both groups feel like family to me,” she reflects.

**Bibi and Antun**

“We don’t go to church or anything; I pray by myself.”

Bibi and Antun both grew up in Lebanon in very religious families. Bibi is a Sunni Muslim and Antun is a Marronite Christian (an Eastern Catholic Church in full communion with the Roman Holy See). They met in medical school over twenty-five years ago. Antun would study with Bibi when her study partner did not show up. They have been together ever since. They have two children and live in the United States. While neither one of them ever converted to the other’s religion, their theological beliefs and family lives have been deeply affected by living as an interreligious couple in America.

Bibi and her husband knew one another for many years before they decided to get married. Bibi emphasizes that during this time of getting to know one another, it became clear that “we knew that we really believed in the same thing even though our religions were different.” Bibi was raised to respect all of the Islamic rules including praying five times a day, not drinking, not eating pork, honoring Ramadan, and the like. Her husband was raised
religiously as well, going to church and praying to Jesus Christ. Bibi explains that she and Antun “talked about our religious beliefs quite a lot before we got married.” To their comfort, they were not on very different theological pages. “We discovered that we had a lot of the same beliefs in God. The only difference was that I believe Jesus Christ was a prophet and he believes that Jesus Christ is the son of God, and everything else was the same. It was not something we felt very different about.” While some Christians and Muslims find this difference to be insurmountable, Bibi and Antun do not. They agree that there is “just one God” and that all religions “lead to the same thing” – God.

Bibi and Antun worked hard to understand one another’s religious beliefs before they were married – they were “impeccably truthful with themselves.” This was important in building the foundation of their marriage. However, it did not dissolve their challenges. “The biggest challenge was the outside world,” explains Bibi, “not our little inside nuclear family.” Antun’s family was “uncomfortable that he was marrying a Muslim.” But Bibi’s family, particularly her father, was very upset. In Islam, the wife is to follow the husband, so Bibi’s father was rightly very concerned that Bibi’s husband was not Muslim and was not going to convert. Her father believed that he had lost his daughter to the Catholic Church. This was not easy for Bibi. “He basically said if I do this, he wouldn’t have anything to do with me, and I had always been a perfect child, so it was very difficult for me.” While her mother was more supportive, Bibi and her father did not talk for some years because she married a Christian.

Over time, however, both Bibi and Antun’s families embraced their child’s spouse. Bibi says that once Antun’s parents “saw how much he loved me, I became the beloved daughter in-law, and it was not an issue.” Bibi’s father had gotten to know Antun and his
family before they married. He liked them as people, but was just worried about the fact that they were not Muslim. Once they decided to marry and after a few years had passed, Bibi’s father “did come around though.” He accepted the reality, saw that Antun did not force Bibi to give up her Muslim faith, and wanted to know his grandchildren.

Bibi and Antun had no problems deciding how they wanted to raise their children; they wanted to raise their children to believe in God. As a part of this, they wanted to expose them to both traditions and not be fanatical about either. Bibi does not serve pork at home, something the children have gotten used to. Raising their children in the United States means that the children would inevitably be influenced by Christianity. Bibi celebrates Ramadan, but they celebrate Christmas as a family. They explain that Christmas is about giving to the poor. When Bibi fasts for Ramadan, she emphasizes that fasting is so that you can feel the pain of the poor and exercise self-control. These are all important ideas that they want to impart to their children; they seek to send these messages through both religious holidays and traditions.

For the most part, their family sees belief as personal and not necessarily requiring affiliation. The family does not go to church or mosque regularly. Bibi admits that she prays by herself. Her daughter “has also become much more spiritual and has realized that you have to make your own personal zone [for religious belief].” When her children were between ten and twelve years old, they “declared themselves.” Their daughter “felt comfortable with Christian education” and their son “felt uncomfortable with all religions.” Bibi herself has changed over time after living in an interreligious family in the United States. “I have become more comfortable with God without strong religious affiliations to it.” She shares the moment this happened: “When my daughter was born, I just looked at her, and
realized that there’s just one God – that was the defining moment for me. It was then that I abandoned specific affiliation.”

Kathleen and David

“My one son is now calling himself half Jewish and half Christian and marks a line down his head to show both.”

Kathleen and David met at Georgetown law school. She grew up nominally Catholic and had never gone to Catholic schools. She found it “amusing” that she met a Conservative Jewish man at the first Catholic school she had ever attended. David kept kosher growing up and insisted that their children would never go to mass – a comment that surprised Kathleen when they first began to discuss the possibility of getting married. While they dated, David would go with her to mass for Christmas and Easter. They have now been married for over five years and have three children. However, figuring out how to reconcile their ideas of religion and family was not very easy, at least initially. They did not have trouble as a couple but they struggled with their parents and in-laws, how to raise their children, and most important, how to find a religious community that would meet their needs.

As regards the wedding, Kathleen’s father, who was never a very religious man, “firmly stated that he would not attend the wedding if the local priest was not there and that he wanted his grandchildren to know who Jesus was.” David’s younger brother had married a non-Jewish woman, but she converted to Judaism. Kathleen reflects that “this was a cause of much celebration in the family.” She wonders if “they are still latently hoping the same of me.” Kathleen chose not to convert. For their wedding, they chose to blend both traditions. David’s family found a rabbi who would officiate but Kathleen’s family priest refused to co-officiate. He did agree to attend, however, which met the minimum requirement of her
father. Admittedly, in order to emphasize the commonalities between the two traditions, “Jesus played a negligible role” in the service.

Despite their attempts to work through how they would raise their children before they got married, Kathleen and David never really figured this out. “When we first had children, we were having difficulty deciding exactly what way to raise them. Rather than opting for either side, we began by taking the middle road of doing nothing.” “Our sons were neither baptized nor given a bris – nor did our daughter have a naming ceremony.” Neither of them was satisfied with this option since they wanted to give their children a religious foundation; but it seemed easier to avoid it than to address it. Kathleen recognized that her husband was much more religious than she and really wanted to raise the children Jewish; at the same time, however, she knew that if David and the children had become part of the synagogue, she would have felt “alienated.”

Neither David nor Kathleen ever felt comfortable in the other’s congregation. The first time Kathleen went to Jewish services with David, the rabbi talked about expanding and extending the traditional rituals concerning death. The rabbi advocated a death ritual when your child marries outside of the faith. “This, obviously, made me feel very uncomfortable,” Kathleen remembers. David was never comfortable with the iconography at the church, when he would go with Kathleen during Christmas and Easter. In order to empathize with him one time, Kathleen leaned over and commented to him “on how many bleeding Jesus[es] there were on the walls of the church.” Neither church nor synagogue felt like a fit, but they were not satisfied with ignoring religion.

They found a solution to their problem when they moved to the Washington D.C. area. The Interfaith Families Project (IFFP) of the Greater Washington D.C. Area “is an
independent community of interfaith families and others committed to sharing, learning about, and celebrating our Jewish and Christian traditions.”21 The IFFP has bi-monthly meetings that combine Sunday school for the children and general family services. It is an alternative to going to synagogue or to mass. The children learn about a new holiday every time they go. “I really enjoy hearing them come home and say something interesting about Jesus . . . [I am] delighted that we are now singing the hamotzi at home.”22 Kathleen is happy that her children are developing a religious identity – “My one son now calls himself half-Jewish and half-Christian and marks a line down between his head to show the difference.”

Not only are the children growing and expanding their religious knowledge in the IFFP community, Kathleen and her husband are too. Her husband does not have to worry about his children going to mass (his initial concern) but at the same time, has become part of a community that introduces Christian ideas – something he initially could not imagine for himself. Kathleen has learned to appreciate Judaism in a new way since they joined the IFFP. As one example, she tells a story about learning some Hebrew. When David was the Hebrew teacher at the Sunday school, he wanted to make Hebrew flash cards but his handwriting was terrible. Kathleen made the flashcards for him in exchange for a little lesson on what the letters meant. “The knowledge of Hebrew that I have accrued has been particularly useful when attending services for high holy days . . . before, I knew absolutely nothing and did not even feel comfortable reading the English translations.”


22 Kathleen is referring to the blessing or prayer that is said before a meal. “Hamotzi lechem min ha-aretz, we give thanks to God for bread. Our voices raise in song together as our joyful prayer is said.” http://www.iffp.net/documents/Programs/Cultivating%20the%20Capacity%20for%20Joy10-07.pdf, accessed 12 October 2010.
In the IFFP, their family is finding a sense of community, something they wondered if they would ever have. “[T]his organization has enabled us to meet a lot of other couples with whom we can discuss issues and an opportunity to meet a lot of people – some of whom were our neighbors whom I would have never met if not for this.” She is happy that her children are getting some grounding in religious knowledge and is fine if they go on to have a Bar/Bat Mitzvah when they are older. The IFFP “is a perfect way to fill that void” that comes from having two different religions in the household. What they have found is that “the middle ground does not have to end up as doing nothing.”

Barbara and Martin

“Buddhism is about letting go. Nothing helps you let go faster than having someone with an opposite view. . . . You believe in God and I don’t.”

Barbara and Martin use humor a lot in their relationship. Always bantering and laughing, they find ways to support one another, forgive one another, and not only live with their differences but use their differences to enhance their personal and professional lives. In addition to humor, Martin emphasizes their intellectual approach to problem-solving: “Problems are not insurmountable things . . . [they] are just minor roadblocks.” Barbara laughs replying, “I’ll remember you said that next time we have a fight!” Martin, a liberal Lutheran, had no problem with his wife [previously Catholic] converting to Buddhism early in their marriage. Barbara explains that “Martin was okay with it because we both believe that religion is a deeply personal thing and that he couldn’t force something on me; he wanted me to be happy.” Martin goes to church and participates in an adult Bible study; Barbara goes to the Buddhist center on Wednesdays for adult meditation. This arrangement works well for them. While Barbara and Martin embrace their differences most of the time, things
get a bit more difficult with their son Alex, and even more difficult with their extended families, especially Martin’s parents and siblings. Martin adds that “Barbara thought it [her conversion] would be a bigger issue for me than it actually was, but it was more of a problem for [my] family than we thought it was going to be.”

Martin and Barbara do not have the same view of God. However, they have both found that this is a strength – it strengthens their religious views, their relationship, and their ability to interact with others. They are continually getting to know one another through the medium of their religious difference. For example, Barbara says that “Buddhism is all about letting go, and nothing helps you to let go faster than having someone with an opposite view. . . . You [Martin] believe in a God, and I don’t.” To that Martin agrees. He explains why this is not a negative:

My views about Jesus, God, and God’s relationship with man/the world/the cosmos are fairly controversial and almost heretical, and I would have certainly been burned for them years ago. (I am pretty much as far left as you can be with still being a Christian.) The interfaith relationship frees me to let my mind wander more and debate/discuss things like the existence of a soul and what is a soul without being constrained by traditional views.

Barbara shares her perspectives:

It [interfaith marriage] really gives you perspective because it is very easy to get wrapped up and forget that not everyone thinks the same as you do. I still have a lot of respect for Christianity. I find it a beautiful religion and enjoy going to services. From studying religion, you really do learn that no matter how strange a religion may be or no matter what seemingly awful things some of them do, most of them do work to do something good.

Both Barbara and Martin comment upon how their interreligious marriage has affected their professional lives. Barbara teaches classes for those interested in learning more or converting to Buddhism. “It [an interreligious marriage] really helps you to be very tolerant and to develop patience for others.” Martin is a speech therapist and recognizes that
faith helps families cope with difficult situations. He has learned in his marriage and in his work that “understanding the role of faith is even more important than having the same beliefs.”

While Barbara and Martin find great benefit in their religious differences, these differences create more complexity when it comes to raising their six-year-old son Alex. Martin and Alex go to church, but Barbara only goes on holidays or special occasions, like when Alex performs in the cherub choir. Alex does not seem to understand or accept this arrangement. One time Alex said to his mother, “I wish you were Christian.” Barbara explains that Alex wants her to go to church so that they can all spend more time together. Martin replies, “I told him about that before -- that I wouldn’t want Mommy to be Christian; I like Mommy to be happy.”

Their young son may desire there to be religious unity in their family church- outings, but Barbara and Martin actually value diversity. Barbara converted half of the back room into a shrine for meditation. She has a book on family meditation so that she can include Martin and Alex when she is not meditating on her own. Because he is only six, she modifies some of the prayers to be able to include him. Alex “enjoys the bells, lighting [the candles], and other aspects like that.” They also expose Alex to different types of books including Christian biblical books as well as Eastern texts. Barbara “just wanted him to be exposed to both faiths and for him to make his own choice later on.” They explain that their two sets of best friends are Jewish, so Alex has been exposed to Judaism as well. “Oftentimes, he [Alex] goes back and forth – ‘I want to be Christian’ – ‘I want to be Buddhist’ – ‘I want to be Jewish.’” Because Martin and Barbara see religion as “a deeply personal thing” they believe it is their role to introduce Alex to Christianity, Buddhism, and other religions when they
have the opportunity, in order to give him alternatives. Then, they see it as Alex’s decision when he is older to find a religion that suits him and meets his needs.

Martin and Barbara are still trying to figure out how to teach Alex about complex issues like what happens after someone dies. Barbara admits that teaching a six-year-old about reincarnation is not too easy. Martin does not want his son learning about hell; he does not believe in hell and does not want Alex to be fearful of it. While they do not know how they will address many of these complex theological questions in the future, Martin and Barbara both agree that they want to give him different ideas to consider and “don’t want him to be afraid of anything.”

Martin and Barbara agree that the hardest part of their religious intermarriage is not reconciling their religious differences or even raising their son, it is negotiating with their extended families, primarily Martin’s. This comes up during the holidays. Barbara celebrates Christmas and Easter with Martin’s full family and celebrates the Buddhist holidays herself. “In Buddhism, we celebrate the birth, enlightenment, and death of the Buddha, the Tibetan New Year, and some lunar holidays.” Martin is frustrated by his relatives’ perception of the influence of Barbara’s Buddhism. “There are both major and minor holidays in Lutheranism . . . If we don’t participate in [all the] family events, my relatives often blame it on Barbara’s Buddhism even though most of the time, it just stems from a desire to have celebrations [only] with our immediate family.”

Martin’s family is much more religiously conservative than he is, but rather than taking issue with his liberal ideas of Christianity, they focus on Barbara’s Buddhist views. “My parents’ reaction [to Barbara’s Buddhist practice] has been characterized by hostile barbs, sarcastic comments, and erroneous assumptions.” Barbara shares what she refers to as
“the canoe incident.” “One time, I went kayaking with my brother-in-law, and he directed [us] into the middle of the lake and just stopped and then asked me, ‘Why have you rejected Jesus Christ?’ I didn’t really know how to respond.”

Martin complains that his family has not been able to evolve and accept Barbara’s Buddhism as well as her Catholic family who has had relatively few issues with it. Barbara clarifies: “My family was surprised initially but took it [my Buddhism] easily. My parents were never very religious and mainly just wanted me to be happy. Now they try to show their support, for example, by including a little Buddha by the tree at Christmastime.” Barbara argues that Martin’s mother has actually improved. “His mother buys me Buddhist trinkets when she goes places. It’s a nice gesture even though I know she still talks bad about me behind my back.” To her point, Martin admits that there has been some evolution. Religion and relationships change and shift over time. Martin adds, “I think with all things, time brings understanding . . . Eventually, you just realize that the sky doesn’t fall and the earth doesn’t go into flames. And the grandchildren don’t turn out with horns or tails.” With a chuckle, Barbara adds, “at least not yet.”

**Paradox and Ambiguity**

The goal of qualitative research is to uncover some of the complexity in the experiences of people. These stories reveal that the role of religion in these marriages is complex, ambiguous, and at times paradoxical. On the one hand, religious identity, religious practices, and exposing children to religion are important to many of these couples. This is why Kathleen and David found the Interfaith Families Project such a blessing in their lives;

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23 Glesne and Peshkin, 7.
they had had a difficult time finding an educational outlet and religious community before they moved to Chicago and joined the IFFP. On the other hand, many of these families go out of their way to tone down religiously particular messages during holidays; they remake rituals and revise theological ideas to meet their needs. Bibi and Antun emphasize that Christmas is about giving to the poor, a message that resonates with one of the key messages of Ramadan. Julie, who was so excited to share Passover with her Christian husband and atheist relatives, customized the Haggadah to accommodate, or at least not alienate, her guests.

Many clearly distinguish between religion and spirituality and appear to favor spirituality over religion in their lives. Annika and Tim make this very clear. Annika prays to God daily, but explicitly says that this is not religiosity, it is spirituality. She believes that religion in Hinduism is about the symbolism of “rituals,” “the statues,” “the flames,” and “being in a certain place.” Tim also identifies as spiritual and admits that he is not into organized religion. At the same time, however, many of these couples still make a special effort to incorporate religious practices into their lives. Annika and Tim, by way of example, had a traditional Hindu rice ceremony for their daughter and hope to have a baptism-like ceremony as well. According to their own definitions, these would be religious activities.

In discussions with intermarried individuals and couples, they went out of their way to emphasize what their religions have in common. They want their children to see that at the core, the world’s religions and the values they teach are the same. Barbara and Martin emphasize that most religions advocate goodness and positive values. Bibi and Antun find common themes in Christmas and Ramadan to relay to their children. At the same time, many of these couples made very clear that the success of their marriages and the intimacy in
their marital relationships was greatly enhanced not in spite of, but because of their religious differences. For example, Barbara and Martin talk at length about how their religious differences make them better people, a better couple, and better professionals. Because he and Barbara hold different views, Martin can take theological risks and explore ideas without being constrained by traditionally Christian views. Kathleen and David find great joy in their children learning about Jesus Christ as well as important Jewish practices.

A Concluding Thought

While these couples’ lives are filled with complexity and compromise, the descriptions they provide regarding how they manage and negotiate religion and religious differences, relay an undercurrent of satisfaction with their marriages. Some also express that while their religious differences have created consternation with their extended families, over time their parents and in-laws have shown more acceptance of the spouse who is the religious other.24 Dr. John Borelli, a theologian and historian of religions, suggests that “[o]ne sign of how well religious communities live together is how well interfaith couples live together, in spite of the lack of encouragement from their communities to enter these marriages. Those couples who continue to grow in their respective faiths with care for each other’s religious liberty give a sign of the peace and interchange . . .”25 If what Borelli suggests is true, it is

24 In this study, I cannot measure happiness and satisfaction in a marriage. However, this is my general observation from the tenor of the interviews. Loren D. Marks provides the following rationale for her statement that the couples she interviewed were in successful and happy marriages: “It is probable that the participants were relatively happily married, based on their willingness to be interviewed in depth regarding their marriage and family relationships without compensation.” Loren D. Marks, “How Does Religion Influence Marriage? Christian, Jewish, Mormon, and Muslim Perspectives,” Marriage and Family Review 38, no. 1 (2005): 89.

important to try to understand as much about these families as possible; they open the door to understanding religious traditions and religious pluralism in America in new ways.
CHAPTER VII

AN ERA OF INTERFAITH MARRIAGE
A Bridge among Religions, the Spiritual, and the Secular

“Marriages may be made in heaven.
But they have to be worked out on earth.”

Proverbs

“Qualitative researchers seek to make sense of personal stories and the ways in which they intersect,” say Glesne and Peshkin.¹ In this chapter, my aim is to make sense of these personal stories and understand how the experiences of these couples align within, across, and outside the normative parameters of religious traditions. Throughout the interviews, we learned about the role of religion in these couples’ lives. In this chapter, I map the interviewees’ comments on the role of religion in their lives to the normative parameters of the religious traditions that I outlined in Chapter 5. By mapping the couples’ insights and experiences to the normative parameters for each religious tradition in regards to belief, practice, and community-involvement, a picture emerges that reveals that these marriages are neither religious nor secular; they are ‘interfaith’ – a term I define carefully towards the end of the chapter.

Using the analysis techniques I described, I used open coding to tag meaning units with key words and phrases that aligned with key elements of the normative parameters of each religion that I discussed in Chapter 5. Across all of the interviews, as there was a Christian partner in each of the couples, I assessed the interviewees’ views on Jesus, the

sacrament or covenant of marriage, baptism, heaven and hell, communion, and church-community involvement. These key words and phrases align with the normative parameters for Christianity. For the Christian-Jewish interviews, I also evaluated the comments on ethnicity, culture, descent, chosen people, covenant, conversion, *quiddushin*, *bris*, circumcision, Bar/Bat Mitzvah, naming ceremony, kosher, Shabbat, Hebrew, and synagogue. These key words and phrases align with the normative parameters for Judaism. For the Christian-Muslim interviews, I explored the insights on Allah/God, the Qur’an, Muhammed, *ummah* or community, contract, *Sharia* law, conversion or *shahada*, Ramadan, prayer, and mosque. For the Christian-Hindu interviews, I assessed the commentary on India, ethnicity, culture, caste, purity, *moksa*, reincarnation, *samskāra*, *pūjās*, arranged marriage, God, *Brahmin*, and temple. For Buddhism, I evaluated the comments on *nirvana*, enlightenment, self, suffering, soul/anatman, Awakening, the four noble truths, the eightfold path, ethnicity, meditation, temple/shrine, and God. In all of the interviews, I also assigned tagged meaning units that related to their weddings and their holiday practices. These keywords are bolded to in the analysis.

To convey this information most clearly, I offer a series of findings and then support the findings with select quotations from the interviews. This is a common format for relaying results of qualitative data analysis. The findings provide a descriptive explanation of what I found when I mapped normative parameters to the insights from the interviews. The quotes I select are not exhaustive of all of the quotes from the interviews; they are meant to be illustrative. Because this is not a quantitative study, I offer a general sense of the magnitude of an issue or experience; I resist saying that half or ten percent of the interviews expressed a point of view since this would imply that these percentages are necessarily representative of
all interreligious couples when they are not. My objective is to develop findings to understand how these marriages and family-lives fit within the bounds of religious traditions and how they do not. Ultimately, I draw conclusions from these findings that speak to how these marriages and family-lives are challenging the normative boundaries not only associated with religious traditions, but also the boundaries associated with the religious and secular spheres.

Mapping Interviewee Insights and Experiences to Normative Parameters of Religions

Christian Normative Parameters

Many of the interviewees have theologically pluralistic views of Jesus. In these views, while the uniqueness of Jesus is often minimized, the importance of Jesus is not.

“I believe that Jesus is a savior of mankind; he is not the only one, however.” (B-5)

“We discovered that we had a lot of the same beliefs (i.e., in God). The only difference was that I believe Jesus Christ was a prophet and he believes Jesus Christ is the son of God, and everything else was the same. It was not something we felt very different about.” (M-11)

“In trying to find your way in religion to God, you can just pray to one deity to form a relationship with God, or you can pray to all deities. Jesus could be a part of it, or someone with religious power. Whatever way for you to focus on God. It allows you to appreciate other ways of reaching God as legitimate and important.” (H-2)

“I feel comfortable to say to them [my children] that I don’t personally accept the fact that Jesus is the son of God but there are many others that do.” (J-1)

“Jesus, to me, is a lot like the Buddha or the Dalai Lama, highly spiritual individuals who force us all to wake up.” (B-3)

“I’m very much at peace praying through Jesus to God. In Islam, we believe Jesus was a prophet. The more beliefs there are, the stronger values you have. It’s bad to believe your way is the only way. . . . My husband and I never have arguments over religion because we both realize that there’s no wrong way.” (M-4)
Their views of Jesus are not unrelated to their views of heaven and hell. Most express belief in salvation and heaven, but do not believe in hell, especially for their non-Christian spouses. Core to this is a non-literal view of scripture. For some, they held these views before marriage; for others, their religious intermarriage has affected and changed their views.

“We taught our son to pray for his family, but have never seen it as one of us, whoever is wrong, is going to hell. As a Christian I do believe in Jesus’ saving us, but it always seemed independent from everyday life.” (J-8)

“He [my husband] told me that his parents had said that if you’re not Christian, you will go to hell, so he never thought he would marry outside of his faith. I had asked him if he thought the same thing, and I can’t really remember what he said. He didn’t say no. I think he has started to believe what I believe. If you’re good and do the right things, that’s what matters, not whether you’re Christian. When I tell him things like, what about before Christianity, when I bring up those points, I think it makes a difference.” (H-3)

“In Buddhism there are multiple heavens and hells. We go to a separate realm of existence. We reach nirvana. There is no permanent self. I believe ideas of ‘heaven and hell’ are all reconcilable.” (B-5)

**Baptism** is essential to initiation into the Christian community. Many of these religious intermarried couples ignore baptism, or are waiting until they find a church-community where they are comfortable doing the ceremony.

“If it had been really important to me to have my kids baptized, I would have fought for it, but it wasn't important.” (M-10)

“I haven’t been too vigilant about having her baptized . . . I didn’t want to have her baptized in a traditional church because I didn’t want to have to choose a denomination. My friend belongs to a non-denominational church that invites different religious leaders to come and give sermons. It’s called a Christian church, but it incorporates a lot of different religions. For me that would be an ideal place for the baptism; it’s called a blessing ceremony there.” (H-4)

“When we first had children, we were having difficulty deciding exactly what way to raise them. Rather than opting for either side, we began by taking the middle road of doing nothing. Our sons were neither baptized nor given a bris – nor did our daughter have a naming ceremony.” (J-10)
Some couples have their children baptized but still want to expose them to the other religious traditions.

“He is technically baptized Catholic; however, I would still like to expose him to the Jewish traditions/faith.” (J-11)

“We decided that she would be raised with both religions and allow her to decide at the appropriate age. We took her to a church and baptized her, and my father also did the ‘azan’ prayer when she was born.” (M-4)

“When we had our son it came kind of naturally to raise him in both our traditions. I mean, he was baptized Catholic, but he’s also been exposed to his Jewish side at Bar Mitzvahs and other family celebrations.” (J-8)

With baptism and First Communion, intermarried couples generally express two related concerns – prioritizing one religion over another and/or offending and alienating their non-Christian in-laws. As a solution, some Christian-Jewish families have mixed ceremonies.

“The only time we ran into a problem with religious traditions was with our first daughter’s birth. I thought it was important to have some type of religious ceremony then; however, my husband was afraid at how his family would react to one. We wanted to have something that would honor both faiths. The Interfaith Union was able to solve this problem for us. They have a beautiful combination ceremony of baptism and the Jewish naming ceremony that we were able to have for both our girls.” (J-13)

“We decided that we wanted to raise our daughter in both traditions. . . . She recently had her First Communion, which was done with an interfaith ceremony. The children (there were six of them) were up on the altar with a priest and a rabbi around a circular table—looking kind of like the Last Supper. There was a lot of dialogue, a lot of discussion, and a mix of Hebrew and Catholic prayers. Challah bread was used for the ceremony. The parents got to be behind their children on the altar. It was, in all ways, a very moving ceremony, and we tried to make sure that our daughter understood its significance and uniqueness. She went to her cousin’s First Communion the week after, where there were over 100 kids together. I don’t mean to sound selfish, but I thought that the [Interfaith] Union’s ceremony was so much more beautiful and moving.” (J-12)

Christian-Muslim families are also creating mixed religious ceremonies for their children. A Catholic priest shared the following experience with me regarding an alternative to baptism.

The following summarizes his explanation:
A Catholic man married to a Muslim woman did not want to get their son formally baptized, but did want to have a ceremony to bring the family together and initiate their son into God’s loving expression. They approached their priest with questions about how to do this. The priest suggested that they each write a letter to their son and read it during a “Dedication Ceremony.” By dedication, the priest explained the following: we mean “an act by which we name a child as a believer in God.” The priest read at the ceremony, “This dedication, then, marks the beginning of a lifetime of teaching and example that this mother and father will give to their son about what it means to be a believer.”

Despite the desire by some to initiate their children into one or both religious traditions, most of the Christians and non-Christians in these religious intermarriages do not see the need to go to church regularly. They describe themselves as more ‘spiritual’ than ‘religious.’

Because of the ‘spiritual’ nature of their Christian identity, they do not see the need to go to church regularly.

“I am more spiritual than religious, I believe in God, spirituality guides my interactions with others, my life. I don’t go to church on a regular basis. Religion is an individual thing. My spirituality is personal for me. I don’t need to go to church, or make others think the way I do.” (H-4)

“I’m Catholic, but I don’t go to church – I’m not fanatic. I was born and raised and educated Catholic. I believe more in being spiritual than religious.” (M-6)

“But we do pray. We say grace before dinner and taught our son to say bedtime prayers. But this has always been general and not specifically Christian or Jewish. . . . We’ll occasionally go to church or less frequently the synagogue as a family.” (J-8)

“I think that I would say that neither of us is extremely religious. . . . I think we’re spiritual. We talk about religion as an intellectual/thinking point. We don’t go to church. We do discuss religion though.” (H-2)

Only one couple expresses distinctly negative feelings toward churches and institutional religion.

“My husband and I both believe in all the prophets and don’t believe that one is better than the others. We never required each other to go to church or mosque. We

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didn’t want to put the faith of children in the hands of people at church or mosque.” (M-2)

A few attend services at churches/organizations where they can find a community that is focused on ‘spirituality.’

“Both of us have participated in rather liberal spiritual communities, eschewing anything that is all ‘holier-than-thou.’ We much prefer the welcoming, open, affirming churches. . . . We are also involved in a small Christian community together. . . . We meet with a few other couples once every three weeks to have a more spiritual and open community. The meetings start with a ‘state of the heart,’ in which we can open up to our own spiritual dilemmas. Then, there is a topic for each meeting, and we talk about those and answer/ask questions. You end up forming a community within the greater community; a network that you know will be there for you.” (B-3)

“The church has become very important to us not only spiritually but socially. It is great to be surrounded by a community of forward-thinking people because there are not a lot of forward-thinking people out here in the Bible Belt. I don’t know if I would say I have become more religious because UU [Unitarian Universalist] is a lot less ritualized and less focused on a creed, but I have become more spiritual.” (J-16)

“I still do consider myself a Muslim in many ways, but once I got back it changed. I actually joined a Unitarian Universalist church because I really wanted a spiritual experience.” (M-10)

Some Christian spouses do go to church regularly but do not expect their non-Christian spouse to go with them; they see their Christianity as very personal, not an activity for the family.

“My husband goes to church on Sundays, and my children don’t affiliate with either religion. I would always light the candles for Shabbat myself on Fridays.” (J-14)

“He [my son] wants me to go to church . . . so that we [our family] can spend more time together. One time, he said, ‘I wish you were Christian.’ [My husband told him,] ‘I wouldn’t want Mommy to be Christian; I like Mommy to be happy.’” (B-7)

“It is understood that he will [only] accompany me to church on major holidays and [the] other times I feel [it is] important . . .” (M-9)

A few of the non-Christian spouses do not feel comfortable going to church because they cannot take communion and/or they feel excluded.
“He goes to mass a lot. I go with him sometimes, but I am not always comfortable there. The Roman Catholic mass is heavily ritualized, which is not something that I grew up with, so I often feel like a foreigner there. Also, when it comes time for Communion, since I cannot participate, I always wonder, ‘Why am I here?’” (B-4)

“I didn’t want my children to think that his religion was wrong because mom couldn’t take communion.” (H-8)

“My only negative experience at a church was when we attended Good Friday services one year that fell during Passover. The priest used the archaic dialogue that kept repeating ‘the Jews’ in an accusatory fashion. I did write to them because the Pope had four years before apologized for anti-Semitism and absolved the Jews. However, the only response I got was that ‘we’re sorry you felt badly.’” (J-7)

None of the interviewees describe their marriage as a Christian **sacrament** or **covenant**.

**Jewish Normative Parameters**

Many of these couples in Christian-Jewish intermarriages did not have traditional Christian or Jewish **weddings**; yet they did not have purely civil ceremonies either. Many couples had an integrated Christian-Jewish wedding at a neutral location, with a priest and rabbi co-officiating. They sought to tailor the ceremony to their desires and emphasized what was common in the traditions. Many chose to blend their traditions in a way that exemplified the beauty of their interreligious relationship. They emphasize that their weddings were symbols of their cultures, upbringings, and families.

“We had both a priest and a rabbi at the ceremony. We held it in a neutral space—a community house. We did not want to have it in a church or a synagogue and preferred the idea of a neutral space. Before the wedding, we met with both a priest and a rabbi for guidance on the wedding ceremony, which we designed ourselves. The priest and rabbi were like a dog-and-pony show—they had co-officiated many ceremonies in the past. It was both funny and sweet and traditional. We had everything—prayers, traditional elements (like the **huppah**), and community. Everyone from both sides described it as very unique and wonderful.” (J-12)

“With the wedding ceremony, I wanted to blend the traditions of Judaism and Roman Catholicism. We scheduled our wedding to be held at a Reformed synagogue with a rabbi and a priest, and singers from my church. They played music only from the Old Testament in order to not offend any of the guests. The toughest part was finding the synagogue.” (J-6)
“Our wedding was both intercultural and interfaith. I knew about the rabbi from our university, and we had him co-officiate over our wedding with a priest. We incorporated Jewish traditions as well as Cuban traditions into the ceremony. Jesus was not mentioned in the wedding so that everyone would be comfortable.” (J-1)

“We got married in an interfaith chapel at a college nearby and had the wedding co-officiated by a rabbi and a priest. Planning the wedding was a long process because we both needed to be sensitive to both sides. We first began with the chapel and then found a rabbi. Luckily the rabbi had a close relationship with a priest who he had co-officiated with in other ceremonies.” (J-4)

Some describe their weddings as more Catholic than Jewish, something that was not always easy for the Jewish family. But even these couples did not have fully Catholic weddings, as their marriages were not fully sacramental since one person was not baptized. One wedding in the Catholic Church did not have a mass; others were held outside of the Church and/or incorporated Jewish traditions.

“I have been very lucky in the fact that my in-laws have always been very accepting of me. They struggled a bit with our wedding which ended up being in my church. It was not important to my husband to be married by a rabbi but it was very important to me to be married by a priest. According to our diocese a priest could only officiate a wedding in a church. We did not have a mass, just a service but I know it was very hard for them to be in the Catholic Church. They have attended each of our children's baptisms and first communions and have done so with grace and respect. I am not so sure my parents would have been as accepting!” (J-5)

“His parents belonged to a really nice country club in the area so we had the ceremony there, but we brought in a Catholic priest. Our priest was at first hesitant to marry us. He actually pressured us a bit to both convert and to raise our children Catholic. We had to meet with him a number of times to set his mind at ease. We also resolved some of the differences by incorporating some of his family’s [my husband’s] traditions into the reception. Most people were fine with it.” (J-9)

“We got married at the Irish-American Heritage center, which had been a converted high school. Our wedding was a reflection of both of us, incorporating elements from both faiths. I would say that it was probably a bit more Roman Catholic, but it definitely had a personal touch to it. . . . We had both a priest and a rabbi at the ceremony. The Jewish-Catholic Couples Dialogue Group was affiliated with St. Patrick’s Church, and we had some of their choir sing. The readings, mass, and unity candle were all Roman Catholic, but we also had a lot of the Jewish traditions (e.g., the huppah).” (J-11)
Others opted for much more religiously-liberal wedding ceremonies officiated by one minister or rabbi in a neutral location or a church like the Unitarian Universalist church that was open to interreligious unions.

“Our wedding was an interesting case. We had it in a restaurant called The Abbey that was a restored church. As it was a restaurant, it was sufficiently secular to please my side of the family, and the stained glass windows pleased my husband’s. We were married by a family therapist that my husband knew (he works for the State Association of Marriage and Family Therapy). As the guy had ‘minister’ in his title, it appealed to my husband’s side; however, he also ran a retreat at a place called the Shalom Center.” (J-14)

“We were married by a Humanistic Jewish rabbi in a Unitarian Church. When we first started thinking about getting married, I bought a book called Celebrating Interreligious Marriage. Although we were originally planning to have a lot of blending of the two traditions, I loved the symbolism in Jewish weddings, like the huppah, the breaking of the glass, having both parents walk you down the aisle. So we ended up having mainly a Jewish wedding. I did have one of my cousins read a passage from Corinthians though.” (J-2)

“Living in the Bible Belt, we had to search hard for someone who would marry us. [My husband] had heard of the Unitarian Universalist Church, so we checked it out. . . Our minister at the wedding (our current minister now) was actually an ex-Methodist minister . . .” (J-16)

These Christian-Jewish couples did not discuss the specific religious meaning of their marriage. In other words, none of the interviewees in Christian-Jewish intermarriages describe their marriages as a Christian sacrament or covenant or as a Jewish covenant. The issue of ethnicity and the Jewish people being chosen also is absent from the discussion. However, the couples are acutely aware of the fact that their marriage is not fully accepted by the Jewish community and that conversion to Judaism would be the ideal for many in these families. Parents, in-laws, and some synagogue programs reinforce this for them.

“The main problem was with Joel’s mother. Joel’s mother was very religious and kept kosher—and reacted with some trepidation upon hearing about our engagement. I could tell that she wanted me to convert at first (I had no intention of doing so, for I was firm in my remaining a Roman Catholic), and her main point of focus was about how we would raise the children.” (J-12)
“Mike’s younger brother married outside of the Jewish faith as well; however, that
woman converted to Judaism. This was a cause for much celebration in the family;
although I get along fine with my husband’s family, I wonder if they are still latently
hoping the same of me.” (J-10)

“I was originally expecting to have twin boys; but I had a miscarriage in the second
trimester. While preparing to have a child, we went to a class that was ‘nominally’
for interreligious couples in a conservative synagogue. However, the person running
the outreach program gave the impression that the only moil in the area was
Orthodox, which wasn’t true, something I found upsetting. The outreach class was
designed more to obtain converts.” (J-2)

Core theological ideas about God, prayer, and morality unite these couples and offer them a
way to consistently communicate their religious views to one another and to their children;
their religions may be different, but their core beliefs are not.

“While God and faith are important to us, we don’t really see each other as Christian
or Jewish. . . . We see ourselves as accepting and tolerant of others.” (J-8)

“[O]ur faiths do influence our family’s morals, but they are very much
complementary. It’s been very important to us to raise our children to be courteous,
well-rounded, and upstanding individuals, and faith in God is an important part of
that. He keeps you in check.” (J-9)

“My eldest is 22, and my youngest is 18. We always encourage prayer and
meditation. We have conversations about belief all the time, and when we ask them if
they believe in God, the answer is always, ‘Of course!’ However, there is no sense of
a need to identify with one specific religion. We are all pacifists and believe that life
is sacred and should not be taken under any circumstances—except in cases like self-
defense. They always tell the truth and know that lying is the wrong path. We seek
knowledge.” (J-15)

These Christian-Jewish couples are also cognizant of the importance of a bris and Bar/Bat
Mitzvah as ways to offer their children an identity with the Jewish community. Largely
these rituals are viewed as optional, not mandatory. In some cases the non-Jewish spouse
sometimes feels uncomfortable with these rituals; however, it is more common for the couple
to be fairly neutral and/or default to the spouse or side of the family who feels strongly one
way or another.
“I had always had trouble with the idea of having a bris. I wanted to get everything done and over with in the hospital and was more worried about my child’s safety and not wanting to hurt him. I was very emotional and unsure about the issue; however, as we ended up having a baby girl, it ended up not being a problem at all.” (J-12)

“Also, the idea of having a bris took me a little while to wrap my head around . . .” (J-2)

“My husband and I haven’t determined yet what exactly lies in the future for our children far ahead. I feel that they will probably end up getting Bar Mitzvahed. This is very important to my parents; they don’t mind compromising about some issues, but this one is very important to them.” (J-1)

“When my children get older, I am not going to force them in either direction although I think that they will probably have Bar/Bat Mitzvahs because my husband is more religious than I am.” (J-10)

**Shabbat** plays a different role in different families. In some, the Jewish spouse celebrates Shabbat alone. In other homes, the non-Jewish spouse and children participate.

“Since Joshua was born, we [my Jewish husband and I] have definitely become more deliberate and intentional in our treatment of religious practices, e.g. prayers at dinner and candles at Shabbat. Joshua now expects them, for example [he says] ‘church day?’ or ‘amen?’ when he feels that something is missing. . . . One time, I ended up realizing that Joshua was getting the experience of the Shabbat more than Roman Catholic equivalents—I [a Catholic] had spent too much time focusing on the Jewish traditions that I had forgotten to teach him about the sign of the cross.” (J-11)

“I’ve grown more comfortable over the years and am able to follow on with most of the Shabbat by reading lips. I feel very comfortable because Christianity stems from Judaism. There is ‘nothing that doesn’t connect right’ in the services.” (J-2)

“I would always light the candles for Shabbat myself on Fridays.” (J-14)

Most Christian-Jewish families celebrate a range of Jewish and Christian **holidays** in order to expose their children to both religious traditions.

“We celebrate the holidays with both families. With my husband’s family, we celebrate the Jewish holidays in the traditional fashion. We go with my husband’s parents to the synagogue because we are not members of one ourselves. We are not affiliated with any temple or synagogue nor with any Roman Catholic church. However, we like to expose our children to the traditional celebrations of both faiths. We do the same with my side of the family, i.e. attending religious services around the holidays. We have both a Christmas tree and a menorah during the holiday season
at the end of the year. The Easter bunny comes to us just as much as we celebrate Passover. The only holiday that ever creates a problem is Thanksgiving because then we have to decide which side we are going to celebrate with.” (J-13)

“We celebrate everything: Christmas, Hanukkah, Rosh Hashanah, Easter, Passover, etc. Our daughter is at the age where she is starting to understand the nuances of the holidays although presents are still a major focus for her around the holidays. However, we try to give a very ‘fair’ treatment to both holidays. Christmas is not the only holiday in December; even though Hanukkah is not one of the main holidays in Judaism, it is still important, too.” (J-12)

One family opts out of celebrating Easter because of its focus on the resurrection of Jesus.

“We mainly celebrate the Jewish holidays; with regard to Christian holidays, we’ll celebrate Christmas, but not Easter because it celebrates the resurrection of Jesus. . . . Passover will be celebrated at his cousin’s house, and we’ll probably go to the Purim Carnival at the synagogue; I do go to church by myself for Easter.” (J-2)

However, many of these Christian-Jewish families celebrate the secular aspects of these holidays.

“There has been an evolution in holiday traditions over the years. The Christmas tree was something I was not willing to give up because it had a lot of memories. I wanted to share that experience with my children. It took my husband many years to become comfortable with that idea. At first, I only had a small tree on the tabletop, decorated with little ornaments. Now we cut down a tree, put it in the car, and go through the whole routine. Rather than taking on a religious significance, the tree for me takes on a form of family timeline through the ornaments. We don’t celebrate Easter but we do go to my mom’s house for dinner. The kids know that the Easter bunny doesn’t come here: he comes to Nana’s house.” (J-4)

“We did all of the cultural stuff more so than the religious stuff, so we had the tree, lights, gifts on Christmas morning, the stockings by the fireplace—and the lights and gifts for Hanukkah, too. . . . We also had Easter eggs, and since the Unitarian church has a seder, we were able to expose our children to that as well.” (J-16)

“Neither of us had any trouble when we first were exposed to the holiday traditions of the other faith. My husband, especially, enjoyed the Jewish holidays because they’re mostly just a big meal. Easter, for the family, is not treated in a very religious way—they celebrate it in a secular way, with the Easter bunny and everything.” (J-1)

Even though many of these Christian-Jewish couples emphasize their common belief in God over particular religious affiliation and celebrate many of the holidays in a secular fashion,
many express that they enjoy participating in the synagogue community, at least at some level. For some individuals in these intermarriages, the synagogue provides an opportunity to interact with the Jewish culture and Jewish community. Many Reform synagogues and interfaith organizations reach out to interreligious families and Christian spouses. Sometimes, because Judaism is a part of the Christian tradition, participating in the Jewish community is not theologically difficult for the Christian spouse.

“My partner has no intentions of converting as he is Catholic, Catholic, Catholic. However, we have managed to attain a lot of balance in our household. . . . He actually comes to services at the synagogue with me more than he goes to mass, but he is still affiliated with a Roman Catholic church. . . . He doesn’t mind going to services at the synagogue because he sees Judaism as the base for the Catholic religion. We just stopped earlier, and they continued on. . . . My synagogue has done a lot for interfaith outreach.” (J-7)

“We were both interested in . . . a deistic religion of Abraham, Isaac, etc. and I felt that Reform Judaism best offered what I wanted. It contained all of the non-negotiable parts!” (J-2)

“Our synagogue has a lot of [child and] adult [Jewish] education programs . . . I really took advantage of these. I knew I could feel comfortable entering at a 2nd grade level with my son. It was important for me to make sure that my family did not just go to temple on holidays.” (J-4)

“I am very happy to have found a community for my family. I know that if we hadn’t found this “congregation,” Mike and the kids would probably have gone to the synagogue he went to while growing up, and I would feel somewhat alienated. . . . [T]he Interfaith Family Project (IFFP) now provides the community . . .” (J-10)

Most families do not feel the need to practice their religion as a family. Along these lines, some Jewish spouses find a religious and spiritual community at synagogue that they enjoy alone, without their family.

“Judaism is about family, and I have no Jewish family at home. My husband goes to church on Sundays, and my children don’t affiliate with either religion. . . . We have an outreach Shabbat every year, and at the one last year, I spoke about how I felt this way: that I had no Jewish family at home, but that I have a family at the synagogue. A lot of people came to me in tears after it. A lot of people keep this stuff to
themselves. They feel as though their family isn’t a good Jewish family or isn’t the right way and don’t feel right talking about it.” (J-14)

**Muslim Normative Parameters**

Many non-Muslim spouses converted to Islam before they were married. However, very often they did not fully adapt Muslim practices after their conversion, affecting the religious tenor of the family.

“At one point, we were going to go to Iran, and in order to go to Iran, he had to have a Muslim wedding, so he converted to Islam, but he didn’t practice or know much about the religion. He told me I can practice my religion whenever I want.” (M-4)

“I converted . . . the day before my wedding, which was a few days after I arrived in Pakistan . . . the conversion happened very quickly, and I was happy with it.” [This woman later became a Unitarian Universalist.] (M-10)

“Before getting married, I told my husband that if he wanted to marry me, he needed the blessing of [my] family, and they needed him to convert to Islam. It was very difficult for him since he was raised religiously, so he discussed it with his parents, and his father told him that he didn’t have another choice. He went through a week of training and found that it really wasn’t much different, and he identified with Islam.” (M-2)

“[In terms of advice for Christian-Muslim couples:] Even if one of you converts . . . the differences are not going to go away. Check out and be realistic about whether your personalities and expectations dovetail, as well as your faith choices.” (M-8)

Some of these Christian-Muslim couples had traditional Muslim wedding ceremonies, particularly in the marriages where the non-Muslim had converted to Islam prior to their wedding.

“As far as our wedding is concerned, we had a totally Persian ceremony, including the Qur’an and that was absolutely fine with both families.” (M-1)

“Well, first of all, our wedding ceremony was very simple. We went to a mosque, testified, I accepted Islam, and that was it. . . . the true Islamic tradition doesn’t encourage excess.” (M-5)

“On Christmas day, I moved to Pakistan, and my mother and brother came to the wedding with me. We did all the traditional ceremonies. It was a very nice welcome.” (M-10)
Many opted for multiple wedding ceremonies (religious and civil) to appease various family members.

“We got married in three different sessions: papers from court, home ceremony, mosque, and in church. My mother wanted a formal Islamic ceremony, so I also decided to have another ceremony in church in order to be fair to my husband’s family. My mother did not go to the wedding and stayed at home and cried the whole time. My mother is the only one in our family who is very religious and Muslim, so no one else in the family cared at all that I married outside of religion.” (M-2)

“We had a civil ceremony, which was basically for the public where we invited our friends, and it was by [a] judge. We had a small, private religious family for my husband’s family [who is Christian Maronite], but no conversion or anything. Our only registered marriage is the civil one.” (M-11)

“We did the marriage the Muslim way. For a Saudi to marry a non-Saudi, we had to get permission from the government. As a widow, he had to write a letter explaining all his life and all mine. We got approval and got married the Muslim way, and then, we got married again the American way. But, if I had done American before getting permission, we would have never gotten permission.” (M-6)

“We didn’t have any issues. We had it in a church and the traditional Iranian Islamic way.” (M-4)

There does not seem to be much blending of Muslim and Christian traditions at the weddings of these interviewees; however, one couple did have an interfaith minister and a second ceremony that blended the traditions.

“The official ceremony itself was quite simple, just our two families, but a year later we had a larger wedding. We wanted it to celebrate our merging faiths, so readings from the Qur’an played a large role, and an interfaith reverend officiated. In the Qur’an, marriage of a Muslim man to a woman who belongs to one of the three Abrahamic faiths is expressly permitted.” (M-3)

The interviewees did not mention Muhammad or the Muslim community (ummah).

However, the interviewees refer to God and religion as playing an important role in their lives and their marriages. They often gloss over the particularities of the Muslim tradition.
“In this world where everything is so superficial, I think everybody needs something to latch onto that they believe in, especially during tough times, whether economic or personal. Religion, especially believing in God, will keep you together.” (M-4)

“We regularly discuss God and our beliefs, trying to find what is common, . . . while respecting what is different.” (M-9)

“My husband and I knew each other for many years, and we knew that we really believed in the same thing even though our religions were different. . . . When my daughter was born, I just looked at her, and realized that there’s just one God – that was a defining moment for me. It was when I abandoned specific affiliation. . . . If they think their way is the only way, their partner needs to agree. I really believe that both are right because they all lead to the same thing. To me, that’s the only way that an interreligious marriage can work harmoniously – maybe there are other ways, but to me, that’s very important.” (M-11)

These families do not ignore Muslim religious traditions; however, many practice only select aspects of the religion, deeming other practices to be superfluous to their lives.

“We are very spiritual people, less focused on regularly praying and attending a mosque than on reflecting on the Qur’an.” (M-3)

“And now, we don’t drink, we observe Ramadan, and we read the Qur’an, but I don’t wear a headscarf, pray five times a day, or attend mosque regularly.” (M-7)

“Sometimes I would fast for Ramadan and explain to the kids why I’m fasting.” (M-11)

Many Christian-Muslim families see involvement at a mosque as optional and not necessary for the family.

“We have the best of two religions. I was born in a Muslim family, but I didn’t practice daily although I believed in what I learned during my childhood. I tried to combine the best out of both religions to run the family. We never argued or fought over [whose religion was] better. We would go to church and mosque during special occasions.” (M-4)

“We didn’t want to put the faith of children in the hands of people at church or mosque.” (M-2)
Many individuals in these religious intermarriages either observe Ramadan or expose their children to it. They also want their children to experience American/Christian holidays. They view these holidays, namely Christmas and Easter, as more cultural than religious.

“We’re always learning about each others’ traditions. For example, Ramadan and Easter. . . . He fasts. . . . [and] [w]e celebrate Christmas.” (M-6)

“In terms of children, we have already decided to raise them Muslim. I love the importance of family in Islam, and although we agreed that we can still enjoy some American cultural traditions, like Easter eggs, we want them to understand the importance of all Muslim holidays.” (M-3)

“Each has very neat traditions, and we get some from both. . . . Christmas we explained the importance of giving. I would explain the idea of the hajj to them. I always brought up Ramadan and giving to the poor to the kids. I think fasting – the idea of feeling the pain of the poor and exercising self-control was an important tradition to bring up. Also, giving to the poor was an important tradition that I wanted to impart on my kids.” (M-11)

One Muslim interviewee who sometimes prays alongside her Christian husband, and other times prays as both a Muslim and a Christian, provides an illustration of how naturally the truths of Christianity and Islam co-exist for some of these couples.

“Our child had epilepsy and went through a lot, so if it wasn’t for our religious beliefs, we would have fallen apart. Our daughter had a 14 hour surgery, and I was praying in a Muslim way, and he [my husband] was praying with the cross in his hands. When she came out of surgery, she talked for the first time, so it worked. . . . When I’m really nervous on airplanes, I pray both (the Muslim and Christian way).” (M-4)

**Hindu Normative Parameters**

None of the Christian-Hindu marriages were arranged; they were all “love marriages.” In addition, none of these interviewees mentioned caste or that marriage was a samskāra or transformative event for a Hindu woman. They also did not raise the importance of maintaining ancestral lines of purity through marriage. Despite this non-traditional approach to marriage, many of the Hindu interviewees express that their parents are accepting of their
non-Hindu spouses. One interviewee mentions that getting both of their parents’ permission to marry was “extremely important” since she grew up in a Hindu family and culture.

“We weren’t going to proceed without the blessing of our families. It took a long time, but we got their approval eventually. Having been raised in a Hindu family and culture, it was extremely important to have proceeded with the parents’ permission. Family is so important to me. He is extremely close to his family [also], and they are involved in each other’s lives.” (H-6)

These Christian-Hindu couples shaped their wedding ceremonies as they please; they were not indifferent to the wishes of their respective families, but ultimately made choices based upon what they wanted. Some weddings are blended/integrated ceremonies, despite the wishes of some parents and in-laws. The couples are not only interested in integrating the religious aspects of their traditions, but also in having their different cultural traditions represented.

“I wanted it [the wedding] to be half-half. I didn’t want a full ceremony. I wanted something that would represent our history and where we came from. There was no need for an in-depth Catholic or Hindu ceremony. I chose the parts I wanted to represent. On his side, his dad’s brothers and uncle mentioned they wanted a separate church wedding which we didn’t have. My husband said no because it undermined the point of the wedding. We took the reins with the ceremony, since we live in California, and our parents live in different places, so if any of them had planned it, they would have had complete control. For my parents, they wanted it to be equal, so no one would be upset. . . . He [Jason’s dad] talked to my parents. My parents didn’t say anything and [later] my dad told me he wouldn’t go to a church wedding. You can have a non-denominational wedding, but he didn’t want it to be one-sided, one religion being dominant.” (H-2)

“[I]t was a Hindu-Christian wedding . . . and having his whole family there to see that we clearly were of two different faiths, I think it helped a lot. . . . In the ceremony, the Hindu part was a lot more generic. It was more ritualistic than anything. That was fine with him, and in the Christian part, the person officiating the wedding tried to make it more generic, to say God instead of Christ.” (H-3)

“[Religion] played a role in our marriage ceremony. We made a conscious effort to have a combination Hindu-Christian ceremony. They were on the same day, we had a Hindu priest and a Christian pastor. . . . We found a Hindu priest who abbreviated the Hindu ceremony, and a pastor did the Christian part.” (H-4)
Not everyone chose an integrated wedding. Some opted for civil ceremonies with a Christian-orientation and others two separate ceremonies.

“[We] were married by a Justice of the Peace, and the ceremony had a Christian orientation. That was what [we] both wanted. His [my husband’s] parents had mentioned that they wanted to see . . . [a Hindu ceremony] in the future, but we weren’t interested.” (H-1)

“I wanted a traditional Indian wedding. Steve (my husband) was fine with us having a Hindu wedding. . . . In June we did a civil marriage—the whole white gown thing, a western, small wedding. It gave his parents the opportunity to have that. Then we had the Indian wedding in October. There was no argument or negative discussion. We wanted to make sure that no one was offended and wanted to have a good time. From the henna party . . . to priest, they [his parents] were really into it.” (H-6)

The interviewees did not mention moksha or Brahmin and only mentioned reincarnation during discussions of heaven and hell.

“[The wife said:] I believe in reincarnation. [The husband said:] I believe in heaven and hell. We don’t believe in them so seriously that it affects our relationship.” (H-5)

“I’m iffy on the concept of heaven. I believe in the afterlife. Sometimes I think it is like reincarnation, that spirits come back, and sometimes I picture my dead relatives in heaven. I’m not sure how I characterize it. I don’t believe in hell.” (H-4)

However, God is an important topic for these couples, one that raises important questions and issues relative to religious belief, practice, and culture. In describing Hinduism, these interviewees clearly separate ideas of God, belief, morality, and spirituality from religion and Indian culture, the former being very private, personal, and universal, the latter being more public, communal, and particularistic. They see religions and cultures as lenses to God.

“I don’t think morality and religion are the same thing. We try to teach her [our daughter] good morals outside of religion. I think part of the culture is that Indians put more emphasis on family . . . It was less about marrying outside of the religion as marrying outside of the culture or race. . . . We are both spiritual. We don’t believe in man-made religion and what comes along with it. Growing up, religion was being part of the community and culture, a sense of belonging; it’s not about God as much.” (H-5)
“I think, to a degree, all religions teach some core values: do what’s right to you and others. Those core values resonate throughout all religions.” (H-6)

“It’s been beneficial [to be of two different faiths]. I am Hindu. My mom raised us to appreciate multiple religions. The Hindu religion does that a lot. It encompasses a lot of ideas of different religions. It [different religions] can all be seen as okay, what you’re doing is a way to reach God, and that’s fine.” (H-2)

“Religion to me is my heritage. It doesn’t play a daily role in my life. I consider myself spiritual and my way of life to be tied to my religion. I pray to God on pretty much a daily basis, but that’s not being religious. To be a Hindu, being religious is about the rituals, having the statues and the flames and being in a certain place. I’m not into organized religion, I am more spiritual. I believe in God. . . . Hindu religion is basically a culture and heritage. It’s a cultural perspective on how to look at God. . . . [cultures and religions are] people looking through different lenses.” (H-4)

Many of these families celebrate Hindu holidays as well as Christmas and Easter. They emphasize that these holidays are an opportunity to get together with their extended families; they do not emphasize the religious significance of the holidays.

“Well, we celebrate all the Hindu holidays, and especially because I live close to my parents. We do celebrate Thanksgiving; it’s important to us. It’s a big aspect of his family. We celebrate Christmas with his family because my family considers it more of an American culture thing and not religious and not a big thing. . . . They [my husband’s family] live out of state so we have to travel. We celebrate things that are important to them, and we are happy to travel for those things. It gives us an opportunity to do things to celebrate a common purpose, it connects you. I wouldn’t imagine celebrating Diwali by myself. It’s another reason to be a family.” (H-6)

“We both celebrate Christmas, in my case more as a commercial holiday. On Easter we went to his cousin’s house more to spend time with the family. It wasn’t very religious. . . . In the holidays, how or what to celebrate won’t be much of an issue and more where to celebrate or who to spend it with.” (H-2)

“We celebrate Christmas and Thanksgiving, which is obviously not a religious holiday. We celebrate one holiday with one family and the other holiday with the other family. For the Indian holidays we go to Virginia [where her parents live].” (H-5)

Hindus worship at home and/or at temple. None of the Hindu spouses have home shrines, but one mentions that her husband would not be opposed to it. Many do go to temple to pray off and on, but do not see this as essential to their spirituality.
“I only go to temple once/twice a year. But I pray every day. He doesn’t need to have that exposure either on a daily basis to be spiritual. . . . I don’t go to temple each week like many other Hindus, because we don’t feel the need to be present in front of God to know that we’re believing.” (H-6)

[When asked if her religious intermarriage has made her more or less religious:] “I would say it’s hard because it depends on what you mean by religious. If you mean going to temple more, then I am less religious. I think I am the same or more so spiritually.” (H-4)

While these individuals and couples do not see worshipping at the temple as necessary for their spirituality, many do go, even if only occasionally. They do not describe going to temple as a family-affair, however. If the non-Hindu spouse joins them at temple, the Hindu spouse is careful not to expose him or her too extensively.

“I will go to temple from time to time, I will pray from time to time, but nothing on a daily basis. . . . He goes to the temple with me, but I don’t go for more than five or ten minutes. I usually go when my parents visit. He’s very respectful when he goes. He will usually stand to the side.” (H-3)

“With traditions and praying and temple, I include him to the point that he wants to be included. Nine out of ten times, he’ll come with me. My routine has been the same: this day I’ll do this, and this day we’ll do this. So I do the same things. It’s up to him to see if he wanted to participate, but I don’t push it upon him if he’s not interested, he’s just not. The religion—it can be overwhelming, so many customs and all. Everything is fresh and new to him. My parents are happy with the way he is. They would never push him. They never ask him to go to temple with them because of their fear that they’ll push him away completely.” (H-6)

“I don’t celebrate religious holidays. I like to go alone to the temple. I mentioned to him maybe we should go to the temple; he said yes, but we haven’t done it.” (H-2)

_Buddhist Normative Parameters_

Most of the Christian-Buddhist couples had a Christian _wedding_ before the one spouse converted to Buddhism. When they describe their weddings, they relay early signs that they did not feel bound to the theological and religious parameters of the Christian tradition, however.
“He now considers himself a cultural Christian and practices the Presbyterian faith. I, on the other hand, come from a Presbyterian background and converted to Buddhism about ten years ago. . . . we celebrated a Presbyterian wedding.” (B-1)

“I was raised Episcopal then converted to Buddhism, he was still Catholic. We also married in the Catholic Church before I converted. Catholicism was a part of his life growing up but I believe it was more culturally important than spiritually important. . . . Religion plays a key role in my life; [religion does not play a key role] in [my] marriage . . . .” (B-2)

“We did marital preparation with a Catholic priest. . . . [He] said to me, ‘It’s you two who are marrying each other.’ What was important was that we have the wedding how we want; we are being married by the community—that he was just a bystander, a ‘formality.’ That kind of openness and embracing spiritual connectedness is what we find most important. . . . We got married in a Unitarian Universalist Church with a female priest and had a blessing done the next day at his Catholic Church.” (B-3)

One Christian-Buddhist couple (both on their second marriage) had two wedding ceremonies – one was at the Catholic Church and the other was at a Buddhist Sangha; they were able to develop customized vows, based on discussions they had during a Catholic pre-marital retreat.

“We had two weddings, one at his Roman Catholic church and the other at my Sangha. The Roman Catholic service was a traditional Roman Catholic wedding. I wore a long, white dress; there was a Catholic service. However, we did have some leeway for vows and readings although the overall format was still traditional. The one difference was that we decided to forgo Communion. I was not comfortable with having Communion there because in the Catholic church non-Catholics, including myself, can’t participate. . . . The wedding at the Sangha was based on the Buddhist format and led by my dharma teacher; however, we wrote a lot of the ceremony together. In the Catholic Church, in order for your marriage to be approved (and this was important to my husband), you have to go to pre-marital courses. During one of the weekend retreats, we had a lot of frank discussions about what works and what does not, and we wrote promises out of this that we used for our vows.” (B-4)

The Catholic Church forbids a couple from having two wedding ceremonies; the couple either did not know this or ignored this when they chose to have a second ceremony at the Sangha.
In discussions on the role of religion in their marriage and lives, the interviewees largely did not discuss nirvana, suffering, or the view of self in Buddhism. One interviewee draws parallels between nirvana and heaven and hell.

“In Buddhism there are multiple heavens and hells. We go to a separate realm of existence. We reach nirvana. There is not permanent self. I believe ideas of ‘heaven and hell’ are all reconcilable.” (B-5)

Even though the Buddhist tradition does not recognize a creator or God, some of the interviewees incorporate theistic theological ideas into their Buddhism.4

“Buddhism doesn’t have creator gods, but there are tremendously beneficent beings that are ready to step in and try to assist us at any time. Sometimes I put my faith in them when I need help with something I cannot do myself. Time and time again, things have happened that have happened too often to be coincidence. Certain things come together that mean there is an outside agency that is helping me along. [But] the responsibility still lies in us.” (B-2)

“[When asked if they were more or less religious because of religious intermarriage:] More religious. One thing that I really like about being in an interfaith marriage is that there are elements of his faith and practice that I feel are missing in mine. He has a very deep relationship with God. There is no God in Buddhism, but when I was growing up, the relationship with God was something that was very important to me. This sharing of ideas/beliefs helps me to have a more personal view on how the universe works when I talk with him.” (B-4)

Many of these families celebrate Christmas and Easter and other American national holidays.

“Since my husband and I considered ourselves blanket/cultural Christians when we were married, it didn’t pose a particularly huge problem. There were no frictions with religious holidays. We had Christmas, bought a Christmas tree, set out Easter baskets for our kids, and still today, as a Buddhist, I don’t have problems with that.” (B-1)

“We do not celebrate any Buddhist holidays; we mainly just celebrate the national holidays: Christmas, New Year’s, Easter, etc.” (B-6)

Some do not recognize that there are Buddhist holidays; others recognize that there are, but celebrate them alone and not with their families.

“There really aren’t any Buddhist holidays, but we celebrate all of the Christian holidays—we do all of the traditional Christmas practices.” (B-4)

“I mainly celebrate the Buddhist holidays myself. In Buddhism, we celebrate the birth, enlightenment, and death of the Buddha, the Tibetan New Year, and some lunar holidays (e.g., one on the 10th of the month and one on the 25th of the month).” (B-2)

None of the interviewees mentioned the Four Noble Truths or the Eightfold Path; however, some refer to Buddhism as a spiritual path and discuss their meditation practices. These interviewees describe Buddhism as personal, private, and spiritual, something they practice alone and sometimes introduce to their immediate family. Many do not see a conflict between their personal practice of Buddhism and their spouses’ religion.

“Spirituality is a critical part of who we both are. . . . He does not hold traditional Roman Catholic beliefs. . . . he is also much more interested in spirituality and meditation. . . . I meditate every morning, and he prays every morning. We used to do this together; however, we are on slightly different schedules now. However, we do always say grace together before every meal and switch off between the Roman Catholic grace and the Buddhist grace.” (B-4)

“I do love the Quaker service. It is very meditative and really spoke to me. I still enjoy it because I see no contradiction for me. I embrace Quakerism but still view Buddhism as my faith. . . . Maybe the only conflict would be that I am very private with my Buddhist practice.” (B-5)

“I sometimes take my children to meditation sessions but they haven’t necessarily grabbed it as a spiritual path.” (B-1)

“My wife has converted half of the back room into a shrine for herself where she holds meditation. She bought a book on family meditation recently so that she could include me and our son as well; however, she also needs private time for meditation, too.” (B-2)
The Emergence of Interfaith Marriage

These findings across the Christian-Jewish, Christian-Muslim, Christian-Hindu, and Christian-Buddhist interviews indicate that these couples do not follow the normative parameters and many of the core tenets outlined by religious traditions to which they identify; and yet, these couples and their families are not living secular lives, devoid of religion. If these religious intermarriages cannot be defined according to the definitions of religious groups, how can they be defined? What are some of the core characteristics and themes that one can use to describe commonalities of these families? In the remainder of this chapter, I intend to address these questions. These core characteristics and themes will not align with every interviewee. Rather, they will introduce important and pervasive ideas that emerge within and across the interviews. By drawing larger conclusions from these findings, my hope is to offer new sets of hypotheses and new platforms for future research.

It is my contention that even though these marriages are ‘interreligious,’ in that each person identifies with a religion, this description is misleading. They are much more complex than this descriptor allows. Interreligious marriage, like interreligious dialogue, for example, suggests that there are two individuals, each with his/her own religious beliefs and practices who come to the marriage or dialogue-table, ready to discuss, listen, and perhaps negotiate their religious differences. However, in many of these intermarriages, this is not the dynamic at all. These individuals come to their marriages with ambiguous and complex ideas associated with religion and spirituality. Even in the cases where one spouse converts to the other’s religion, they do not leave their religious upbringings and spiritual associations behind. Instead, their lives become a living experiment in forging new religious space that does not fall within the boundaries of one or even two traditions, and does not fall neatly into
secular space. In learning about how these couples are creatively redefining religion and its role in their lives, one can begin to learn about the emerging facets of this new religious space.

Whether Catholic or Protestant, Christian marriage has traditionally been understood as a union between two individuals that is sanctified by God and witnessed by the Christian religious community. In marriage, the couple is to live Christian lives and pass onto their children the values, beliefs, and practices of the Christian church. Even though at least one spouse identified with Christianity in these interviews, it is clear from the analysis that the role of Christianity in these marriages does not align with these traditional parameters. For example, this disconnect between the nature of these Christian intermarriages and Christian tradition surfaced in the brief descriptions of their weddings. While their weddings were very often attended or officiated by a priest or minister, it was just as common to have a Jewish rabbi or a Hindu priest there as well. Some did have church weddings, but it was more common for these couples to find a neutral location where they could have a wedding ceremony that was not seen as necessarily more Christian than the other religion. In only a few interviews did the couples share that it was very important for the husband or wife to have a traditional Christian wedding in the church. In an overwhelming number of cases, the couple sought balance in their two religious traditions – designing a wedding ceremony to reflect that their marriage was not singularly a Christian marriage, but a marriage that brought together two religions, two cultures, and two families. In the process, these couples decided to incorporate some religious elements, but not all religious elements of their respective traditions in their weddings. With few exceptions, they were not concerned with upholding the Christian theological significance of the marriage ceremony – as a sacrament or covenant
between the couple, Jesus, and the church; on the contrary, often they were interested in bridging Christianity with the other religious tradition, emphasizing common elements that united them as a couple and their cultures and families.

Just as the majority of interviewees did not describe their marriage ceremony as sanctifying a Christian sacrament or covenant, they also did not describe their marriage as having strong Jewish, or Muslim, or Hindu, or Buddhist theological meaning. In the case of Buddhism, this makes sense, as Buddhism does not prescribe marriage doctrine or dogma. However, in Judaism, Islam, and Hinduism, marriage is not only a civil contract, but an institution laden with very important theological significance. In discussing their wedding ceremonies, the interviewees did not mention the theological significance of marriage in each of their particular religious traditions. This omission is significant. However, they felt strongly about having religious authority present and incorporating religious scripture and ritual into their wedding ceremonies. This too is significant.

How is one to reconcile that generally these couples were disinterested in the particular theological meaning of marriage in their respective religious traditions, but were quite interested in shaping wedding ceremonies that incorporated religious scripture and rituals and were led by religious authorities? I pose this question in order to begin a discussion about how to reconcile couples’ interests and disinterests in the role of religion in their lives. While the question is based upon the role of religion in their weddings, it is meant to illuminate broader dynamics associated with their marriage in general and the role of religion in their ongoing family lives.

One answer to this question has to do with religious identity. Some scholars and religious authorities argue that many religious intermarriages are between individuals who
nominally identify with a religion, but are simply not religious; they may incorporate elements of religious traditions into their wedding ceremonies only to appease their families. Thus, their marriages are really secular – only clothed in a veneer of religiosity for social and familial reasons. For example, in 1968 and 1970, respectively, sociologists J. Milton Yinger and Ruth Shonle Cavan explored new definitions and measurement systems for religious intermarriage that were meant to answer the question – If a nominal Catholic and a nominal Jew marry, for example, and “share essential secular values,” but “have abandoned specific religious doctrines,” is this a ‘religious’ intermarriage?5 Almost forty years later, in an article on her experience as a Jewish mother married to a Palestinian Muslim man, Nora Lester Murad argued that religious authorities and scholars often qualify, downplay, or flat-out reject one’s religious identity if the person does not follow the norms of the religious tradition. In other words, religious intermarriages are not really religious, just as “derogatory [racial] labels like ‘oreos,’ ‘bananas,’ or ‘coconuts,’ . . . refer to people who supposedly aren’t really Black, Asian, or Latino because they behave or look or think in ways deemed appropriate only for others.”6 In a 2010 statement, Rabbi Jerome M. Epstein, Executive Vice President of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, refers to many of these religious intermarriages as ‘interfaith-less,’ another example of projecting secular identity onto these intermarried couples.

Many refer to intermarriages as ‘interfaith marriages.’ The error in that terminology is the presumption that each spouse brings a different faith and [different] religious commitments to their marriage. That, of course, could present conflicts. But evidence


demonstrates that many couples are not challenged by religious differences because they do not bring any faith or religion into their marriage, even if they call themselves Catholic, Protestant or Jewish - or Buddhist. Rather than being interfaith, these marriages are, as Rabbi Harold Schulweiss has noted, ‘interfaithless.’ Religious identity must not be merely a label that is inherited from parents or that is chosen casually. The values and attitudes with which a person lives life must reflect his or her religious identity if that identity is to be meaningful.⁷

A second answer to this question has to do with theology of religions. Some scholars argue that the reason these intermarried couples dismiss the particular theological significance of marriage and yet incorporate religion into their weddings is because they have and are living a theology of syncretism – the merging and mixing of distinct religious and/or cultural traditions. As I discussed in Chapter 1, scholars often look upon syncretism disparagingly because those who are involved with it tend to ignore important differences and particularities with the traditions.⁸ Some argue that by diluting the theological meaning behind marriage and picking and choosing select scriptural references and rituals to incorporate into a ceremony, these couples have adopted a theology that overlooks the particularities of both traditions, upsetting the integrity of the religions they nominally choose to represent. In a 2001 University of Chicago dissertation, Joseph Edelheit argues that Christian-Jewish intermarriage “is a post-modern example of religious syncretism,” endangering both Christianity and Judaism.⁹ Rabbi Arnold Jacob Wolf comments positively

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on Edelheit’s thesis and asserts that even though clergy, cantors, and rabbis sometimes participate in religious intermarriage ceremonies, these marriages are neither *quiddushin*, covenantal, or sacramental. Intermarriage ceremonies are “a meld of impossible ingredients which betrays both Jewish and Christian understandings of true marriage.” These arguments regarding syncretism in the Christian-Jewish community may be applied more broadly to Christian-Muslim, Christian-Hindu, and Christian-Buddhist marriage as well.

Some studies are beginning to refute that syncretism and secular identity are dominant characteristics of religious intermarriages. In an article on the practices of intermarried Thai Buddhist women and Catholic men at a *wat* in Silicon Valley, Todd LeRoy Perreira shares a story of a man, woman, and their son who take communion at midnight mass and then spend the afternoon at a Buddhist *wat* to participate in the ceremonies at the temple. What he observes in this family and others is that “there is no attempt at eclectic syncretism between the two traditions; rather, both remain distinct and yet complementary . . .” Murad, referring to her experience in a religious intermarriage, disputes the notion of syncretism and secular identity. Referring to the work of Sindre Bangstad on Muslim-Christian marriages in a South African community, she states that “intermarriage does not dissolve Islam, but rather reconstitutes a localized Islam that is vibrant and meaningful to its adherents.” Regarding identity, she describes herself as “strongly Jewish-identified,

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spiritual in a way that is Jewish influenced but not defined . . .” She continues, “I am willing to concede that my Jewish identity is less ‘traditional,’ but I am not willing [to] accept the implication that to be less ‘traditional’ is to be less Jewish.”

Theologians and religious authorities who view religious intermarriage as deleterious to their missions are searching for ways to prevent their constituents and interreligious families from succumbing to a secular identity or theology of syncretism. For example, at the Third Bishops’ Institute of Theological Animation (BITA III) meeting in Hong Kong in May 2006, the Roman Catholic Church discussed religious intermarriages in the religiously pluralistic context of Asia. They agreed that “[w]hat is called for is an attitude of loyalty to one’s own faith and respect for the faith of the other; hence, neither syncretism nor fundamentalism.” The Conservative Jewish movement seeks “the recommitment to infusing Jewish living, Jewish practice, and Jewish faith into homes in which one spouse is not Jewish.” Rabbi Epstein insists that the movement “must encourage and support the conversion of potential Jews into real Jews.” While these examples are largely Catholic and Jewish centric, they provide a benchmark for how American religious traditions react to religious intermarriage.

Religious communities are impelled to prevent or influence change in intermarriages they believe are dangerously secular and syncretistic. At the same time, individuals in

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13 Ibid.
15 Epstein, 2.
religious intermarriages are exploring where they fit within the realm of religion. To enable religious authorities, scholars, and potentially interreligious couples themselves to navigate this space, it is necessary to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon of religious intermarriage beyond the categories of secular identity and syncretistic theology. I agree that there are elements of secular identity and syncretism in the experiences of these couples we interviewed. However, I do not accept that secular identity and syncretism adequately describe the role of religion in their weddings or in their ongoing marriage and family-lives. It is more complex than secular identity or syncretism suggest.

I argue in the remainder of this chapter that these intermarried couples are redefining religion, and in the process, religious identity, by thinking about belief, practice, and community-involvement as separate aspects of their religious lives. By dissecting religion and treating belief, practice, and community as distinct aspects of their lives, these couples are able to dismiss particular religious interpretations of marriage, while simultaneously insisting upon the presence of religious authority and ritual in their wedding ceremonies. A pervasive theme was that they were very interested in religious diversity, but were not interested in the normative parameters that separate religious traditions and communities from one another. This explains their approach to their weddings as well as the role of religion in their ongoing marriage and family-lives.

Moving Beyond Secular Identity and Syncretism – Core Themes

There are four core themes that emerge in the research. Together they reveal a complexity inherent in the lives of these interreligious families that cannot be easily defined as religious versus secular or religious versus syncretistic. First, these families are exercising creative freedom to address the core challenges and issues of religious intermarriage. They
identify with two different religious traditions and sometimes cultures, they have parents and extended families that usually identify with different traditions, and they must decide how to raise their children in the midst of their religious differences. Over the centuries, many of the legal, theological, and social barriers that once proscribed religious intermarriage have begun to dissolve, if not completely, then sufficiently to allow for a rise in religious intermarriage in many Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish communities. Muslims, Hindus, and other newcomers since the late-twentieth century experience a freedom in America that their parents and grandparents may not have had. These individuals in these intermarriages are using their freedom to not only get married to someone from another religious tradition, but also to find creative ways to address the issues that religious intermarriage raises. With the exception of one Christian-Muslim couple who was constrained by Saudi Arabian law, the interviewees had no legal concerns regarding their marriages. For the few who felt strongly about getting married in the church or by a religious authority, or according to Sharia law, or strongly about having a baptism for their child, for example, they were constrained by the parameters of those religious officials. However, most found ways to get around normative theological barriers.

The most significant constraints to intermarried couples come from the societal pressure, exerted by their parents and families to conform to traditional practices – in their weddings, holiday practices, and in raising their children. Even in these situations, couples

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seek only to accommodate (not necessarily meet) the needs of their families where possible. They make their own choices. As individuals and as couples they utilize their legal, theological, and social freedom to creatively reformulate the role of religion in their lives. This creative reformulation is reflected in how they address issues related to religious belief, practice, and community involvement.

Second, these couples are differentiating between spiritual belief and religious practice. This differentiation is at the crux of how they strengthen their marriages, resolve their differences, and negotiate the challenges of extended families and raising children. In the interviews, intermarried people use ‘religion’ to depict an institution and/or community of people with a distinctive set of doctrines and practices. Religion is a word used to depict boundaries in a space outside of their home. Religion is used to discuss parents and in-laws, extended families, churches, temples, or synagogues. Religion, in this way, has a public connotation. ‘Spirituality’ is the term the interviewees choose to describe a very personal and private feeling. Spirituality is not institutional and while it can be shared with others in some venues, it is not necessarily community-based; they describe it as an individual experience. This individual experience has no specific doctrines or beliefs or required practices – it is open and malleable with no boundaries. Spirituality is what seems to connect an individual to a higher purpose for existing. It is not clear how spirituality and morality fit with one another; but there is certainly a link, one that implies that if one is spiritual, one is a good person and has certain basic values, including the universality of humanity, the goodness in all people, and the positive effect of religious and cultural diversity in the world. Sometimes spirituality is what these individuals credit as being a bridge in their marriage. This is potentially an area for future research. Because spirituality is an individual experience, it is
not necessary for spouses to share spirituality. Some spouses are more spiritual than their husbands/wives. However, for some, the commonality inherent in spirituality overcomes, overshadows, and trumps differences in their religion and religious upbringing.

For many, spirituality appears to be in the realm of belief and personal piety; religion is in the realm of practices and institutional affiliation. In Chapter 5, I explained how the phenomenon of secularization has typically been evaluated in two dimensions – one, in terms of institutional religion and the other in terms of personal piety. What these couples have done is split these two dimensions of religiosity apart. In the process, elements of personal piety have been removed from the realm of religion. The theological implications of this are significant because ideas regarding God, a transcendent, morality, and/or human goodness appear to fall into the category of spirituality, not religion. Religion is left only with particular beliefs and rituals that reflect a particular lens or cultural perspective on God, transcendence, and goodness. With the exception of a few Buddhist spouses, God serves as a bridge, overshadowing the particularities of their religious traditions. Moral goodness serves as a bridge as well. Particular beliefs about heaven and hell or reincarnation or the divinity of Jesus no longer divide couples because these particular beliefs fall into the arena of religion, not spirituality.

Third, religion and religious practice, now differentiated from spirituality, become one path among many to God or transcendence. It is not clear whether this behavior reflects a Hickian theology of religions and/or if it is more theologically reductionist in nature.¹⁷ I do not have enough data to reach this conclusion. However, it is safe to conclude that many

couples are articulating that no one religion is superior to another, that religious practices are
ways to experience one’s personal spirituality and culture, and that exposure to and
understanding of multiple religions is good. These couples do not view religious diversity as
the proposition of competing truth claims, laden with theological conundrums. On the
contrary, they very naturally see truth in the diversity itself. Religion is not the inward arena
of truth or God, per se, that is spirituality. Religion is an outward expression of a culture or
community that has a myriad of ideas, rituals, practices, and traditions common to those
cultures and/or communities. They do not view one religious tradition’s ideas, rituals, and
practices as better than another’s; they are simply different.

Because couples differentiate between religion and spirituality, many are not overly
concerned that if they deprive their children of a singular religious upbringing then their
children will not appreciate God or transcendence. Whether this becomes reality or not,
many couples express that if they expose their children to multiple views of God, their
children may develop a better appreciation of the magnificence, diversity, and complexity of
God than if they had been raised in only one religious tradition. Based on their personal
experiences in religious intermarriages, many couples believe that religious diversity has the
potential to lead to enhanced spirituality or faith in God. Sometimes, but not consistently, the
word ‘faith’ acted as a bridge between the particularity of religion and the universality of
spirituality.

These dynamics are articulated clearly by a Catholic father and Muslim mother who
shared their views on religious diversity during the Dedication Ceremony for their son that I
explained earlier. Their priest helped to create this ceremony as an alternative to baptism.
The following are excerpts from the father’s dedication:
You will see before long that the world is a very big place and that people have many, many different ways of practicing their faith. You are a lucky boy because your mother and I have been raised in two of these traditions and you will be fully a part of both. You will learn twice as many ways to love and build your own faith! Because a part of each of us is in you, you will bring us all closer together as we explore our own and each other’s faith, and for that I thank you.\textsuperscript{18}

He continues:

The gift of being the bearer of two traditions also comes with sacrifice – you will at times be confronted by those who don’t understand, who will tell you that some set of your beliefs aren’t correct, that for whatever reason, the manner in which you practice your faith is somehow incorrect or invalid. These will be tests and will not be easy to suffer. In these times you will come to rely on your faith and use it so that you can respond to these criticisms not with anger nor with self-loathing but with love. In your confidence and calmness you will let their derision flow through you and you will not [be] diminished, but strengthened.\textsuperscript{19}

The Muslim mother shares her ideas on the role of religion and religious diversity in her son’s life:

While there are differences in how Islam and Catholicism achieve these ends [give families direction and purpose], the tenets of both faiths believe in achieving closeness with Allah through both prayer and actions – specifically actions that help, not hurt, others. . . . We [your father and I] learned [through our religions] that goodness would bring us closer to God. . . . As your father noted, you have the benefit of being raised in both traditions and I hope, perhaps naively, that having both will make you stronger, more loving and more giving than either religion alone could teach you. . . . through the lessons you learn from Islam and Catholicism, through the love we give you, and through your relationship with others, I hope you are the best of all of us.\textsuperscript{20}

Not only in this example, but also in many of these interviewees’ families, by differentiating between spirituality and religion, and simultaneously valuing religious diversity, the couples are relieved of the theological necessity of practicing only one religion as a family. Husbands, wives, and children can pray separately or differently, because

\textsuperscript{18} “Welcome to the Dedication Ceremony.”

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
diversity is valuable, not deleterious to one’s spiritual development. Spouses can skip or partake in the other’s religious holidays and rituals without feeling as if they are betraying their religious ideals. Couples can form integrated wedding ceremonies or have multiple religious ceremonies because their theology or spirituality not only allows for religious diversity, but values it. The emphasis of a ceremony shifts from the unified religious fate or beliefs or lifestyle of a couple and their children to the diverse religious practices and backgrounds that individuals and families bring to one another. They are not necessarily dismissing the theological significance of these rituals, but they are changing and reforming the theological significance.

I do not deny that much of this sounds like movement toward the secular white space, outside the circles of religious traditions. I also do not deny that many of these couples’ practices resemble syncretism – the Dedication Ceremony could be critiqued as syncretistic, for example. However, what I hope to convey is that there is also something more that is occurring in these intermarriages. Namely, by differentiating spirituality and religion, these couples are not simply (or necessarily) moving away from religious practice. They are also not simply (or necessarily) trying to merge and mix their religious traditions. They are also reformulating the role of religion in their lives, individually and/or collectively as families, to use religious diversity as a way to enhance both their spirituality and religious understanding.

A woman in a Muslim-Christian marriage shares her perspectives on how and why she feels more religious being married to a Muslim.

“Our mutual love of God has both been a blessing and a good and difficult challenge. For me, it has given me an opportunity to articulate my faith and retell my faith stories . . . I have also had to consider every aspect of what I believe, causing much growth in my personal beliefs. It is a slow but beautiful process of sharing. We regularly discuss God and our beliefs trying to find what is common . . . while respecting what is different.” (M-9)
A Christian man married to a Jewish woman explains this dynamic as follows:

“I have been able to learn more about my own faith and have gained a deeper understanding of Roman Catholicism. I know that if I had married someone of the same faith, my understanding of Judaism would be very rote. However, being in an interfaith marriage, I need to ask questions about my faith and to seek out answers when I don’t know what [my wife] asks.” (J-11)

His Jewish wife shares a similar sentiment:

“I definitely feel more religious. . . . Being in an interfaith marriage, especially after my son was born, has renewed my interest in my faith and has deepened my knowledge and understanding of it. Having to explain something makes you reflect on questions like why do we do this and what does this actually mean?” (J-11)

A Buddhist woman, who is married to a Christian, explains the effects of being in a religious intermarriage:

“With two belief systems, the spiritual/religious component of marriage becomes a bigger piece of the pie. It pervades life a lot more. We have more conversation and more tolerance—and religion takes up more physical space. I find it wonderful that we have this as a larger part of our marriage because spirituality is very important to me. It is a vital part of any healthy marriage. . . . Tolerance is [also] very important. My Buddhism has been enriched and enhanced by [my husband’s] Quaker views. You are able to see the similarities and develop tolerance. It increases your faith in your own and transcends the belief system so that you can truly see the universal benefit of religion.” (B-6)

Sociological studies have historically found that divorce is more likely in a religious intermarriage than in a marriage in which both husband and wife are the same religion.21 This may be changing, however. In 2000, a study of Jewish intermarriage by Patrice Heller, a psychotherapist and rabbi, and Beatrice Wood, a professor of psychiatry, reveals that the

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intra-religious and inter-religious couples experience the same level of marital intimacy. They define intimacy as “a process of relating that promotes closeness, bondedness, and connectedness.” They clarify that “no research to date has investigated the relationship between intimacy and intermarriage.”

Heller and Wood found that it is not the level of intimacy that differs in intra- versus inter-married couples. Rather, it is the process by which couples become intimate that is different for intra- versus inter-married couples. “Intramarried couples appear to experience greater personal similarity and mutual understanding rooted in their ethnic bond, which aids the development of intimacy. Intermarried couples appear to find that the very process of negotiating ethnic differences leads to greater mutual understanding and intimacy.” While I do not explore this any further in this analysis, one could hypothesize that religious diversity in a marriage has the potential not only to strengthen spirituality and religiosity of the individuals, but also strengthen the marriage bond itself.

The value of religious diversity in a marriage is an important dynamic that surfaces in this research. It suggests that while religious diversity has the potential not only to weaken the normative parameters of religious traditions, it also has the potential to strengthen one’s spirituality as well as one’s understanding of his/her particular religious tradition. In these ways, the value of religious diversity in these relationships has the potential to be a force that continues to challenge normative parameters, resulting in the shifting of boundaries among religions and between religious and secular ideas of marriage and family-life.

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23 Ibid., 241.
The non-traditional affiliation practices of these families reflect these shifting boundaries. This leads to the fourth core theme – religious community affiliation is no longer normative for the family. Families are creating new types of religious affiliations. Because spirituality and belief is separate from a religious community, one can connect with God or his/her vision of transcendence without going to church or synagogue or the mosque or temple or a meditation session. The notion of religious community, or the church or the chosen people or the *ummah*, as a theological category, is changing. Mothers and fathers and their children sometimes go their separate ways, so to speak, in regards to community involvement. This does not suggest that they want separate communities, or see religion as purely individualistic. It only suggests that the religious community venues available to them today are ones that very often are not suitable for families where members of the family follow different religions. Many couples want to stay connected to their religious cultures and especially their parents and extended families. Religious celebrations and holidays are a way to do this. A couple very often will attend church, synagogue, etc. on holidays and with their parents and as a whole family, when they do not attend at other times of the year.

Many individuals in these families retain deep needs to connect with one another in ways traditionally offered through involvement in a religious community. Some yearn to discuss, practice, and experience their spirituality and their religion with others. They seek to find a community to do this with, even if their spouses and/or children are not interested in joining them. Some individuals in these religious intermarriages go to church or synagogue or the temple by themselves to fulfill their personal need to connect with a larger group on spiritual and religious issues.
For some, the Unitarian Universalist church or Reform Judaism or a group meditation practice helps to fill this need. These religious communities offer an open environment for intermarried couples and families. The Interfaith Family Project (IFFP) is an important example of new types of communities that are forming to cater to the needs of Christian-Jewish interreligious families. If and when Hindu, Muslim, and other religious traditions face greater challenges with religious intermarriage, perhaps these interreligious communities will become more prevalent. The core theme that emerges from these families is that this is an area in flux in the American religious landscape. It is likely that as individuals in religious intermarriages seek more communal venues for their spiritual and religious expression, more venues will become available to them.

In all of the analysis on religious intermarried couples, what surfaces is that these individuals, couples, and families are defying normative boundaries for religious traditions, and yet are not living wholly secular lives. Many of their experiences appear ambiguous and paradoxical. These couples are introducing new and important dimensions to how we understand religion and religious diversity in the United States; one cannot simply dismiss their experiences as secularism or syncretism. These families are splitting apart definitions of religion, distinguishing between spirituality, practice, and community aspects of religious life, and crossing traditional boundaries among religions and between the religious and the secular.

**Interfaith Marriage: Bridging the Religious, the Spiritual, and the Secular**

A primary observation about these religious intermarriages is that they are notably different from the religious intermarriages of the nineteenth century that Anne Rose described or the intermarriages of the twentieth century where interreligious families would largely
affiliate with one religious tradition. In early American history, Catholic and Jewish
intermarriages to Protestants were largely subsumed under Protestantism. By the mid-
twentieth century, America’s civil religion or imagined religious community included not
only Protestants, but also Catholics and Jews. To be American was to be religious, to affiliate
with a church or a synagogue as a family, and partake in American life “under God” – a
phrase that was incorporated into civic life to differentiate ‘religious’ Americans from
godless Communists. Interreligious families continued to affiliate with religious
communities, as did the majority of Americans. Through the centuries, the legal, theological,
and social doors to religious intermarriage slowly opened. By the late-twentieth century,
religious intermarriage was becoming increasingly common across a range of religious
communities.

As religious intermarriage has become more common, it has also become more
complex. These twenty-first century American religious intermarriages reveal a new
dynamic, one notably different (it seems) from religious intermarriages of the past. These
couples are much more freely and creatively shaping their marriages and family-lives to
include religion and spirituality where and how they deem it important and appropriate.
These couples do not believe that unity in religion and/or family religious affiliation is
necessary. It is very common for various family members to differ in their beliefs, practices,
and community involvement.

There is complexity and ambiguity regarding religion in the lives of these couples;
this complexity and ambiguity is not captured by the phrase ‘interreligious.’ Even though the
individuals identify nominally with a religious tradition, many of these individuals and their
families are not ‘religious’ by normative parameters. The word or label I would assign to
individuals in intermarriages that fit this description is ‘interfaith.’ Where interreligious couples of the twentieth century may have their feet in two traditions, but identify predominantly as one religion as a family, these interfaith couples appear to have their toes in two traditions and their fingers outside of the traditions altogether. This is not to say that in the early-twenty-first century there are not interreligious families as well as interfaith families; rather, I am introducing a theme that helps to illuminate a shift that is occurring. Interreligious families are potentially becoming more interfaith. This movement is occurring. This shift is recognizable because these couples are knowingly, actively, and unapologetically defying normative boundaries associated with religious traditions. And yet, their lives are not devoid of religion. They remain respectful of aspects of religious belief, practice, and community involvement, but are making their own rules and are crossing traditional boundaries.

While this term ‘interfaith’ is a generic term, used colloquially and in sociological scholarship to describe religious intermarriage in all different forms, I do not use it generically here. I use it to describe individuals who do not fit within the boundaries of one or two religious traditions and also do not fit in the secular white space that is wholly outside the boundaries of all the religious traditions. The word ‘faith’ is meant to bridge the very institutionally-oriented word ‘religion’ with the very ephemeral and non-institutionally-oriented word ‘spirituality.’ I am not defining religion, spirituality, and faith based on scholarly sources; I am defining these words based upon how these people in intermarriages use them.

If these couples had abandoned religion altogether, then more appropriate terms to depict their marriages may be ‘interfaith-less,’ ‘intra-spiritual,’ ‘inter-spiritual,’ and/or
‘secular’ marriages; these terms would depict their common abandonment of all particularly religious ideas completely. However, these couples have not abandoned religion altogether and cannot be labeled interfaith-less, intra-spiritual, inter-spiritual, or secular. In aspects of their lives, they remain involved with religious institutions and/or maintain certain aspects of personal piety. If not through their own interest in affiliating with religion directly, they are inspired to maintain religious connection through religious rites and holidays for and with their children, their parents, and/or their extended families. While they remain connected to religion in certain ways, they shape their lives by picking and choosing the parts of religion they hope to maintain in their life. Often, they ignore the set boundaries of their religious traditions in terms of beliefs, the purpose of marriage, or the parameters for living a religious family-life. These families depict the “secular age” Taylor describes, but they themselves are not people devoid of religion.

‘Faith’ has numerous theological connotations, some very specific and integral to a religious tradition. For example, many Protestant denominations emphasize that the doctrine of faith alone (sola fide) is core to understanding what differentiates Protestants from Catholics. A commonly-used definition from the anonymous epistle to the Hebrews, in the Christian scriptures, is “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” However, I chose ‘faith’ as a term to bridge ‘religion’ and ‘spirituality’ for the following reasons. In the Marks and Lambert/Dollahite studies, very religious couples use ‘religion’ and ‘faith’ somewhat synonymously, and do not use the term ‘spirituality’ very

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often. On the contrary, the intermarried couples we interviewed use and differentiate the terms ‘religion’ and ‘spirituality’ quite often. However, they do not appear to have clear associations with the word ‘faith.’ The word ‘faith’ is ambiguous in its meaning and use, just as their religious lives are ambiguous. At times interviewees use it to refer to their religious tradition; at times they use it to refer to a very personal feeling that there is a larger meaning in their life. ‘Faith’ took on associations with ‘religion’ and with ‘spirituality’ – the two terms I hope to bridge. These interfaith marriages exist in a space that straddles the religious and secular. They are reflective of movement and change in the broader American religious landscape and they contribute to this change. This is the focus of the next chapter.

Interfaith marriages are affecting change in the American religious landscape. The boundaries among religions and between the religious and secular spheres have never been stationary. Early-twenty-first-century America is no exception – these boundaries are in shift, so to speak. As relationships among religious communities change, as the nation becomes more religiously diverse and religiously complex, and as interfaith couples creatively navigate religious diversity in their lives, movement and transformation persists. In this chapter, I examine these dynamics as well as comment upon the implications of these dynamics on scholarship and discourse related to religious pluralism. I argue that, as seen through the lens of interfaith marriage, scholarship and discourse on religious pluralism in America must consider a new space in the American religious landscape – Interfaith Space.

Affecting Change

In Families

Individuals in these interfaith marriages are religious innovators, vanguards of the work associated not only with bridging religious traditions, but also finding new ways to retain religiosity in their lives. By entering into a marriage with someone of another religion, working to make their marriage successful, and often raising children in these interfaith
households, these individuals are affecting change in one another, in their extended families, and in their broader religious communities. Their intimate relationship as husband and wife is a private one; however, the decisions they make regarding their religious lives extend beyond their relationship.

The married couples we interviewed work to reconcile their religious differences, negotiate compromises, and develop innovative solutions to religious questions. They do this because they love one another and want their marriages to work. They have a practical incentive to think about, to discuss, and to address the realities of religious diversity. At the same time, however, these couples’ extended families, religious communities, and religious authorities do not necessarily have to wrestle with or address these issues. Yet, because they come in contact with and are involved in the lives of these interfaith families, their views on religious diversity are affected. This is how movement and change occurs over time. For example, if a Christian husband and a Muslim wife want to dedicate their son in a way that celebrates their son’s relationship to God, but does not make him exclusively Christian, they are inspired to find an alternative that meets their theological needs. Their parents and in-laws or religious authorities may not have a ready answer or solution for this couple; this may not be an issue that they have personally had to contemplate. However, by proactively approaching their priest and/or their imam, emphasizing the importance of raising their son as both a Christian and a Muslim, and working to shape a Dedication Ceremony, for example, this couple is affecting change not only in their family, but in the broader religious community. For everyone who attends the Dedication Ceremony and for every couple who approaches that priest or imam in the future, there is a new theological possibility that has been introduced – a child and his family can celebrate their son’s connection to God, not
despite their Muslim and Christian religions, but because of their Muslim and Christian religions.¹

In this example, one can see how an interfaith couple has built a bridge between the Christian and Muslim traditions. Baptism is one aspect of Christianity that often creates a boundary around the religion, officially making those who are baptized part of the church of Christ and those who are not, outside of the Christian fold. Where Buddhists and Hindus may or may not have a theological issue with their children being baptized, baptism can become problematic for Muslims and Jews who view baptism as simultaneously an acceptance of Christianity and a rejection of Islam or Judaism. In an article on pastoral care for Christian interreligious couples, Dr. John Borelli explains that “[b]aptism of the children, especially of a Jewish mother, would be understood as an attempt to remove them from the Jewish community.”² This is true for many Muslims as well. In a discussion at a Chicago retreat for Muslim-Christian couples, one Christian woman explained that they had decided to raise their children Catholic, but “with a deep appreciation for their father’s Muslim faith.” She recalled that “just as she was bursting with joy at the baptism of their first child, she looked over at her husband to see tears streaming down his face.”³ At this retreat, many Muslim men felt that “allowing their children to be baptized meant they had somehow failed in one of their most important duties, to raise their children as Muslims.”⁴ The couple that

¹ “Welcome to the Dedication Ceremony,” 26 June 2010, document provided by a Catholic priest with whom I discussed the Dedication Ceremony on 1 Oct. 2010.


⁴ Ibid.
chose to do a Dedication Ceremony with their priest (and other couples who are opting for ‘blessing ceremonies’ or other alternatives to baptism) was able to portray Christianity and Islam as universally complementary, rather than exclusionary of the other. In this way, the couple created a bridge between Christianity and Islam, contributing in some small way to a shift in the boundaries between the religious traditions.

This Dedication Ceremony also provides an example of how these interfaith couples are contributing to a redefinition of what constitutes religious versus secular space. Their family and their son are neither wholly Muslim, nor wholly Christian, by normative parameters; however, the words they spoke at the Dedication Ceremony reveal that they do not intend to live secular lives, devoid of religion. In this particular marriage, the husband is Christian – he did not convert to Islam when he married his Muslim wife. By the normative parameters of the Muslim tradition, their son is not Muslim, as descent is patrilineal in Islam. Additionally, by not formally baptizing their son, they denied him the basic sacrament that is the entry point into the church and to the other sacraments. As a consequence, their son is neither Muslim nor Christian, according to normative parameters. However, it would be very difficult to classify the parents of this child as secular or non-religious; religion is very important to both of them, as evidenced by the importance they both put on having a public religious ceremony to dedicate their son to God. His parents have publicly blessed him in front of clergy, family and friends, and offered their perspectives on how their love for him and their religiously diverse perspectives on life will help to “strengthen his faith” as a

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“believer” and bring him “closer to God.” The interfaith couple, their child, the
grandparents and extended family, and the community, have been a part of a ceremony that
was neither traditionally Christian nor Muslim, nor devoid of religious piety and value. In
this way, the distinction between ‘religious’ and ‘secular’ is blurred.

The ways in which many interfaith families are approaching their wedding
 ceremonies provide additional examples of how these couples are contributing to the shifting
boundaries among religious traditions and between the religious and secular spheres. In these
settings, the private decisions that these couples make regarding how they will incorporate
religion into their lives, are made public through their children, their extended families, and
sometimes their religious communities. When a couple decides to create a wedding that
honors Judaism and Christianity or Hinduism and Christianity, for example, the couple
introduces new ideas regarding these two religions to the family and friends that attend, as
well as the pastor, rabbi, and/or Hindu priest who officiate the ceremony on behalf of his/her
respective tradition. While these weddings may not be considered sacramental, covenantal,
*quiddushin*, or *samskāra*, for example, they are not secular events.

The holidays are also a time when religious boundaries blur in many of these
interfaith families. For example, many celebrate Christmas together. Christmas is often a
time when whole families, including spouses who are not Christian, spend time with parents
and extended relatives. Interviewees from a Christian and Jewish interfaith family invite both
of their extended families to Christmas every year. As a result, the individuals in these
extended families are offered an opportunity to interact with the religious other, in a way that
they may not if their son or daughter had chosen to marry someone from his/her religious

6 “Welcome to the Dedication Ceremony.”
Christmas is a religiously complex affair. On the surface, it appears to have become a secular holiday in many interfaith homes – some describe it as “secular,” as “not very religious,” or as “an American cultural holiday.” However, when one looks more closely, there is a subtle, but important role that Christmas plays in bridging religious traditions and conceptions of the secular and religious. A Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, or Buddhist spouse sometimes attends church with his/her Christian in-laws on Christmas Eve. He or she may not go to church during other times of the year, but the family joins together during this occasion. People who are not Christian become directly exposed to the liturgies, rituals, and customs of a Christian family and community. Christians in the family or at church see and perhaps interact with individuals who are not Christian while in their sacred space. Sometimes families use Christmas as a way to emphasize commonalities in their respective traditions. For example, one Muslim woman emphasizes to her family that Christmas and Ramadan both have to do with giving to the poor. Even when holidays appear to be devoid of religious meaning, secular Christmas trees and Easter bunnies provide parents and in-laws, Christian and non-Christian alike, with a non-threatening way to connect to the religious other. These events affect change in how families and religious communities understand their particular religion relative to other religions. In these times, a bridge, even if a very narrow one, is being built.

Outside of baptisms, weddings, and holidays, these interfaith couples reveal in their experiences that they are contributing to the shifting boundaries among religions and between the religious and secular spheres in myriad of other ways. Sometimes this bridge is in the religious education they are providing their children. Family involvement in the Interfaith Families Project is an explicit example of trying to expose children to both Christianity and
Judaism. More often than not, however, this dual exposure is more informal; every family is creatively crafting their own solutions to educating their children in matters of religion. One Hindu woman explains that she and her Christian husband decided to raise their son in both traditions. At dinner, they say prayers in both Christian and Hindu ways. Her four-year old son folds his hands differently for different prayers. At church, her son runs up to the priest when he is taking communion and enthusiastically asks to “take Prasad,” a Hindu ritual where one offers something edible to a deity as a gracious gift and then consumes it. In another family, a young child of a Christian-Buddhist couple sometimes joins his mom to experience meditation in her shrine at home; he also goes to church with his dad and interacts with people in that community as the son of a Christian and a Buddhist. When a Jewish mother tailors a Passover celebration for her Christian, atheist, and Jewish friends and family, she too is contributing to the redefinition of religious boundaries in a broader arena that extends beyond her and her husband.

In Religious Communities

One important indicator that interfaith marriages have been and are affecting change is that religious communities and authorities are reacting to the phenomenon. While they fear that couples and children of religious intermarriages will disassociate with their religion to associate with another religion, often their greater fear is that they will disassociate with religion all together. In a discussion between Christian and Jewish authorities on religious intermarriage, Sheila Garcia, Associate Director for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), acknowledged that while the Christian and Jewish traditions have important theological reasons for opposing intermarriage to the other, both Catholic and Jewish communities are “dealing with . . . an alarming trend of many in their twenties not to
affiliate themselves or their kids with any organized religion.” In an effort to stem apostasy, many of America’s religious leaders are working cooperatively with other religious communities and are often revising the ways they approach issues related to religious intermarriage. At the same time, they are searching for ways to prevent the erosion of their religious communities and uphold the sacred nature of the marriage commitment. I will provide a few examples of developments in various religious communities in order to illustrate that change is underway.

In the Roman Catholic community, as an historical point of comparison, in 1880 Pope Leo XIII insisted that a marriage contract could in no way be severed from the sacrament of marriage. This is articulated in the encyclical *Arcanum* as follows:

> Hence it is clear that among Christians every true marriage is, in itself and by itself, a sacrament; and that nothing can be further from the truth than to say that the sacrament is a certain added ornament, or outward endowment, which can be separated and torn away from the contract at the caprice of man.  

By way of contrast, following the Second Vatican Council, the 1983 Code of Canon Law provided for dispensations for “disparity of cult” marriages. A dispensation for disparity of cult enables a Catholic to marry someone who is not baptized as a Christian. These marriages are *not* sacramental, but *are* recognized by the Church. Dispensation forms list the possible reasons for granting a dispensation for disparity of cult, including the following: to foster harmony within the families, preserve the faith of the Catholic party, prevent the danger of

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the couple having merely a civil marriage, and/or hope for the religious conversion of the non-Catholic party. While the Catholic spouse must promise (orally or in writing) to do all that they can to retain their Catholic faith and have their children baptized and raised in the Church, the spouse who is not Catholic is no longer required to sign forms making similar promises. The non-Catholic spouse must simply be informed that the Catholic spouse has made these promises.

Since the 1980s, Catholic dioceses have begun to formally recognize the reality of marriages between baptized Christians and those of other religious traditions who are not baptized. The Church does not advocate these marriages; however, the Church wishes to be a resource for couples who are in situations where religious intermarriage may become a reality for them. For example, a 1988 statement called “Marriage in Islam and Roman Catholicism” advised the following: “Our religions do not encourage interfaith marriages. However, if a couple is contemplating such a marriage, they are advised to consult with a Roman Catholic priest and a knowledgeable Moslem while planning such a marriage.”

Across the country

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9 Roman Catholic Diocese of Baton Rouge, Publications and Forms, [www.diobr.org/documents](http://www.diobr.org/documents). The reasons for a “disparity of cult” dispensation are worded slightly differently on different dispensation forms. For other examples, see the Archdiocese for the Military Services at [www.milarch.org/resources/Forms](http://www.milarch.org/resources/Forms) and the Diocese of Honolulu at [www.catholichawaii.org/filemgmt_data/files/Dispensation](http://www.catholichawaii.org/filemgmt_data/files/Dispensation).

10 The Catholic spouse must promise something similar to the following to be granted a dispensation: “I reaffirm my faith in Jesus Christ and, with God’s help, intend to continue living that faith in the Catholic Church. I promise to do all in my power to share the faith I have received with our children by having them baptized and reared as Catholics.” United States Council of Catholic Bishops, “Apostolic Letter on Mixed Marriages, Statement on the Implementation of the Apostolic Letter on Mixed Marriages.” National Conference of Catholic Bishops (Washington, DC: USCCB Office of Publishing and Promotion Services, 1971); quoted in United States Council of Catholic Bishops, “Catholic-Muslim Marriage Preparation: A Resource for Pastoral Ministers,” (draft to be published in 2011).

there are efforts in place to prepare jointly statements on practical guidelines and pastoral advice regarding religious intermarriage.\textsuperscript{12} Two examples are as follows: First, on October 19, 2010 the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and the National Council of Synagogues (NCS) of America met in New York City to discuss topics mutually affecting their respective religious communities. The majority of the meeting was dedicated to the changing attitudes regarding religious intermarriage in the nation and how Catholic and Jewish religious leaders could work cooperatively to respond to these dynamics.\textsuperscript{13} Second, during the last quarter of 2010, the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs at the USCCB, has been jointly working with a prominent Muslim organization to develop a mutually agreed upon pastoral resource on Muslim-Christian marriages. This document, when it is published, promises to offer these couples theologically-grounded guidance and advice.\textsuperscript{14}

Protestant religious authorities and communities are also engrossed in discussions regarding religious intermarriage. While many Protestant groups do not have strict prohibitions against intermarriage, Christian lay people continue to approach their pastors and ministers with questions, concerns, and hopes regarding marriage to a non-Christian. The World Council of Churches is developing a text on religious plurality and Christian self-understanding (in progress as of December 2010) that addresses the need to provide more

\textsuperscript{12} Borelli, 35.

\textsuperscript{13} United States Council of Catholic Bishops, “Jewish-Catholic Dialogue Examines Mixed Marriages.”

\textsuperscript{14} United States Council of Catholic Bishops, “Catholic-Muslim Marriage Preparation.”
pastoral guidance for interreligious couples.¹⁵ The Office of Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations at the General Assembly Mission Council Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) provides a thorough guide to couples and families titled, “Interfaith Marriage: A Resource by Presbyterian Christians.” In it they recognize the following: “An interfaith family can help others find bridges between two faith communities. A willingness to explore the traditions, beliefs, history, and community of a spouse’s faith can bring shared growth to all.”¹⁶ In general, mainline Protestant churches are more open to religious intermarriage than evangelical churches; moreover, they are more open to discussing and exploring the implications and the practical steps necessary to work with interreligious families.¹⁷

In the publication Dovetail, a newsletter for Christian-Jewish interreligious families, Julie Aziz, a Reform Jew, expresses optimism that religious institutions and authorities will continue to work with her interfaith family. She says, “We expect resistance from the institutions—that-be, and know they cannot bend to our will, but we will continue to work with them to find a middle ground, as we did with our wedding.”¹⁸ This comment reflects that these institutions are not immovable in their positions. Interfaith couples and families appear

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¹⁷ For a 2010 exchange of a congregant and an evangelical Baptist pastor on religious intermarriage, see http://en.allexperts.com/q/Baptists-954/2010/1/Interfaith-Marriages.htm, accessed 2 Dec. 2010. With rationale based upon 2 Corinthians 6:14-17, this pastor says that he does “not know of any Baptist church that would perform this marriage.”

to be influencing their religious communities. Rabbi Charles Kroloff who chaired a task
force for the Central Conference of Reform Rabbis in 2010 said: “Whereas 30 years ago a
Christian-Jewish couple might have approached a rabbi with embarrassment about their
intentions to marry, today they’re asking about spirituality programs in which the both of
them can feel comfortable.”

As I discussed in Chapter 4, Orthodox Jewish communities continue to proscribe
religious intermarriage; however, studies reveal that in contemporary society, it is not as
common for members of the extended family and community to sit shiva or completely
alienate the interfaith family. The Conservative community continues to wrestle with how
to discourage interfaith marriage, while at the same time encourage interfaith families to stay
connected to the synagogue with the hope that the non-Jewish spouse eventually converts.
For example, at a Conservative synagogue in Dayton, Ohio, about 80% of their members are
affected by religious intermarriage in some way. They are developing special projects to help
“get rid of the shonda – shame – factor.” The Reform community has made significant
strides in seeking to accommodate and attract interfaith families to their congregations. The
1983 decision to accept patrilineal descent opened the door for families with Jewish fathers

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Marriages.”

20 Barbara Pash, “A Jewish Soul: Orthodox Outreach and Interfaith Families,” Interfaith

21 Elliot Salo Schoenberg, “Intermarriage and Conservative Judaism: An Approach for the

22 Martha Moody Jacobs, “Interfaith ‘Inreach’ in a Conservative Setting,” Jewish Federation
and non-Jewish mothers to participate in the Jewish life of the synagogue community.\textsuperscript{23} In 2010, after a task force spent three years studying Jewish religious intermarriage, the Central Conference of American Rabbis agreed that while rabbis can still opt out of performing interfaith marriage ceremonies as “a deeply personal matter of conscience,” the Reform movement wants to “embrace it [interfaith marriage] as an opportunity.” The CCAR President Rabbi Ellen Weinberg Dreyfus says that while there is greater likelihood of Jewish continuity in Jewish-Jewish marriages, “in the case of intermarriage, the opportunity for Jewish continuity is significant, especially if there is effective rabbinic leadership.”\textsuperscript{24}

Jewish and Catholic religious communities have been deeply affected by religious intermarriage in the United States. Religious authorities have struggled with questions of religious intermarriage since the nineteenth century when waves of immigrants came to the country and began integrating and often assimilating into the Protestant ethos that defined America’s civil religion. Hindu, Muslim, and other newer immigrant communities have been facing similar issues since the late-twentieth century. Paul D. Numrich, theologian and scholar of religion and immigration, explains this dynamic:

> The clash between American individualism and Old World communal and familial norms underlies much of the moral critique of American society coming from new immigrant communities. Widely reported tensions and negotiations about the dating and marriage choices of the American-born second generation symbolize the issue.\textsuperscript{25}


These tensions and negotiations appear within the Muslim community in America. Muslim marriage is an important religious contract between a man and a woman, integral to maintaining the ummah. While Sharia law allows for a Muslim man to marry a Christian or Jewish woman, this type of marriage is discouraged. It is not uncommon for the non-Muslim to convert prior to marriage so that the family can prosper through religious unity and strength.\textsuperscript{26} Despite these ingrained norms in the Muslim community, there are indicators that change is underway.

A 2007 study revealed that the majority (62\%) of Muslims in America believe that it is “okay” for a Muslim to marry a non-Muslim.\textsuperscript{27} In a study by Islamic scholar Denise Al-Johar on Sunni Muslim marriage patterns in Houston, Texas, she correlates one’s self-identity with his/her choice of a marriage partner. If a person primarily self-identifies as a native of a certain country, he/she often seeks an arranged marriage to someone of the same nationality. A person who self-identifies primarily as Muslim (and not with their nationality) often marries a Muslim who is not from his/her native country. A person who self-identifies primarily as an American most often marries a non-Muslim American of European or Hispanic descent.\textsuperscript{28} Al-Johar also determines that many second-generation Muslims are finding renewed religiosity in America; they become more orthodox in their views as they unite with Muslims from different parts of the world on common religious principles. The

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\textsuperscript{26} For insight on Muslim conversion, see Yasin Dutton, “Conversion to Islam: The Qur’anic Paradigm,” in Religious Conversion: Contemporary Practices and Controversies, ed. Christopher Lamb and M. Darrol Bryant (London: Cassell, 1999), 153-156. \\
\textsuperscript{27} PEW Research Center, Muslim Americans: Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream, released May 22, 2007, 34.
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prominence of “Muslim first” identity (versus nationality first) has been found in other studies as well.\textsuperscript{29} Al-Johar notes that “[m]arriages among some Muslims are increasingly governed by religious principles rather than traditions from ‘back home.’”\textsuperscript{30}

While some second-generation Muslims are identifying less with ethnicity and more with religion, others are embracing their American identity and putting less emphasis on marriage to another Muslim.\textsuperscript{31} According to a\textit{Washington Post} news article, an imam at a large Washington D.C. area mosque said that the key issues related to marriage that surface in his community are “interfaith marriage, how well Muslims can know each other before they marry, and what the modern version of a ‘wali,’ or guardian, a figure in Islam who is supposed to help women pick the right husbands.” The imam shared that “[a]nytime there is a program at the mosque about these things, it’s completely packed.”\textsuperscript{32}

One issue that is creating discussion and debate, not only in Muslim communities, but also with prominent Muslim scholars, is the differing Islamic laws for men and women on the issue of religious intermarriage. Practical and theoretical concerns are instigating potential reforms in the tradition. On a practical level, there is a surplus of single Muslim women in America. Marcia K. Hermansen, Director of the Islamic World Studies Program and a professor of theology at Loyola University Chicago, explains this issue:

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\textsuperscript{30} Al-Johar, 567.
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\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 557-558.
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In the case of unmarried daughters, immigrant families face the problem of keeping their daughters within traditional norms and out of American practices such as dating; they also have the problem of a limited pool of suitable spouses from similar backgrounds and smaller networks of persons to involve in the matchmaking process.33

A counselor in New York who is married to an imam and counsels Muslim singles and couples “used to feel torn” about the issue of interreligious marriage. However, she has changed her position since she fears that Muslim women will have to either forgo marriage or marry a non-Muslim. While she remains focused on introducing Muslim women to Muslim men, she believes that Muslim women should not be prohibited from marrying non-Muslims.34

Scholars of Islamic law are beginning to re-evaluate this long-standing position that Muslim women cannot marry non-Muslims. It is widely believed that there are two primary reasons why interreligious marriage is prohibited for Muslim women. First, in the Qur’an men are given explicit authorization to marry People of the Book; there is no explicit authorization given to women. Islamic scholars have widely interpreted this to mean that women can only marry Muslims. Second, throughout much of Muslim history, tradition has held that the man is the head of the household and dictates the religion of the family and children. As a consequence, a Muslim woman would not be able to practice freely her religion if she married a non-Muslim man.35 In a 2009 article published in the *Indiana Law Journal*, the author Alex B. Leeman, highlights that scholars including Dr. Khaleel


34 Boorstein, B5.

Mohammed, scholar of Islamic law and comparative religion at San Diego State University, and Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na’im, Charles Howard Candler Professor of Law at Emory Law School, are now raising questions that impel one to reevaluate this stance on marriage in light of the “modern situation.” They are asking questions that Leeman articulates as follows: “What if the woman is considered equal in her particular household? What if her husband agrees (even by Islamic marriage contract) not to impose his religion upon her or restrict her from religious practice?” The realities of religious intermarriage in contemporary American society are beginning to instigate discussions of potential reforms in the Muslim community.

Change is occurring in Hindu religious communities in America as well. Most Hindu adults in the United States are immigrants; most were born in South-Central Asia. Traditional ideas associated with arranged marriage and purity persist as these traditions are deemed important for holding these diaspora Hindu communities together. Some families threaten to disown their child if he/she marries someone who does not have the desired qualities; Hindu priests often refuse to marry these couples; and Hindu temples are largely unprepared to deal with integrating non-Hindu spouses into the community. Religious intermarriages appear to be affecting change in the Hindu community, however.

36 Ibid., 763.


According to the PEW U.S. Religious Landscape Survey in 2008, Hindus are the least likely to marry someone from another religion.\(^39\) This is not surprising given the high percentage of immigrants in the Hindu population. However, as younger generations distance themselves from the traditional Indian-Hindu marital norms and as young Hindus integrate into American society and interact with non-Hindus at school and work, many families fear that intermarriage will become more prevalent. According to observers at a large meeting in Houston that brought together many Hindus across Texas, “nothing gets so touchy” as the topic of intermarriage.\(^40\) One study estimates that 70% of Hindus marry non-Hindus. The details of this study are not clear and relative to the PEW results, this percentage is overstated; what is important to note, however, is that religious intermarriage is a growing trend.\(^41\)

Traditional Hindu practices are shifting on American soil and Hindu religious authorities are reacting to the phenomenon. Parents and family-members traditionally hold the authority for arranging marriages. While this remains somewhat normative in India,\(^42\) second generation Hindus in America are exercising more personal authority and choice in the person they marry. They often value personal qualities in a mate over religion and

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\(^{41}\) Sutherland, 138.

Towards the end of the twentieth century, in both India and in the United States, Hindus began signing up for matchmaking services as a substitute for, or complement to, their families’ efforts to arrange their marriages. One author of a study comparing matchmaking advertisements for Hindus in India versus Hindus in America made the following observation:

One would expect that five decades after independence in India, where exclusion or inclusion on the basis of caste and religion are illegal, a somewhat diminished emphasis would be placed on caste and religion in social contexts. However, it appears that in a traditional society such as India, old values die hard, especially in matters dealing with marriage and the choice of a mate. . . [I]ndividuals are keen on establishing preferred endogamous alliances regarding caste and religion, while their counterparts in North America are willing to largely forgo these traditional social concerns.44

According to this study, Hindus in America value qualities such as “caring and loving,” “appearance,” and “age” more than religion and caste.45 In addition, the author found that in India, relative to the United States, families wield much more social control over marriage. In the United States, individuals wield the control, influenced by Western concepts of freedom and individuality.46 It is still common for a man to ask his family to arrange a marriage for him in India. However, both men and women appear to be exercising greater choice in their marital lives, with arranged marriage as only one of many options. With the influx of on-line social networks and dating services in the first decade of the


44 Ibid., 111.


46 Ryali, 113-114; Wong, A-41.
twenty-first century, it is apparent that greater numbers of young Hindu-Americans are taking their matrimonial lives into their own hands.\footnote{There are websites dedicated to Hindu matchmaking as well as sites for more general audiences that allow individuals to specify that they would like to meet a Hindu mate. Most of these sites are geared toward the couple themselves (e.g., “Choose: I am a man seeking a woman OR I am a woman seeking a man) and not towards parents or family-members arranging matches. However, in the feedback sections of the sites there are comments from parents who appear to have had success setting up their children via the web-based service. For examples, see Hindufaces.com, imatchup.com/Hindu.html, hinduconnections.com, platinum.match.com/online-dating/Georgia/Atlanta/hindu/singles.html, accessed 28 August 2010.}

Parents, the traditional authorities and matchmakers for their Hindu children, show signs of reforming their views. A founding member of a Hindu temple makes the following observation regarding the shifting expectations of Hindu parents regarding marriage:

When it is time to marry your son or daughter, caste is the first thought that goes through your mind. Pretty soon, you realize it’s not going to work. First, you think, any girl from Tamilnadu is OK, then any girl from South India is OK, then any girl from India is OK, then, finally, you say any good girl is OK.\footnote{Sutherland, 125.}

Some Hindu priests are also reforming their practices regarding marriage, as evidenced by Asian religions scholar Gail Hinich Sutherland. There are not many studies on religious intermarriage of Hindus in America; fortunately however, in 2003, Sutherland published her findings from research she conducted on marriage and wedding ceremonies of Hindus in Houston, Texas. Sutherland observed and compared two Hindu weddings – one between two Hindus, the other between a Hindu and a non-Hindu. She also drew conclusions regarding some of the effects of Hindu intermarriage on the Hindu religious community in Houston.

The priest who conducted the Hindu interfaith wedding was a woman who had spent six months translating nuptial mantras into English in order to serve a growing population of Hindus who sought to have Western-style weddings – some marrying other Hindus, others
seeking to marry non-Hindus. The weddings she performs are much shorter in length than traditional Hindu weddings and emphasize the equal roles of the man and the woman – a marked turn from traditional marriage theology that emphasizes the serious transformation of the woman’s identity into the half-body of her husband. Sutherland describes this as follows:

Thus . . . the archaic patrilineal references and, unique to Hinduism, all of the symbolism of a wife’s bodily transformation into the substance of her husband have been left out [of this interfaith wedding ceremony], in favor of the discourse of complementary symmetry [between the man and woman].

Religious intermarriages in Houston, and likely in other cities with sizable Hindu populations, are affecting change in their religious communities. Sutherland found that since there is no formal means of conversion to Hinduism, some leaders in the Hindu community are beginning “to think about new bases for reproducing Hinduism and stable families that do not depend on Indian ethnicity.” She also found that while there is “a perceived need in the community to preserve conventional Hindu signs of identity through endogamy . . . [and] ‘traditional’ gender roles,” there are also “increasing pressures . . . to accommodate ethnic and religious intermarriage [and] the contemporary American context of blurred gender roles.”

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49 Ibid., 136.


51 Sutherland, 137.

52 Ibid., 126.

53 Ibid., 126.
These examples of how Paul Numrich’s observations manifest themselves in the Muslim and Hindu communities illustrate that interfaith marriages are not only affecting change with Christian and Jewish religious authorities who have wrestled with these questions for decades, but are also affecting change with religious authorities in newer immigrant communities. These communities are only beginning to be exposed to the long-term effects of religious intermarriage on their traditions. It is by observing interfaith marriages that one can observe the actual movement and transformation that is occurring in America’s religious landscape. The ways that interfaith marriages are affecting extended families and more broadly, religious communities and religious traditions, illuminate an aspect of why and how this transformation is occurring.

The Emergence of Interfaith Space

Through the lens of interfaith marriage, one can recognize the continual change and transformation not only of marriage but also religion in America. Martin E. Marty, author of over 50 books on American religion and the Fairfax M. Cone Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus at the University of Chicago Divinity School, affirms the historical changes and the newness that contemporary religious intermarriages reveal. In a brief article called “Embrace the New” in Christian Century (2000) he writes the following:

Forty years ago the marriage of a Protestant and a Catholic meant an epochal jolt for two families. Thirty years ago Jewish-Christian marriages caused upheaval. Both now are commonplace. Twenty years ago the influx of Asians and their presence in collegiate life lead to many East-West marriages. Ten years ago we looked around and found that more marriages than not seem to involve gnostics and agnostics, indifferent and somewhat-different, nonobservant and semi-observant. Now, as the Muslim population surges, there are thousands of ‘my daughter-in-law is Muslim’ stories, and they are soon to be taken for granted. . . . These options are at war in the mind while the heart more simply reaches out. . . . So I picture the expansive love of
God reaching beyond the circle of explicit Christians, even ‘anonymous’ Christians, but I am not going to write a dogmatic dogmatics text on the theme.

For now I’ll keep the systematic theology questions in the back of my mind and do what thousands, millions, of families do: embrace the changes, embrace the new.\textsuperscript{54}

Throughout this dissertation, I have explained the “changes” and historical dynamics to which Marty refers. An era of intra-religious marriage morphed into one of interreligious marriage. In the early-twenty-first century, there are signs that interreligious marriage is transforming into an era of interfaith marriage. Individuals in religious intermarriages push the boundaries of what has historically separated Catholics from Protestants and Christians from Jews, Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists.

As I have shown and as Martin E. Marty affirms in his brief commentary, interfaith marriages are material representations of the shifting boundaries among religions and between religious and secular space – they exist in a new space that overlaps, straddles, and redefines the circles of religious traditions and white secular space. This new space does not exist in isolation. As interfaith families solve problems and build bridges between their families and communities, broad-based change is set in motion. This new space – this Interfaith Space – not only defies normative parameters, it also creates change and transformation in American religion.

I capitalize Interfaith Space in order to delineate it as a formal category of exploration, one that is beginning to, but has not received much attention in the academy historically. Interfaith marriages are an indicator of a broader arena that is emerging in the American religious landscape. This is an arena that not only includes individuals in interfaith marriages, but also their children, their close friends and family, their spiritual leaders and/or

those groups and organizations that inform and support their interfaith lives. The Interfaith Space promises to have profound effects on our understanding of religion in America. Because the Interfaith Space embodies core characteristics that appear to be growing and increasingly influential in shaping American religion, scholars of religious pluralism would do well to “embrace the new,” as Marty advises, by considering Interfaith Space in their work.

Based upon the insights from interfaith marriages, there are at least four characteristics of the people, families, and organizations that are or could be a part of this Interfaith Space. First, the Interfaith Space is an arena where people exercise their religious freedom to pick, choose, and pro-actively create religious and spiritual lives that meet their needs. They are cognizant of, but not bound by, the traditional or normative parameters of religious traditions. Second, the Interfaith Space is an arena where people can be classified as religious, spiritual, and secular. They embrace religion and spirituality in only certain areas of their lives. Third, those people who align with the Interfaith Space do not assume religious superiority; rather, they adopt inclusivist and/or pluralistic theological ideas that not only help them reconcile religious diversity in their lives, but also allow them to see the value of religious diversity in their lives. Fourth, in the Interfaith Space, patterns of affiliation with a religious institution are highly non-traditional. Individuals, families, and the organizations to which they belong may identify, affiliate, and/or be involved with a religious community, two or more religious communities, or no religious community at all. Individuals in families are likely to be involved in different communities and have different levels of involvement. In the Interfaith Space, religious identity, affiliation, and community-involvement are piecemeal, complex, and largely in flux.
This is a new space, one that overlaps, collides with, and affects religious traditions, but exists separately. As this is a new and emerging space, there are limited organizational and institutional resources within it; however, my hypothesis is that over time, as more people and families fill this space, there will be organizations, communities, and fora that emerge to meet the needs of these people and families. According to the interviewees, the Unitarian Universalist church is one example of a community that has moved into the Interfaith Space. Unitarian Universalists describe themselves as follows:

Unitarian Universalism is a caring, open-minded religion that encourages seekers to follow their own spiritual paths. Our faith draws on many religious sources, welcoming people with different beliefs. We are united by shared values, not by creed or dogma.55

In their explanation of Unitarian Universalist beliefs and values, they begin with the following explanation:

Unitarian Universalism is a theologically diverse religion in which members support one another in our individual search for truth and meaning. . . . Interfaith families often find that Unitarian Universalist congregations are a good fit for them.56

The Interfaith Family Project (IFFP) is another example of an organization that would fit into the Interfaith Space. As one interviewee explains, the IFFP offers people and families who identify with both Judaism and Christianity a forum for community interaction and religious education. In describing the people and families they attract, The Interfaith Family Project of the Greater Washington D.C. Area highlights that they serve people who are religious and not religious, Jewish and Christian, and Jewish or Christian; their description is an example of how communities in this new Interfaith Space are blurring the


56 Emphasis mine. Ibid.
normative boundaries not only between religious traditions, but also between religious and secular ideas of marriage and family-life.

Our community includes those who continue to practice a faith, and those who do not. Many IFFP parents have chosen not to select one religion for their children, but rather to instill in them an appreciation and understanding of both heritages. Other IFFP parents have chosen one religion for their children but want them to gain knowledge about both of their cultural heritages. 57

When I say Interfaith Space, I am not referring to a space that brings together people, families, and religious leaders who clearly align with one singular religious tradition. On the contrary, I am referring to people, families, religious/spiritual leaders, and/or institutions and organizations that literally embody different traditions – people who live at the intersections of religions and at the intersections of the religious and secular. For example, a Christian-Hindu couple, and their daughter who they are raising in both traditions, may join a reading group designed for people and families who see themselves as Christian and Hindu. Each month, the reading group comes together to discuss select passages from the Vedas and from the Bible. Perhaps their daughter attends a non-religious public charter school that advertises that they value religious diversity and offer children multiple courses in world religions and cultures. On the weekends, the Christian mother may go to a meditation session at a local church that draws upon practices and mantras from a variety of Eastern religious traditions. In this example, the reading group, the school, and the meditation session, as well as the individuals and families who partake in these activities, would align with the Interfaith Space.

The term ‘interfaith’ is often used generically in American public life. For this reason, just as I am not wholly satisfied with the term interfaith marriage, I am not wholly

satisfied with the name Interfaith Space. However, these terms will be sufficient for my current purpose which is to describe important and emerging dynamics in marriage and religion. My goal is to create a discussion surrounding these dynamics; ideally, in the course of time, and through productive scholarship and discourse on the Interfaith Space, either new terms will emerge and/or the generic nature of the term interfaith will dissipate. In the meanwhile, it is necessary for me to clarify how my definition of Interfaith Space differs from current uses of the term.

Many events or organizations are called ‘interfaith’ either formally or informally because they offer a collaborative forum for people who are a part of a distinct religious community to come together for a common purpose. In April 2006, Georgetown University, the Comunità di Sant’Egidio, the Archdiocese of Washington, and the Catholic University of America co-sponsored an International Prayer for Peace. This is often referred to as a very important interfaith event. “Prominent witnesses and representatives of the world’s great religions . . . meet in order to address issues together.”58 The Pluralism Project at Harvard University has a section of their website where they list ‘interfaith’ organizations.”59 The Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC) is one example of dozens of organizations on the list. The mission of the IFYC is to build “mutual respect and pluralism among young people from different religious traditions by empowering them to work together to serve others.”60 These


are only a couple examples of how ‘interfaith’ is often used generically to refer to events or organizations that bring people and/or representatives from the world’s religions together.

While these events and organizations reflect the value associated with bringing religious communities together for common purposes, they are on the peripheral of what I am referring to as Interfaith Space because they attract people who actively participate in a religious tradition. Their objective is to bring together people who represent, embrace, and follow the normative parameters of a religion, not necessarily people who, by my definition of interfaith, defy the normative parameters of religious traditions and notions of what is ‘religious’ versus ‘secular’ behavior.

As I discussed in Chapter 1, Peter Phan provides an explanation of why people with multiple religious belonging do not fit within the paradigm of interfaith dialogue. This helps to substantiate my point.

Indeed, interreligious dialogue . . . militates against multiple religious belonging because it requires as a matter of methodology that participants in interreligious or interfaith dialogue preserve their distinctive religious doctrines and practices and show how these are not only similar to but also different from those of other religions. 61

The Interfaith Space is an arena where “participants” do not “preserve their distinctive religious doctrines and practices.” Interfaith marriages not only bridge religious traditions, but bridge notions of secular and religious belief, practice, and community-involvement. The Interfaith Space is the arena where interfaith marriages are normative. It is also an arena that provides room for diverse religious beliefs, practices, and forms of community involvement to co-exist, reform, change, and expand.

Sociological data reveal that the Interfaith Space may be growing. It appears as if there are a number of Americans who may fall into the space, even if they are not in an interfaith marriage. Studies show that more Americans are ignoring the boundaries of their traditions and are exercising their freedom to pick and choose religious beliefs and practices from an array of religious traditions. For example, 22% of American Christians believe in reincarnation, a Hindu and Buddhist theological belief. The Barna Group, a research organization that does studies on religion and culture, reported that 71% of American adults “are more likely to develop their own set of religious beliefs than to accept a defined set of teachings from a particular church.” This number increases for 18 to 25 year olds.

Studies also reveal that Americans are using the term spiritual to describe their religious identity. In a 2005 survey conducted by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, over 34% of the Americans sampled described themselves as “spiritual but not religious.” The Social Science Research Center has a task-force dedicated to Spirituality, Political Engagement, and Public Life to explore the growing phenomenon that sociologist Ruth Braunstein summarizes as follows: “Many young adults seem to be moving away from organized religion while simultaneously trying desperately to connect with their spirituality.”

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Other studies reveal that the majority of Americans do not hold theologically exclusivist views; they believe that there is truth and salvation in religions other than their own. A December 2008 PEW study indicates that 52% of American Christians believe that a non-Christian religion (Judaism, Islam, and Hinduism, for example) can lead to eternal salvation. In other words, these Christians do not believe that salvation is only through Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{66}

Finally, since the late 1980s, one of the most significant trends regarding religious identity and affiliation is the emergence of the ‘Unaffiliated’ or ‘Nones.’ According to the 2008 PEW U.S. Religious Landscape survey, while 92% of Americans “believe in God or a universal spirit,” fewer than 84% affiliate with a religious tradition.\textsuperscript{67} The fourth largest “religious” group in the country is the Unaffiliated who make up 16.1% of the population. Over a quarter of adults under 30 years old are Unaffiliated.\textsuperscript{68} Data from the American Religious Identification Surveys (ARIS) indicates strong growth since the late-1980s in the numbers of people who do not formally affiliate with a religious tradition. In 1990 this group made up 8.1% of the adult population; in 2001 the percentage jumped to 14.1%.\textsuperscript{69} These


\textsuperscript{67} PEW Forum on Religion and Public Life, \textit{U.S. Religious Landscape Survey}, 7, 162.

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., 7.

studies indicate that there may be increasing numbers of Americans who explicitly or tacitly align with Interfaith Space.

I hypothesize that there will likely be more institutional forms within the Interfaith Space as it grows and more Americans and American families move outside the normative parameters of religious traditions. These institutional forms may result from efforts by existing religious communities to serve better the needs of those in the Interfaith Space; and/or, there may be new organizations and service-providers that enter the American religious marketplace to meet the needs of those in the Interfaith Space. The United States is a nation of innovators – people who have a history of capitalizing on new opportunities. As more people and families move into the Interfaith Space, there will be greater opportunities to provide them with spiritual, religious, and communal services that meet their needs. Newsletters like Dovetail, groups like the IFFP, and the myriad of websites dedicated to offering outlets for young people considering interfaith dating and marriage, are harbingers for an explosion of new institutional and organizational resources in the Interfaith Space. If and when new fora within Interfaith Space emerge, it will become much easier for scholars of religion to identify, dialogue with, study, and understand the people and families who have these characteristics.


Implications for the Study of Religious Pluralism in America

Across the academy, scholars are studying religious pluralism. In Christian theology, studies on theology of religions, comparative theology/religion, and interreligious dialogue explore the relationship between Christianity and other religious traditions. In the social sciences, studies on secularization theory, religion and democracy, and American civil religion often explore the relationship between religions, religious diversity, and secular arenas of American public life. Based upon the historical evolution of religious intermarriage, the experiences of contemporary interfaith couples and families, and the emergence of an Interfaith Space in the American religious landscape, I argue in this final section that scholars of religious pluralism would do well to formally consider the Interfaith Space in their work. Since the Interfaith Space defies as well as influences the normative boundaries of religious traditions, it is likely to affect the work of theology. Since the Interfaith Space defies and influences the normative bounds of the religious versus the secular, it is likely to affect the work of social scientists. In Chapter 1, I provided an overview of the various forms of theological and sociological scholarship on religious pluralism. It is now appropriate to understand how the recognition of this new Interfaith Space may affect scholarship in these various arenas.

Theologians – Relationships among Identifiable and Distinct Religious Traditions

Theology of Religions: Truth Outside of Christianity

Scholars of Christian theology of religions wrestle with how it is that God’s salvific will is universal, and yet, salvation is uniquely and absolutely only in Jesus Christ.\(^7\)

Hick answers this by developing epistemological rationale that Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism “constitute different ways of experiencing, conceiving and living in relation to an ultimate divine Reality which transcends all of varied visions of it.” When human beings practice Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, or Buddhism, or connect with Yahweh, Jesus, Allah, Brahman, or nirvana, they are experiencing varied visions of God, universal transcendence, or what Hick calls “the Real.” This Hickian pluralistic hypothesis provides an explanation for the co-existence of multiple religions, enabling all of them to be potentially true. Many Christian theologians reject this interpretation as relativistic or syncretistic and pose theologically exclusivist or inclusivist positions that put more emphasis on the uniqueness of Christ. The documents of the Second Vatican Council, including but not limited to Nostra Aetate, open the door to the potential for truth and salvation in other religious traditions, but hail Christianity as the most efficient means of salvation.

Interfaith Space, as understood in the experiences of individuals in interfaith marriages, challenges the predominant paradigm for scholarship on theology of religions. The discipline of theology of religions is built upon the idea that the normative parameters that I outlined in Chapter 5 are essential pillars of religious traditions and cannot be easily compromised without compromising the integrity of the tradition itself. Interfaith Space, by definition, pushes, changes, and often ignores these normative parameters. There are many individuals who identify as Christian, but do not believe that Jesus is the unique savior. They reject the idea that their spouse, who is not Christian, is any further from truth, God, or

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salvation than Christians. They reject any notion of hell. Very often they do not worry that marrying outside the church or forgoing Christian baptism for their children will have deleterious effects on their lives. While it would be all too easy to dismiss this growing group of Americas as ‘not religious’ or ‘secular,’ this is not an accurate description. It is not uncommon for these people in the Interfaith Space to believe in God, pray to Jesus, and/or attend church and participate in a Christian community. This is the nature of the Interfaith Space – it defies the boundaries not only among religious traditions, but also between the religious and secular sphere.

I contend that the discipline of theology of religions cannot ignore Interfaith Space. My reasons are fourfold: First, Interfaith Space, as seen in the phenomenon of marriage, is affecting change in families, religious communities, and religious traditions. To ignore it would be to ignore the future of a growing population of Christians. Second, Interfaith Space, as seen in the phenomenon of marriage, provides new insights into how people are adjusting theologies to not only accommodate religious difference, but to embrace religious difference. What theologians wrestle with, many of these people in interfaith marriages are accepting very naturally – religions have important values, but do not need to be exclusive to retain those values.

Third, Interfaith Space is multi-religious. It embodies, by definition, theories of multiple belonging and religious hybridity that involve Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and a range of other religious traditions. The work of Peter Phan and Catherine Cornille on multiple belonging and Jeannine Hill Fletcher on hybrid identity falls squarely
into the Interfaith Space; it provides a foundation for further research. As the relationship among religions is the business of theology of religions, exploration of this space should prove to be beneficial. Fourth, Interfaith Space provides a window into modern phenomena like religious indifference and secularization. These phenomena create resounding concern not only for Christian theologians, but religious scholars and leaders in many religious traditions. Because the people and families in this space are not wholly removed from religion, and yet are not wholly associated with it in traditional ways, they provide a bridge between the religious and the secular world.

**Interreligious Dialogue in Theory and Practice: Areas of Convergence and Divergence**

I also propose that those involved in comparative scholarship and interreligious dialogue, also consider the Interfaith Space in their work. In a November 17, 2010 lecture by Gregory Baum, a prominent theologian who was instrumental in the Second Vatican Council’s work on *Nostra Aetate*, he argued that “interreligious dialogue must include critical reference to the Enlightenment and the challenge of modernity.” All religions are affected by Enlightenment-thinking, including science, democracy, and religious liberty. These are the forces that are changing the world. Dialogue or engagement with these modern realities has the potential to shift mindsets within religious communities. In the nineteenth century the Catholic Church rejected religious liberty; in the twentieth-century it embraced religious

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liberty through the idea of human dignity. This development or change happens in all religions, he explained. Baum’s final plea was the following: “We must dialogue with critics of religion – those in the tradition of the Enlightenment.”

Dialogue with people in the Interfaith Space is a way to engage modernity, not run from it as Baum warned. One of the core characteristics of individuals in interfaith marriages is that they feel free to pick and choose elements of religion(s) to incorporate into their lives. They also take an individualistic approach to religion which means that the family is no longer required to be unified in their religious beliefs, practices, or involvement with religious communities. This type of behavior can be traced to Enlightenment thinking. By inviting people from the Interfaith Space to the dialogue-table, so to speak, Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, and other religious leaders will have the opportunity to better understand how modernity is affecting individuals, their families, and their communities.

**Social Scientists – Relationships between Religious and Secular Spheres of Society**

Where theologians evaluate religious diversity from the vantage point of their own ideal system of beliefs, practices, and religious values, social scientists stand outside of religion in order to understand its effects and influences on society. Secularization, political consensus building, and the religious identity of the nation are three primary areas where religious diversity is of particular interest in their work. The Interfaith Space will become increasingly important in these types of scholarship.

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Secularization Theory: The Place of Religion in American Society

Historically, scholars of secularization theory argued that religious diversity would lead to the slow demise of religion. Many sociologists such as Peter Berger have changed their position on secularization, as it has become evident that in the United States and in many regions of the world, religion not only exists, but is flourishing. José Casanova’s book *Public Religions in the Modern World* has become a seminal text in establishing that religion is alive and well in the public sphere. And yet, at the same time, there is overwhelming evidence, as shown in Charles Taylor’s *A Secular Age*, that Western society, including but not limited to those in the United States, sees religion as optional. According to Taylor, in contemporary society there is a “milieu in which unbelief is close to being the default solution.”

It seems reasonable that Interfaith Space, as I have defined it here, offers a lens into these dynamics. The predominant project for sociologists of religion is not to gauge *whether* religion in the twenty-first century is on its way in or out, but rather, to understand *how* religion is changing in an era characterized by both religious fervor and religious indifference. The Interfaith Space promises to be an arena rich with insight for sociologists. Religious affiliation patterns and the growing groups of Unaffiliated, Nones, and Spiritual But Not Religious are arenas that are becoming increasingly important to the discipline of sociology of religion. As interfaith marriages reveal, the effects of religious diversity within a marriage and family do not necessarily lead to the abandonment of religion or the


78 See *The Immanent Frame*, [http://ssrc.org](http://ssrc.org) for up-to-date discourse on topics related to sociology of religion.
embrace of a secular life; rather, they often are a mix of both. This mix of both involves associations and disassociations with religion and spirituality in a range of manifestations.

Religion and Democracy: Consensus in a Religiously Plural Public Arena

Scholars of American democracy are also very interested in religious pluralism, as evidenced by the work of John Rawls and Jeffrey Stout. Rawls asks in *Political Liberalism* how it is “possible that there can be a stable and just society whose free and equal citizens are deeply divided by conflicting and even incommensurable religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines?” Rawls suggests that a “process” of “overlapping consensus” occurs when people who hold different worldviews and make different truth claims come to agreement on certain issues. They may not agree on religious beliefs or the nature of God, but they do agree on basic questions of justice, for example. The Interfaith Space has the potential to be a rich resource for understanding the processes in which people, families, and communities who literally embody different religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines go through in order to reach consensus on key issues that are important to them.

Questions regarding the role or religious discourse in American public life continue to challenge scholars of American democracy. In *Democracy and Tradition*, Jeffrey Stout makes an argument as to why religious discourse must be woven into democratic debate and how this can be accomplished in a way that welcomes, yet does not privilege religion. He suggests that there is a common “ethical discourse” in American public life that can be found

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80 Ibid., 154-159.

in neither “an authoritarian form of traditionalism” nor “an antireligious form of liberalism.” Stout provides a model for understanding that democratic discourse is not religious or secular, but a partnership between the two. His book has been critiqued, however, for not explaining exactly how this alliance of the religious and secular manifests in public discourse. The late philosopher, priest, and professor Michael J. Kerlin hopes that Stout writes another book on “a specific thorny topic, say abortion . . . ” to illustrate how the model he suggests works in practice. Studies that explore the democratic processes inside the Interfaith Space would help to illuminate the ways in which religious and secular discourse coalesce in interfaith families, communities, and organizations.

Scholarship that focuses on the Interfaith Space and its connection to American democracy has already begun to take place. In a 2007 article for The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, Kate McCarthy explores the ways in which the practices of interfaith families “transfer to the work of citizenship in civil society.” In an important book published in 2005 on the effects of religious diversity on the American nation, Robert Wuthnow incorporated research from religious intermarriages into his analysis. As more organizations form to meet the needs of individuals and families in

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82 Stout, Democracy and Tradition, 6-10.


the Interfaith Space, they promise to provide a wealth of insight into the processes of American democracy inside these organizations.

**American Civil Religion: National Religious Identity**

The Interfaith Space also promises to influence scholarship on American civil religion. William Herberg recognized a shift in the civil religion from Protestant-dominated to Protestant-Catholic-Jew in the early-twentieth century. Robert Bellah described an “American Civil Religion” as a “religious tradition” that stands alongside the particular religions of American citizens, drawing upon the characteristics of republican government. Casanova argues that in the future our notion of American civil religion will be dominated by public religions — those religious traditions that take prominent roles in influencing politics and the tenor of public life. Catholicism and Evangelical Protestantism have emerged as public religions; Casanova predicts that at some point Islam may as well. Others like Diana Eck and Barbara McGraw perceive of American civil religion as defined by religious diversity; they contend that religious liberty and religious difference have been a source of American strength. In his 2009 inaugural speech, President Barack Obama expressed this religious diversity by providing a list of religious communities that are a part of American life. He listed Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, and non-believers. This list does not capture, however, the growing group of Americans who do not align with any of these categories — who are not simply Christian or Jewish or Muslim or Hindu or a non-believer, but oftentimes are a combination of two or more of these categories.

This leads to another alternative for defining American civil religion, one that could, in my estimation, emerge as a force in American public life. It is possible that an interfaith persona may emerge for the nation — a persona that represents the *embodiment* of religious
diversity, versus a list of distinct religious traditions. In a future inaugural address, for example, a President may describe America as a nation of people and families who identify with many religious and spiritual ideas from traditions around the world. The President may emphasize the relationship between religious liberty, religious choice, religious tolerance, and this interfaith persona. He or she may also be able to describe America as a place where the boundaries that once separated religious people from non-religious people and religious traditions from one another have become less rigid.

If the Interfaith Space continues to expand, an American civil religion characterized by an interfaith persona may emerge. These dynamics exist in contemporary American society, as seen in the lives of interfaith families and in the lives of some prominent families in American public life. President Obama himself embodies interfaith identity. He is Christian. However, his mother was the equivalent of what some today may call Spiritual But Not Religious. His father, largely absent, was an African Muslim. As a child, Obama lived in Indonesia for many years, the largest Muslim nation. As an adult, Obama was exposed to Christianity through his community work in Chicago and later embraced Christianity. In his campaign he emphasized his Christian identity; however, soon after he was elected he reached out to the Muslim world in a speech in Egypt, referencing his exposure to Islam and his appreciation for Muslim societies around the world.

There are other important figures in American public life that have an interfaith persona. Robert P. George is a professor of law at Princeton University and was named “the country’s most influential conservative Christian thinker” by The New York Times. He is a Catholic who is married to a Jewish woman. He has very close ties with evangelical Protestant religious-political constituencies throughout the country. His home life and
professional life stretch across the boundaries of religious traditions, as his beliefs about gay marriage and abortion, for example draw upon conservative Catholic, Jewish, and Protestant traditions. He claims that these principles are not Christian or religious principles, but are universal principles based upon natural law.\footnote{David D. Kirkpatrick, “The Conservative-Christian Big Thinker,” \textit{The New York Times} (20 Dec. 2009), http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/20/magazine/20george-t.html? r=1, accessed 4 Jan. 2010.}

The religious intermarriage of Chelsea Clinton and Marc Mezvinsky is also significant for the emergence of an interfaith component in American public life and America’s civil religion. Chelsea is a Methodist and Marc is a Conservative Jew. While the details of their wedding and their intentions for the role of religion in their lives have been kept out of the press, the interreligious component of their marriage announcement garnered a lot of media attention. Sally Quinn, who writes the column “On Faith” for the \textit{Washington Post}, heralds the link between the Interfaith Space and the American nation:

Knowing what we do of Chelsea and Marc, it seems likely that the spiritual aspect of their wedding will be carefully thought out. Bringing couples together when their families come from different religious traditions is very American.\footnote{Emphasis mine. Sally Quinn, “Chelsea Clinton and Marc Mezvinsky: Our National Joy,” \textit{The Washington Post} (30 July 2010), http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/sally_quinn/2010/07/chelsea_clinton_and_marc_mezvinsky_our_national_joy.html, accessed 10 Dec. 2010.}

\textbf{Conclusion}

Religious intermarriage was once theologically, legally, and socially prohibited in the Christian West. However, in early-twenty-first-century America, such unions are not only more common, but much more socially acceptable. During the Protestant Reformation, Luther and Calvin introduced new biblical interpretations of religious intermarriage, opening...
the Christian theological doors to the possibility of such unions. The men and women who would come to Calvin’s court in Geneva to inquire about the validity of their intermarriages, were pushing the conventional bounds of what marriage meant in Christianity. Through their issues and inquires, they offered the Reformed theologians and lawyers of the sixteenth century an opportunity to scrutinize biblical texts anew. These early pioneers of religious intermarriage also gave theologians an opportunity to discuss, through the medium of marriage, their relationship to the religious other. For Calvin, marriage of a Protestant to a Catholic was much more acceptable than marriage of a Protestant to a Jew or a Muslim, for example. Along with earlier Catholic and Reformed theologians, the Anglican commonwealth model of marriage introduced a number of ideas to the early American settlers that linked the institution of marriage and the well-being of civil society. Despite the eventual legal disestablishment of religion in America, the strong connection of Christian marriage to the health of society has continued into the twenty-first century.

From the beginning of the republic in the late-eighteenth century, the citizens of the United States have had an ingrained respect for the pursuit of happiness, have esteemed religious liberty, and have experienced what it is like to live among people of different ethnic and religious backgrounds. Because of these American characteristics, intermarriage has always been a temptation. For some communities, it remains highly taboo. However, for many others, it has become a common reality. This change is due to important shifts in the religious landscape and the institution of marriage. In the early-nineteenth century, a Protestant hegemony dominated American civil religion. In these Protestant communities as well as in minority Catholic and Jewish communities, the church or synagogue proved central to one’s life and one’s family. This made religious authorities powerful voices in the lives of
Americans. Marriage was considered a religious affair, a covenant or sacrament meant to bond a couple to God and to their particular religious community. Women played an important role in upholding religious traditions in ongoing family life. Marriage was not separate from one’s religion, one’s family, or one’s religious community; on the contrary, it was integral to all of these aspects of life. In general, there was often distrust and contempt among the Protestant majorities and Catholic and Jewish minorities who lived in separate communities. The highly religious nature of marriage and the exclusivity of religious communities made religious intermarriage quite difficult.

However, through the centuries the boundaries between and among religions and between secular and religious forms of marriage and family-life shifted. The American religious landscape diversified. Religious authority moved from church and synagogue communities to individuals and couples. Marriage became increasingly associated with love and freedom. The role of women changed in society. And, individuals from the Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish traditions interacted more and embraced their common American identity. The societal doors to intermarriage slowly opened and an era of ‘intra-religious’ marriage in the nineteenth century shifted to one of ‘inter-religious’ marriage by the mid-twentieth century. In the late-twentieth century, an influx of immigrants from around the world, in combination with culture wars that split conservatives and liberals along religious-secular lines, made religious intermarriages more common, more diverse, and more complex.

Contemporary religious intermarriages reveal that a new era in intermarriage and perhaps in American civil religion is dawning. As the experiences of the 43 individuals and couples interviewed relay, these marriages bridge multiple religious communities and bridge normative conceptions of what constitutes a religious versus a secular marriage and family-
life. These individuals and couples exercise vast creative freedom in picking and choosing beliefs and practices from various traditions. They distinguish between spirituality and religion in order to explain different paths to God. They celebrate the value of religious diversity over religious unity, seeking to expose their children to many religions. They no longer affiliate with religious communities in traditional ways. The people in these marriages could too simply be labeled ‘not religious’ – when in reality, their lives do not defy religion, but introduce new forms of it. These are ‘interfaith’ marriages. I hypothesize that interfaith marriages point to an emerging arena in the American religious landscape – the Interfaith Space.

I do not pass judgment as to whether the increase in religious intermarriages and the changing forms of religion they introduce are good or bad, deleterious to the future of religion in America, or the salvation of it. On the contrary, I have merely sought to describe religious intermarriage as a growing and changing phenomenon in the American religious landscape. My primary plea is that scholars of religious pluralism consider the Interfaith Space in their work. Fortunately, there has already been vast scholarship on religious intermarriage to which new studies will contribute. Additionally, in the last two decades there has also been a rise in sociological studies on disaffiliation, spirituality, and patchwork religion that provide a foundation for new studies on the Interfaith Space.88 In the realm of

theology, past studies on syncretism as well as contemporary theories on hybridity and multiple belonging will also play an important role in informing new scholarship. 89

Moving forward, it is my estimation, based on the insight from interfaith marriages and the broader trends in American religion, that social scientists would do well to make the Interfaith Space a category or subject to house existing and new studies on spirituality, secularization, and American civil religion, for example. Theologians who seek clarity regarding the relationship between Christianity and the world’s religions would be remiss to ignore the Interfaith Space as well. While it is not a religion, and by definition, straddles the religious and secular spheres, the people, families, and organizations that align with it are directly affecting Christian communities around the country. Often these people do not dismiss the value of religion. They only dismiss the value of embracing one particular religion to the exclusion of all others. In a word, they value religious diversity. Scholarship on and dialogue with individuals who do not represent religious traditions, but defy normative parameters of religion traditions, are likely to shed new light on how beliefs and practices associated with Christianity and religion (in general) are transforming in the lives of American people and their families.

By referring to the Interfaith Space (or whatever name becomes more appropriate) perhaps social scientists and theologians can enter into a common discourse on religious pluralism. As individuals, couples, and families blur the lines among religious traditions and

between the religious and secular spheres, perhaps the lines between theology and sociological scholarship on religion need to blur as well.

Interfaith marriages provide the ideal lens through which social scientists and theologians can observe the religious transformation that is taking place in America in the twenty-first century. Those Americans who have embarked on religious intermarriage are the vanguards of religious transformation. They push through the boundaries of their religious traditions and normative conceptions regarding religious beliefs, practices, and community-involvement in order to shape lives that work for them. As vanguards of transformation they are ahead of change, carving out new spaces in American religion. Their stories were once on the peripheral of American religious dynamics, now their stories are becoming the centerpiece of American religion.
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