

Eternity Be Damned? The Impact of Interfaith Vows

Introduction

Karen Marguerite Moloney

IN ANY RELIGION THAT stresses the importance of marriages between its members, choosing to marry someone of another faith is not a casual act. In fact, marrying outside the home faith is likely to incur serious opposition from family and friends—and can even make the person who does so a second-class citizen in his or her own church. At a minimum, interfaith marriage is likely to create—or increase—marital conflicts over such matters as church attendance, child rearing, and value and belief systems. In addition, Latter-day Saints must wrestle with the question of the eternal status of their marriage: does choosing to marry someone other than a Latter-day Saint effectively exclude one from exaltation—or even from the celestial kingdom? Does it mean that, no matter how deep the love or successful the marriage in this life, death dissolves the relationship, dooming two who became one to become two again—for all eternity? Or, assuming the Latter-day Saint has been faithful in every other way, will that person be “reassigned” to another spouse at some unknown point beyond death? Would he or she even *want* to be?

In view of such uncertainty, the Mormon spouse in an interfaith marriage may feel inordinate pressure to convert the non-Mormon spouse, sometimes imposing additional strain on their relationship.

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Alternately, in an effort to decrease areas of conflict, the Mormon spouse may modify his or her beliefs and religious practice, becoming in the process “less active,” and may even be drawn to leave Mormonism behind. But as thorny as these problems can be, Latter-day Saints who may have never intended to do so, continue to fall in love with persons of varying religious persuasions—and find that they must confront these issues for themselves.

The following essays are written by five individuals who have not only chosen to marry spouses who are not Mormon, but who approach their marriages from a rich variety of viewpoints. I applaud their willingness to examine their lives with us in such a public arena. Obviously, their experiences are relevant not only to persons involved in similar situations, but to all of us who struggle with the issue of difference in an intimate partner.

Eternity with a Dry-Land Mormon

Levi S. Peterson

I’VE HEARD THEM CALLED both dry Mormons and dry-land Mormons. They are people who live intimately among the Mormons without becoming members of the Church. They are a puzzling lot because they often behave so much like Mormons that it seems they could have no possible objection to baptism. I have been married to a dry-land Mormon since 1958. Althea came to BYU with a Mormon friend in 1953. The friend left after a quarter, but Althea stayed. She liked living among the Mormons but didn’t want to join the Church. As for our marriage of thirty-one years, I predict it will continue till one of us dies. The question I will address in this essay is whether Althea and I will be together in eternity.

I remember the misalignment between me and a serious-minded Mormon girl I was dating as I left on my mission in 1954. My aspiration ran toward a lifetime of exploring philosophy, art, and literature; hers toward raising a Latter-day Saint family with a man who, as she often said with fervor, honored his priesthood. Some months after I entered the mission field, it became evident I was not destined to be a man who

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