

sonal revelation in support of my choice of husband. Neither can I say I felt divine disapproval. Although my first marriage was to a member (we both joined the Church shortly after our marriage), we were not sealed in the temple. Any sense of failure I carried away from the marriage, therefore, was not compounded by the searing disappointment, anger, and bitterness I frequently observe among divorced women who were sealed to their husbands. Perhaps this was a blessing in disguise, permitting me to focus on my myriad opportunities for growth and the acquiring of Christlike virtues that marriage affords, along with the more immediate joys of loving and being loved. Marriage to Rudi has been in turns hard, wonderful, exasperating, fulfilling, frustrating, rewarding—in short, not so very different from any marriage of twenty-one years. For now I choose to relish the challenge of loving well and living the gospel well within this union and let the question of its eternal duration take care of itself.

Two Faiths, Two Baptisms

Richard L. Popp

I LIKE THE EXOTIC RING to saying, “I married a Lutheran minister.” Heads turn. Conversations start. I like to think I rebelled against narrow parochial views, made a statement about cultural pluralism. I like to think I expressed my independence, my freedom to choose, my will to remake the world. This is pure fantasy, however.

In truth, I married my best friend. We met while working in the same office one summer. She says I was one of the few people to encourage her when she decided to enter seminary. Maybe I did, but it still bothers me that people would pay someone to preach to them. I have learned, though, to appreciate the extra income she can make on weekends, and I relish the thought of seeing the faces of my home teachers the first time they come to the parsonage door and wonder what they’ve gotten themselves into.

The small Montana town where I grew up had Mormons, but not many. The Catholics had the largest church in town; the Protestants were split among eight denominations. My family attended church ten

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miles away. No one church dominated, and there were so few people that we had to get along with all our neighbors.

People who lived in town were merchants, store clerks, teachers, mill workers, preachers. The people at my church were mostly farmers and ranchers, whose parents had homesteaded in the alkali flats left over after the rest of the valley had been settled. My brother and sisters all dated non-Mormons in high school; there really wasn't much choice. I think my parents watched our choice of friends closely but acknowledged that Gentiles were sometimes better influences than the rural and less-educated Saints. Most of the other Mormon kids in my school belonged to three large families, all of whom lived far out in the country. The twelve girls in one family were known for chasing missionaries and any other boys they could catch; their cousins who lived on the opposite side of the valley were strictly disciplined and worked long hours on their farm. A third family of boys had a well-earned reputation for deer poaching.

Much of my time in priesthood class was spent listening to stories of Saturday night parties of the other young priesthood holders, shared when our teacher was late. Of course I could hear the same stories at school on Monday, but somehow they were more unsettling at church where we were supposed to be learning about "a style of our own." It was difficult to share the gospel with friends who knew that the Mormon bishop's sons were responsible for knocking up three girls in the valley. It was equally difficult to try to explain to my friends why some Mormon girls shunned associations with Gentiles, while others tried to act "loose."

Kids didn't talk about religion much in school, but many of my friends were practicing Methodists, Lutherans, and Catholics. My Catholic girlfriend organized a nondrinking party at the time of our senior class "kegger," I assumed for my benefit. A good 10 percent of my classmates were happy to come, and it had little to do with me or my beliefs. I give credit to my non-Mormon friends, who expected me to be in church every Sunday, for keeping me active during those years.

My brother went to BYU and didn't look back, marrying someone he met there. My older sister went steady with a Methodist all through high school; he joined the Church in his senior year, and they later married. My other sister dated non-Mormon boys in high school but married her BYU home teacher, who was also a convert.

My brother and sisters escaped to BYU and brought home marvelous stories of the "True Church" and the way it really worked. I made my own plans to follow them. I can still remember the exhilarating feeling of being surrounded by Latter-day Saints for the first time in

my life. Having grown up with two languages, one for church and family, another for school and friends, it was a tremendous relief to be able to speak the same language all seven days of the week.

I expected to find a spouse at BYU as my brother and sisters had. Although I was daunted by the process of, shall we say, "sifting," which my roommates took on with great zeal, I am confident that there were a number of women I would have been perfectly happy to spend eternity with. I fell in love with several of them, and a couple even returned the compliment. Bad timing, however, cut my opportunities short. For financial reasons I decided to go on a mission after I graduated, and I did not have a reason to go back to BYU after that. I received a scholarship to study history at the University of Chicago and continued my education there.

I am tempted to complain about the awful singles scene in Chicago. However, one night while a roommate and I were bemoaning our lonely existences, we tallied up recent marriages and concluded that the chances of finding a Mormon mate and having a successful marriage were as good or better in Chicago as anyplace else. Although there were dismally few Mormon singles in Chicago, many did pair off and seemed to do well.

I give all this as background to my own decision to marry outside of the Church, a decision which I made only after a great deal of thought and prayer. Was I rebelling against my church? Was I dissatisfied with Mormon women? Did I give up and take what was available? I don't think so. I married my best friend. We were both uncomfortable about marrying someone of a different faith and made that decision only after careful deliberations.

I think it is unusual for two people active in different churches to marry. I think it is certainly unusual for a Mormon returned missionary still active in the Church to marry a Lutheran minister. We have long and animated discussions about religion. While we respect each other's beliefs, neither of us will let a facile statement go unchallenged. Theologically, everything is up for grabs, and I am not allowed to be complacent or to assume anything about doctrines or practices.

The responses to our marriage have been somewhat different from what I expected. At first, my family was relieved to find out that I was getting married at all, since I had waited until I was nearly thirty. But after thinking about it, they grew more uneasy. My brother and sisters all had temple marriages, and I had broken a perfect record for our family. My decision seemed to state an opinion about their choice, to demonstrate a rejection of their church, and by association, of them.

By contrast, my ward members have been very supportive. Someone

was quick to point out that the chapel at Chicago Theological Seminary, where we were married, was also where the mission president and his wife were married years before, when there was no temple in Chicago. Many cared enough to remember that my wife's name was Wendy Lee and not "Sister Popp." My bishop made a point of telling me that my marriage did not affect my eligibility for temple attendance or callings to leadership positions. The fact that my wife is a candidate for the ordained ministry is fascinating to people I would not otherwise consider open-minded, and it has led to long conversations with a number of ward members.

Ironically, Wendy's family has been very supportive, while her church has not. After some worried questioning about my religion and warnings from distant aunts who told Wendy to read *The Godmakers*, her family welcomed me very cordially. Because Wendy's family is mostly in Chicago while my own relatives are scattered, I feel as if I have a family for the first time in years.

Our two faiths are a problem for Wendy as she searches for a position as a minister. Some people are convinced that if I were present when one of Wendy's parishioners came to the parsonage to talk to her, I would try to convert them to Mormonism or would give their parish membership list to the missionaries. Perhaps there is a basic misunderstanding about the type of Mormon who would marry a Lutheran minister. I would laugh at this, but so far Wendy has not been able to get a call to a congregation.

Having explained the particular circumstances of my life, my point is that my choice of a spouse was both natural and normal. When Mormons live with non-Mormons, a certain percentage are bound to intermarry, and I'm part of that percentage. Except for the two and a half years I was at BYU, I have spent my whole life surrounded by non-Mormons, living in neighborhoods with them, going to school with them, working with them. Many are better people than some Church members. Some would be improved by becoming Latter-day Saints, but many more would not.

I believe that the Church leaders' counsel to date and marry within the Church is wise. Without any regrets for my own decision, I would not recommend interfaith marriage; with it come problems that I would not wish on anyone. I would expect any Church leader to point out the potential hazards to those who are contemplating it, including opposition from family and friends and conflicting commitments between church and home. Still, as long as Mormons continue to live among their Gentile neighbors, there will be those who, for various reasons, decide to marry nonmembers. And some of those will be happier than