

Through a Stained-Glass Window

Juliana Boerio-Goates

LET ME START BY SAYING that I did not pick the title for this panel—I am not yet convinced that I have survived the experience intact. However, after more than fifteen years of associations with Latter-day Saints, I count many among my closest friends and dearest loved ones. I greatly appreciate these individuals and hope that my words will not offend them in any way.

I would like to share my experiences as an “NM” married to an “RM.” For thirteen years I have been married to Steven R. Goates. Steve and I are both associate professors of chemistry at BYU. (Yes, we do get teased about the chemistry being right between us!) We spent the first five years of our marriage in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and New York City. Next we lived in Utah County for seven years, and we have just returned to Utah following an eight-month stay in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where we were on sabbatical leave at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Steve and I are an unusual couple, especially with respect to our religious activity. Before we participated on this panel, we had never met others in “mixed marriages” where both partners were active in their respective religions. By the time we married, the ecumenical aspects of Vatican II were developed in the Catholic Church and so, from my perspective, a marriage between a Catholic and a non-Catholic was not unique. However, the considerably fewer marriages between a Mormon and a non-Mormon that I am aware of have usually involved an inactive Mormon.

Frankly, I hope that Steve doesn’t get any more active than he already is. He currently serves as the executive secretary of his ward. Since we have been married, some of his callings have included Sunday School president, elder’s quorum counselor and acting president, and first and second counselor in a bishopric. Before I knew him, he served two years in the Zurich Switzerland Mission.

I have always been an active Catholic, yet I think the experience of being a minority in Utah has made me a more committed one. For

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this I am deeply grateful. I am a product of Catholic schools: grade school, high school, and college. I serve as a Eucharistic minister and lector, have taught catechism classes, and have worked in campus ministry with the Catholic students who attend BYU.

Because religion was important to Steve and me, family and friends were surprised when we decided to marry. Ours was an atypical courtship by Utah standards. We dated for two years (partly via long-distance phone calls) before we were together at the same graduate school. After a year of more normal courtship—that is, we were living in the same city—we married. We delayed so long to be sure that we really knew what would be involved in bringing two strong religious views together in a marriage. But even after the three-year wait, we were still naive about what life would be like.

Some members of my family and friends felt the need to talk us out of our plans. Let me tell two anecdotes, one amusing, the other etched with painful memories. An aunt woke my father at 6:00 A.M. one morning with a frantic phone call. She told him, somewhat hysterically, that he had to call off the wedding, that Julie didn't know what she was getting into, and that she would never have guessed Steve was like "that." It turns out that she had just seen an interview with a Utah polygamist on a morning news program. My father assured her that Steve was not a polygamist and urged her to go back to bed. One very close friend, Paula, told me of her high school teacher who had become a Mormon. According to my friend, this teacher would no longer allow her family in her home because they smoked and drank coffee. In addition, the teacher tried hard to convert Paula, an experience which left her very bitter. Paula pleaded with me not to marry Steve because she was convinced that I would also convert, hurt my family, and abandon all my old friends. When I went along with my plans, she broke off our friendship and never spoke to me again. It is still painful for me to realize that, for many of my Catholic friends like Paula, the label "Mormon" is a stumbling block to friendship with my husband.

For his part, Steve received lectures from a home teacher, who, in many months of visiting his parents, never even bothered to learn the names of the children or show concern for Steve's father's ill health. This home teacher, nonetheless, felt called upon to chide Steve for his weak testimony in marrying outside the temple.

Fortunately, we both had wise parents who counseled us about the difficulties we might face but supported us in our decision, then and to this day. Not until I moved to Utah did I fully realize just how unusual Steve's family's acceptance of me was. Shortly after my arrival, I met with a professional colleague from Salt Lake who knew my in-laws.

During lunch, out of the blue, he commented that Rex and Marcia must have been terribly disappointed when Steve decided to marry me. As I choked on my food, he explained that he didn't mean me personally, but me as a non-Mormon. I mumbled out a reply that in *my* part of the country, it was the non-*Catholic* who was expected to convert. Thus I was introduced to the stigma associated with marrying outside the LDS Church. I will be ever-grateful for the love with which Steve's family welcomed me from the beginning. They continue to support me, both as loving, but noninterfering, grandparents to our daughter and in my Catholic activities. Their attendance at Easter vigil services and midnight Mass on Christmas Eve when I serve as lector helps to ease the pain of being so far away from my own parents at these special times.

Our wedding took place during a Catholic Mass in the chapel of the college where I was an undergraduate, but we incorporated elements of Mormon tradition. Steve's father gave us a blessing in a grotto the night before the wedding; his Mormon bishop was prevented from attending and participating only because of illness. His parents along with mine brought the offertory gifts to the altar. The readings we selected for the liturgy included the beautiful words of Ruth to Naomi: "Do not press me to leave you and to turn back from your company, for wherever you go, I will go, wherever you live, I will live. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God" (Ruth 1:16).

For me, this reading was a proclamation that we would support each other by respecting and, as much as possible, participating in the religious life of the other. For one to have demanded conversion of the other would have required a denial of strongly held convictions. To have done so would have been against my understanding of the teaching found in Matthew and Luke: "Anyone who prefers father or mother to me is not worthy of me. Anyone who prefers son or daughter to me is not worthy of me" (Matt. 10:37-38).

This does not mean that we do not still hope for, pray for, and occasionally invite conversion. It means we entered into the marriage with the realization that, however much we might want a conversion to take place, our happiness could not be predicated upon the assumption that such an event would happen in the immediate future, if at all.

Without a doubt, the most difficult aspect of our dual religious commitments is the rearing of our daughter, Sarah, who is now nine years old.

Long before Sarah was born, during a preparation class required of all those wishing to be married in the Catholic Church, we pledged to each other that we would allow our children to be raised with education in both religions, that the choice of a final religious commitment

would be theirs, and that it would never become an issue of "If you become Catholic you love Mommy better" or "You love Daddy more if you become LDS."

Of course, at the time we made this agreement, I had never lived in Utah and never expected that we would. I believe our plan is made more difficult because we live in Utah County, where our daughter has no other examples of a "good Mormon" married to a "good" something else. Also, I did not realize how strong peer pressure is when every child in the neighborhood, all her classmates, and all her teachers are LDS; nor did I realize how much at the forefront of everyday life religion is here. It is difficult for Sarah to enjoy her Catholic catechism classes. She dislikes being dragged away from her playtime to attend them, and she has no one in the neighborhood with whom to share these experiences. Those of you who have raised children outside of Utah can relate to this, I am sure.

Many people from both religious persuasions are convinced that we will raise a child who will want nothing to do with religion as an adult. Some say that she will develop a confused idea about both religions. I believe that Sarah is smarter than that. For the first eight years of her life, Steve and I stressed the beliefs we share; now we try to answer honestly her newly arising questions, but in a way that denigrates neither of our religions. Having to live with our decision to marry has been harder on Sarah than I would have guessed during those marriage preparation classes. I am no better at predicting the future now than I was thirteen years ago, so I cannot say whether our critics will prove right when Sarah grows up. But I can tell you what we have now. We have a young lady who understands and accepts that good people can have different views on an issue as important as God. She can understand why Dad can eat a hot dog on some Fridays when Mom cannot, and why Mom can drink coffee at home when Dad cannot. I believe this shows a maturity which belies her young age.

The decision to raise Sarah in Utah has proved painful for me, too. Were I to remake any decision of these past years, it would perhaps be the one to move here. I say this, despite the fact that I dearly love my neighbors and my colleagues at BYU. In fact, I doubt that I could have been welcomed anywhere with greater warmth and graciousness than I have been at BYU, the heart of Mormondom.

Perhaps surprisingly, the decision to accept the academic positions at BYU rather than industrial jobs in the Northeast was largely mine rather than Steve's. While Thomas Nielsen, then the director of the LDS Institute at the University of Michigan, was telling students that the Church had great need of them outside Utah, he was telling us that we had a mission to fulfill in Utah, and I believed him.

From the time I married Steve, I have found myself in the often uncomfortable position of playing mediator or translator between Mormons and the rest of the world. (Perhaps that is the mission President Nielsen had in mind.) As I socialize with non-Mormon friends in Utah and listen to the latest Mormon horror story, I feel compelled to remind my friends that Mormons don't hold the patent on insensitivity and that the majority should not be condemned because of a few. On the other hand, I find that Latter-day Saints, particularly those who have served missions in Mexico or South America, have a very skewed view of the American Catholic Church. Many do not realize that crucifixes and holy cards serve the same function in our homes as pictures of prophets or temples do in theirs. A Latter-day Saint will talk about free agency; a Catholic speaks of the formation of conscience. While Catholics agonize over church teachings concerning birth control or a celibate, male clergy, Mormons struggle with counsel on the proper role of women.

I was a young child in pre-Vatican II Catholicism. The changes introduced by the Vatican Council when I was an adolescent proclaimed for me a church that is vibrant and relevant, while for others these changes shook the very foundations of their belief. As a young adult, I have witnessed the strides made in ecumenical activities brought about by this Council.

As this ecumenical spirit grows within my church and as I meet others like Steve who are sincerely convinced of the truth of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, I find that I am no longer comfortable with the idea of one true church that has the answers for all people. In the book *Papa Married a Mormon*, John D. Fitzgerald makes the analogy that "all religions are but windows in the same church letting in the light of God" (Western Epics, Inc., 1976, 283). Let me extend the analogy to suggest that perhaps each religion transmits some part of the truth as the different panes of a stained-glass window transmit the various colors of light.

I am committed to my religion; I would not be happy as a Latter-day Saint. For my husband, the reverse position is equally strong. Can we both be right in our convictions? I am no theologian, and the answer with which I can live is more that of the pragmatic scientist than the abstract philosopher. Can it be that just as we are all given different gifts, different personalities, and different burdens to bear, we may need different support systems to bear those burdens, different approaches to achieve our place in the eternal plan of salvation? Let me give an example. The liturgy of the Mass is for me deeply spiritual. The symbolism of the various actions, the ties to Old Testament traditions, and the organizing structure of the liturgical calendar, create

an environment in which I can be uplifted and renewed. On the other hand, I have attended many sacrament meetings and Sunday School classes in which I have felt deeply moved emotionally, but I have rarely been touched on the spiritual or intellectual level that transcends emotion.

I continue to struggle with the idea of how, ultimately, the Catholic and Latter-day Saint, as well as other, images of God might be resolved in another life. I firmly expect that this, along with quantum-mechanical tunneling and the wave-particle duality of light, will be explained to me someday.

Marriage and family life are never without problems, and Steve's and my religious differences have added a few unique ones to our life together. However, we have not allowed the differences to dominate our marriage, and I have a deeper understanding of God and a wider breadth of vision than I might ever have achieved married to the guy from Notre Dame that I used to date.

East Meets West

Wilma Srob Odell

I HAVE ENTHUSIASTICALLY accepted the invitation to share my experiences as a "cultural Jew" married to a "cultural Mormon." Kenneth and I have been married almost twenty-three years. I have lived in Salt Lake City since 1971 and before that for nine months when we were first married.

I met Ken while we were both working for the New York City Youth Board, a social service organization that worked with ghetto-dwelling gang members and their families. Ken had come to New York as a social worker after graduating from the University of Utah. He was the first Latter-day Saint I had ever met. Back then in 1966, I thought Mormons still dressed in somber suits and long skirts and rode in buggies. This is despite the fact that I was a graduate of an

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