

confines of the temple and return them to the more democratic precincts of the ward chapel, where the ritual of wedding could work upon the hearts of jaded and sinful onlookers, reminding them of their own long-past and perhaps much-violated vows to love and cherish their chosen spouse.

I don't doubt the temple is a holy place. But many other places are holy too. Holiness is as wild and free as the pure air and uncorrupted water of a pristine wilderness. It is God's gift to all humanity. It is not to be seized upon, capitalistically, by a single group of people, however good and intelligent they may be, and subdivided and sold for the aggrandizement of their particular theology. I believe there was an immense holiness present on that Sunday morning when Bishop Ross Denham made Levi Peterson and Althea Sand husband and wife. I will affirm that holiness continues to characterize that marriage, because this couple exercises fidelity, mutual concession, kindness, and affection toward one another.

I believe that on resurrection morning there will be no soldier angels herding the unvaliant onto cattle cars for transportation to a lonely and eternal incarceration. On resurrection morning, God will dispose of the newly risen with astonishing mercy. He will restore me to my loved ones, to my mother and father, my brothers and sisters, and, of course, my wife. He will be indifferent to earthly rituals. He won't care whether I have been baptized, made a high priest, or wed in the temple.

A wedding announces a marriage, celebrates it, establishes its hope and ideal, but doesn't create it. The joy a couple has in one another's presence creates their marriage. I therefore believe that, if God grants Althea and me to participate in the miracle of the resurrection, he will also grant us the privilege of continuing our marriage. There will need be no other reason than that we have loved each other long and dearly.

## One View of Interfaith Marriage

*Karen Lewis*

FIVE YEARS AGO I would never have imagined that I would marry outside of the Church, let alone that I would discuss the experience in public.

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The number of people who will read this does not bother me as much as the thought that I may in some way be seen to represent a large but nebulous group of LDS spouses married to an equally nebulous group of non-LDS mates. Therefore, I will begin with this disclaimer: what I describe here is only my experience and should be generalized with caution. Rudyard Kipling expressed a parallel concept in his poem "When the Earth's Last Picture Is Painted." He described the activity of the righteous after death as if they were artists painting on a "ten-league canvas with brushes of comet's hair." The joy and the purpose of their creative activity was that "each, in his separate star, / Shall draw the Thing as he sees it / for the God of Things as They are!" Similarly, I shall describe the things that I happened to see and observe; and perhaps they will benefit someone; but after all, they are just things as I see them, and not necessarily things as they are.

The two major questions I will address are, "Why did I marry someone who was not LDS?" and "What was it like to be married to a non-LDS spouse?" A very quick summary of my reasons for marrying outside of the Church would be that I thought it was the right thing to do. But I suppose a few more details would be helpful.

Let me begin by describing myself. I was one of those kids who actually loved going to Primary and Sunday School. Even when my family went camping for a vacation, I would want my father to find us a church to go to on Sundays. One of my favorite books, once I learned to read, was *Egermeier's Bible Story Book*. I knew that I wanted to be married in the temple. I tried to build my whole life around the question: "What does God want me to do?"

The years went by, and somehow I was not finding my Prince Charming among the dapper young LDS lads. I stayed active in the Church, still looking and hoping. And then someone appeared who seemed highly compatible and qualified, except that he was not of the LDS faith. As I grew more emotionally attached to him, I did not feel that "eternity be damned," but rather that the match would be compatible with eternal principles. The following entry in my journal, written to a cousin about my decision to marry someone who was not LDS, accurately describes my feelings at the time:

Never fear. All is well. I am choosing wisely. I was brief in my initial communication with you due to time, and I am still fairly pressed, but I wanted to reassure you. I did not mention his "nonmemberedness" because that is only a small part of the total picture. In thought, word, and deed he acts "LDS"; the substance is there; the label may or may not ever come. . . . I am less likely to describe myself as "being in love" as I am to say that I have found a profound, comfortable, enlightening contentment. We're two people who enjoy each other's company, ideas, and spirituality—intensely. I feel very good about my

decision. Most people in the Church have a hard time understanding, though. Thank you for your trust in me. My one concern is that friends and relatives will perform the “faux pas” of treating him as not good enough unless he joins the Church. Non-judgmental acceptance is much more likely to accomplish that purpose than judgmental finger-pointing.

I suspect my thinking was influenced by a lovely story in C. S. Lewis’s *The Last Battle*. Lewis tells of a battle between the forces of the lion Aslan (a Christ figure) and of the vulture Tash (the Evil One). In this story, a young warrior who has always tried to honorably and faithfully serve Tash finally meets Aslan and realizes that he has spent his whole life serving the wrong master. The young man expects Aslan to kill him for his incorrect allegiance; but instead Aslan welcomes him into his kingdom, explaining that all good deeds, even when done in the name of Tash, are counted as service to Aslan, while all evil deeds, though done in the name of Aslan, are actually claimed by Tash.

This story made a lot of sense to me and seemed consistent with gospel teachings. I saw in my fiancé a young man who just had not been fortunate enough to have been born into the LDS church. He was very enthusiastic about the Church, very supportive of my attendance and participation, and said that he would be happy to raise our children in the LDS faith. What more could I ask for?

So I married him and had lots of interesting experiences. Let me start with the positive ones. I found that I was suddenly stripped of the protective and restrictive cocoon of almost total social interaction with Latter-day Saints. I had grown up in Chicago and had had many non-LDS neighbors, playmates, and classmates, but most of my social life revolved around the Church; my parents did not socialize often with non-LDS neighbors or business acquaintances. It was as if we lived in a microcosm of Provo, Utah, transplanted in the middle of Chicago. I was taught tolerance for, but not involvement with, other religions. Mark Twain once said something to the effect that what we can learn about a cat by walking down the street holding one by the tail is ten times more than we could ever learn just by standing at the side of the road watching someone else do so. There are many things that we may know intellectually and yet not truly understand until we have certain experiences.

So it was with my interaction with people of other religions. By attending other church services and by meeting dedicated members of other denominations, I discovered that there are a lot of good people in other churches—people trying to do God’s will and to live righteous lives. I had known that the Church had no monopoly on goodness, but I had somehow gotten the message that members of other churches were

immediate targets for missionary work, rather than people who were knowledgeable about spiritual matters.

I found myself spiritually moved by many of these church services and by the unselfish examples of Christian service and love that I found among the members of these different congregations. I discovered that Baptists have extremely enthusiastic services, that Catholic services are full of pageantry, and that most people don't talk during their church services. I have pleasant memories of one Episcopalian service where the priest ended his sermon by hugging everyone in the congregation. He conveyed such a warm spirit of love that I wasn't *too* embarrassed. These and other positive experiences convinced me that Christians (and I include Latter-day Saints under that title) spend too much time trying to convince one another of the errors of their separate ways and not enough time trying to understand each other and searching for ways to become allies in their struggles against evil.

I have noticed that my new attitudes towards other denominations have changed the ways in which I respond to people. Several months ago, a workman in my house noticed some of my LDS books and asked, "Are you a Church member?" A few years ago I would have quickly replied, "Why, yes!" This time I hesitatingly answered, "Do you mean of the *LDS* church?" I prefer to see this not as a weakening of my faith, but rather that I am more comfortable with and less defensive of my beliefs and therefore am able to accept the fact that other truth-seeking people believe differently from the way I do.

During the time of my marriage, the most influential person in my non-LDS religious life was the minister of the Presbyterian church where my husband and I attended regularly. As a young man, this minister had lost his right hand in an accident. He must have come to grips early with the decision that he would use this tragedy to improve rather than ruin his life, because he was an extremely optimistic, forceful, and sensitive individual. He did not hide his handicap, and I am sure it must have been a highly effective tool in counseling people, especially those with imaginary woes. It's embarrassing to complain about minor problems when you're looking at a man with only one hand.

This minister fully accepted me and never treated me as though I were strange or different, as some members of that congregation seemed to. He would have been more than happy to talk to me about my religious beliefs but he never pressured me to change. Because of that, if I had allowed anyone to sway me from my LDS belief structure, he would have been the one. Those who have ears to hear, let them hear.

Not all was smooth sailing, though, as evidenced by the fact that I am currently divorced. It is very difficult to try to be objective about a

situation in which one has been emotionally involved. I also want to avoid a public complaining session. However, part of our marital conflicts did involve church-related issues that profoundly affected me. Let me describe them as best I can.

My husband found out quickly that because he was a "nonmember," he was not completely acceptable to many LDS people. For example, soon after we moved into a ward, we received a letter from the stake missionaries, telling us of the sorrow of couples who were not able to share eternity together. He occasionally heard talks in sacrament meeting by family members who were praying for their father to join the Church so that they could be sealed in the temple. My husband did not enjoy feeling like a second-class citizen and did not want his children to see their father as inferior. His proposed solution was to raise our children as neither LDS nor Presbyterian, but something "neutral," like Episcopalian. That did not go over very well with me. For someone indoctrinated in LDS belief, raising children in the Episcopalian faith did not seem like neutral ground. I found it interesting that although I could accept my husband's having a different religion, I was very unhappy about raising children in a different religion. The LDS belief system gave my life such deep and precious meaning while I was growing up that I did not want that stolen from my children.

Sometimes *I* was the one who felt direct pressure to join my husband's church. We juggled our schedules so that we attended LDS Sunday services part of the time and Presbyterian or other services the rest of the time. My husband expressed interest in joining one particular congregation, so I attended the membership preparation class with him. One of the members of the Presbyterian congregation asked me, "Why don't you join, too?" I responded: "My current belief system is like a beautiful tapestry. I find it very lovely. I must be very careful not to unravel too many threads, because I might destroy the whole thing."

After our marriage, I began to feel a certain amount of competition between our two belief systems. I felt that I was not giving the time I needed to be "active" in my Church. In turn, I believe my husband felt somewhat defensive about his religious background. Several times I heard him say that just because he spent less time with his Church than I did with mine, that did not mean he was any less devout or committed. Before marriage, he would sing the praises of LDS people and their way of worship. Afterwards, he replaced the laudatory comments with others like "That's stupid," or, "That's too restrictive." Before marriage, we attended both my services and his. After marriage, he was happy not to let church interfere with his Sundays. I began to hide my religious

feelings or ideas so I wouldn't get criticized, but at the same time, I was confronted by doubts. "Could he be right?" I wondered. "If I can't verbally defend my feelings, could I be wrong?"

How much can you compromise before the fabric of your life starts to unravel? What habits are essential to being true to yourself, and what can you give up and still maintain your integrity? I found myself constantly questioning habits by which I defined my religious life. For example, here were all of these good non-LDS people who drank coffee. What was so bad about drinking coffee? Skipping church meetings? What about shopping or going to a movie on Sunday? Was a full tithe 10 percent or 5 percent of total combined salary if one spouse is a non-member? Was it more righteous to keep a husband happy or to fulfill a church calling?

One of my bishops in Los Angeles had been a nonmember when he married an LDS woman and had joined the Church thirteen years later. He had a favorite saying: "It is good to have an open mind, but not so open that your brains fall out." I was starting to feel like my brains were falling out. I was starting to be uncertain about my definition of "good." I was experiencing too many questions and too few answers. I was haunted by the thought, "If I have all of these questions, maybe my beliefs aren't true after all."

I finally decided to trust myself, and I resumed my single status. I'm still adjusting to the perturbations of my faith. However, two concepts have helped me regain perspective: first, don't try to learn to fly an airplane in a snowstorm. In other words, times of great stress are not the best times to devise a new value system. And, second, where there is the greatest capacity for doubt, there is also the greatest opportunity for faith. Just because I may doubt something does not mean it is not true. I just may not have fully understood things yet.

At the present time, I would be very reluctant to consider marrying someone who was not LDS. My experiences taught me that differences of religion in a marriage can be personally threatening, can serve as sources of unresolved conflict, and can even be faith-shattering. When the apostle Paul recommended: "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers" (2 Cor. 6:14), I suspect he did so less out of an attitude of ostracism than out of a practical knowledge of the demands of marital life. When spouses pull each other in different directions, progress is difficult; and without progress towards common goals, a marriage is less likely to survive. Some people may be able to juggle the uncertainties, demands, and compromises involved in interfaith vows. I was not. My best wishes and congratulations go to those who can and do so.