Interfaith Marriage:

A Concern for Jews, Christians and Muslims

The Reverend Patrick J. Ryan, S.J.
Laurence J. McGinley Professor of Religion and Society
Fordham University

RESPONDENTS

Rabbi Daniel Polish, Ph.D.
Congregation Shir Chadash, Poughkeepsie, N.Y.

Professor Jerusha Tanner Lamptey, Ph.D.
Union Theological Seminary, New York City

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On May 23, 1922, a play opened in what was then the Fulton Theatre on West 46th Street in New York City to poor reviews, reviews that did not however prevent the play from running for over five years—2327 performances. After that it toured the country for as many more years, establishing a record that remained unbroken until the run of *Hello, Dolly!* The play the critics panned and the public loved was A*bie's Irish Rose,* the original written by Anne Nichols. Made into a movie twice, first in 1928 and again in 1946 (produced the second time by Bing Crosby), the play also inspired a weekly series with the same title produced on NBC radio between 1942 and 1944. The basic plot of the play, the films and the radio series centered on what happens when a young woman of Irish Catholic upbringing marries a young Jewish man, a union that initially pleased neither spouse's parents.

Could the reason the play succeeded, despite the critics, have something to do with the fact that by the 1920s Americans were beginning to experience interfaith marriage? Was there a felt need to confront that sometimes fraught experience with humor?

Jews, Christians and Muslims—not only in the United States but in many other parts of the world—intermarry, no matter what their families or the guardians of their faith traditions may think about it. Why has such interfaith marriage been controversial? Is marriage the same anthropological and historical and theological reality in each faith tradition? How does such interfaith marriage affect the faith lives of the partners and their children? These and other questions I wish to raise in this forum, and I have asked my respondents to speak to this topic from the perspectives of their own faith traditions.

Sometimes interfaith marriages have occurred in social situations as tense as Verona divided between the Montagues and the Capulets when the "star-cross'd lovers" Romeo and Juliet pledged their love to each other before Friar Laurence. But note that Romeo and Juliet, although from rival clans, were both Catholics. Sometimes interfaith marriages have worked out very well, sometimes not. That could be said, however, about most marriages in the United States, about 50 percent of which break down: 41 percent of first marriages, 60 percent of second marriages, 73 percent of third marriages.[1] Add in the fuel and fire of difference in faith, and you can imagine the potential for explosion when push comes to shove, to use imagery not exactly theological or sociological.

I am not a statistician; let me concentrate on the territory more familiar to me, the history of religion, examining what marriage has meant historically for Jews, Christians and Muslims—especially in their scriptural sources—and the problems as well as the opportunities these histories pose for interfaith marriage in the past and also today. Note that I am only discussing interfaith marriages among Jews, Christians and Muslims. I am not talking about marriages between Christians or between Jews or between Muslims of varying Jewish or Christian or Muslim

traditions, nor do I have the time or the expertise to treat marriages contracted by Jews, Christians or Muslims who marry Hindus, Buddhists or people of other religious traditions. Marriages between people with no acknowledged religious faith and faithful Jews, Christians and Muslims present another set of historical problems, but I will only touch on those problems tangentially. I am principally interested this evening in the problematic that could be the subject of other plays or films than the one with which I began: *Ibrahim's Irish Rose* or *Moshe's Pakistani Gulshan* or *Patrick's Israeli Shoshanna*, or, perhaps even more controversially, *'A'isha's American Frank*, *Mary Anne's Ashkenazi Yakov*, or *Devorah's Malian Muhammad*. Mix and match, but watch out for the explosions that may eventuate.

I.
INTERFAITH MARRIAGE IN THE JEWISH TRADITION

What has marriage been in the tradition of Israel from earliest antiquity, as well as in the Jewish tradition from the Babylonian Exile down to modern times? In the Priestly account of creation, the first in literary placement, we are told that God created the human being in the divine image: "male and female [God] created them" (Gen 1:27).[2] In a faith tradition that has forbidden humanly created images of God, the male and female human beings serve as the unique image of God created by God. I do not think this necessarily means that God is both male and female, although Jewish Kabbalah and some forms of Gnosticism—Christian and Muslim—have tried to develop this theme.[3] I suspect it means that the human person gives us an image—an analogical sense—for what God is like. In the second creation account in the Book of Genesis, the so-called Yahwistic narrative, we are told that the Lord God, who had made the first human being out of clay, made the first woman out of the first human being, so that the first human being would have an equal partner (Gen 2:23). The Yahwistic narrator goes on to tell us that this human equality in createdness, and the fact that the male human being's best friend turned

out *not* to be his dog, are the reason that "a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, so that they become one flesh" (Gen 2:24). The Yahwistic narrator is more concerned than the Priestly narrator with the question of marriage.

In the rest of the proto-history (the first eleven chapters of Genesis) we learn a few other basic principles about marriage. We are not quite sure where and how he found a wife, but the murderer Cain, the oldest child of Adam and Eve, started a lineage. Presumably he married one of the daughters of Adam to which the Priestly source makes passing reference (Gen 5:4). Endogamous marriage, marrying within one's own clan or at least within the larger household of Israel, as opposed to exogamous marriage, marrying outside those parameters,[4] was to become a sacred principle for the Jewish people.

In the Genesis narratives about Abraham and his descendants—the beginning of the history of Israel—endogamy prevailed in the marriage of Abraham and Sarah, whom he passed off as his sister both in Egypt and in Gerar, because she was, indeed, a half-sister (Gen 20:20). Not content to have their son Isaac marry a local bride in Canaan, Abraham and Sarah sent for an endogamous relative, Rebekah, the granddaughter of Abraham's brother, Nahor, who had stayed in the neighborhood of Haran (in modern Turkey) where Abraham's father and his family had moved when they first left Ur of the Chaldeans (in modern Iraq). Isaac and Rebekah, the parents of Esau and Jacob, were not pleased when Esau married exogamously, taking two wives from among the local populations of Canaan (Gen 26:34-35; 27:46). Noting his parents' displeasure with his marriage to natives of Canaan, Esau sought to repair the damage by marrying endogamously a daughter of Ishmael, his father's half-brother (Gen 26:6-9), possibly hoping to take advantage of the seeming reconciliation between Isaac and Ishmael on the occasion of Abraham's death (Gen 25:9). A question can be raised, however, as to the ethnic identity of Ishmael and of his offspring, since Ishmael's mother was Hagar, an Egyptian (Gen 16:1). Subsequent Jewish tradition has traced

Jewish identity through the female line: a Jewish mother gives birth to Jewish children. The sons of Ishmael (Gen 25:12-16), like the children Abraham fathered with his third and final wife, Keturah (Gen 25:1-4), from the sound of their names and the geography of their placement, seem to be Arabs of the Sinai Peninsula. Presumably the same thing was true of Ishmael's daughter who married Esau, in later Israelite tradition identified as the ancestor of the people of Edom, an area in southern Jordan today.

Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel (Gen 32:28), did marry endogamously, espousing both Leah and Rachel, daughters of his maternal uncle and father-in-law, Laban, who had remained back in Haran (Gen 29:1-30:43). Marrying clan members so closely related was eventually forbidden in the tradition of Israel (Lev 18:8-18), but endogamy in a broader sense was still encouraged. Nevertheless, before we leave the Book of Genesis it should be noted that the patriarch Joseph married exogamously, taking an Egyptian bride, "Asenath, daughter of Poti-phera, priest of On" (Gen 41:45), from which union were eventually born the forefathers of the two half-tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim (Gen 46:20). Later Jewish tradition did not accept this anomaly easily, and this may explain the origins of the apocryphal work called *Joseph and Asenath*. Possibly of Jewish or of both Jewish and Christian origins, this historical novella written sometime in the first centuries of the Common Era explains how the Egyptian virgin, Asenath, embraced Judaism in order to marry Joseph.[5]

In the account in the Book of Exodus of the new tablets of the Law made after the first tablets were smashed by Moses in reaction to the incident of the Golden Calf, religious rather than strictly familial or clan reasons are given for forbidding the particular form of exogamy attributed to Esau in the Book of Genesis, marriage with women from among the indigenous people of Canaan: "When you take wives from among their daughters for your sons, their daughters will lust after their gods and will cause your sons to lust after their gods" (Ex 34:16). The author of

Deuteronomy, reformulating the Mosaic Law in the seventh century BCE, specifies that these indigenous peoples of Canaan must be doomed to destruction (Deut 7:2). "You shall not intermarry with them ... [Y]ou shall tear down their altars, smash their pillars, cut down their sacred posts, and consign their images to the fire" (Deut 7:5). The fact that this program for ending idolatry in the Promised Land, first formulated at the time of the Exodus, had to be repeated and further elaborated in the reign of King Josiah (r. 641-609 BCE) suggests that not everyone in Israel had signed on wholeheartedly to the Exodus commands about not marrying local polytheists.

After the Babylonian Exile, Ezra the Priest-Scribe enforced Jewish endogamy that had seemingly been ignored by the men of Israel during the decades of exile: "You have trespassed by bringing home foreign women, thus aggravating the guilt of Israel" (Ezra 10:10). It is possible that the touchingly beautiful Book of Ruth, with its sympathetic portrayal of the Moabite widow of a Jew of Bethlehem who had married her in Moab, was aimed (or at least subsequently understood) as anti-Ezra propaganda on behalf of the Gentile wives of Jews. The Book of Ruth ends by noting that its heroine was the great-grandmother of King David (Ruth 4:17). Jewish tradition understands Ruth as a convert to the faith of Israel as a widow, when she pledged to follow her widowed mother-in-law, Naomi, back to Bethlehem: "For wherever you go, I will go; wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people will be my people, your God will be my God" (Ruth 1:16). Gary Rosenblatt, the editor and publisher of *The Jewish Week* here in New York City, editorialized two years ago this past Shavuot (the Feast of Weeks), the liturgical season in which the Book of Ruth is read, that the story of Ruth's very simple conversion "presents a stinging challenge to the dangerously narrow interpretation of conversion laws in Israel today and the negative impact they are having throughout the diaspora."[6]

In the era of the major diaspora of Jews that began with the Roman conquest of Jerusalem in 70 CE, Jews who lived in communities with non-Jews sometimes found themselves confronted with religious situations defined in the Mishnah and the Gemara of the Babylonian Talmud[7] as *'abodah zarah*: "foreign worship." The laws about *'abodah zarah* demanded of Jews strict limitations on all their civil and business interactions with non-Jews, including marriage.[8] It is interesting to note that this section of the Talmud on "foreign worship" was the most frequently desecrated by Christians in the Middle Ages, probably because Christians sensed the sharpness of its critique of non-Jewish religious practice. Many of the Mishnah texts, however, deal more explicitly with pagan Roman rather than with Christian religious practices.[9]

Several hundred prominent modern Jewish scholars in North America issued a statement in the year 2000 declaring that "Jews and Christians worship the same God" and "through Christianity, hundreds of millions of people have entered into relationship with the God of Israel."[10] But that sense of the commonality in faith between Jews and Christians, not shared today by every Jewish scholar or by every Christian scholar, does not necessarily justify interfaith marriage, or marriages such as some I read about in the Sunday Styles section of *The New York Times*. Typically these notices assert that "elements of the Christian and Jewish traditions were introduced into the wedding ceremony" usually conducted by a friend of the marrying couple licensed to preside for the occasion by some ersatz online marriage ministry.

Although Jews remained largely endogamous as long as they lived in insular communities in the *shtetls* of Russia and the ghettos of Europe until the nineteenth century, the situation of Jews in the 20th and 21st centuries has changed dramatically, especially in countries where Jews found relatively peaceful acceptance in a religiously mixed social setting. Here in the United States it is estimated that 58 percent of Jews who have married since 2005 have done so outside their own faith tradition.[11] It may be too soon to judge the outcome of these recent marriages, but all

too many of the children of such marriages are raised in neither religious tradition, growing up as what I call Brand X. There are only slightly less than fourteen million Jews in the world today (there were sixteen million before the murder of six million during the *Shoah*); about six million contemporary Jews live in the State of Israel and about six million live in the United States. If so many American Jews marry outside their faith and raise their children without religious identity, what is the future for American Judaism?

The great modern rabbi, Abraham Joshua Heschel, sat in his study here in New York City one night 50 years ago this past January 2nd with a famous American Jesuit scholar, Gustave Weigel. As it turned out, it was the last night of Father Weigel's life. That night Rabbi Heschel put penetrating questions to Father Weigel, especially in view of the Church's evangelical mandate to preach the Gospel to all nations, not excluding Jews. "Is it really the will of God that there be no more Judaism in the world? ... Would it really be *ad Majorem Dei gloriam* to have a world without Jews?"[12] I share the late Rabbi Heschel's concern, but not because of any hypothetical Catholic mission to the Jews. I worry that identifiable Jews may be harder and harder to find in the United States if intermarriage and the raising of children as Brand X prevail. On that melancholy note I conclude this section.[13]

II.
INTERFAITH MARRIAGE IN THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION

With the notable exception of Luke, the authors of the documents that make up the New Testament were Jews who had adhered to the Way of Jesus, people eventually called Christians in Syrian Antioch. Many, and perhaps most of the first Christians, were Greek-speaking Jews who had accepted the Christian message; others were Gentiles who may already have been proselytes, people in the process of converting to Judaism (Acts 11:19-26). Some of the earliest Christians in the eastern Mediterranean had never been Jewish proselytes at all—Gentiles pure and simple.

Paul felt called to preach the Gospel to such Gentiles (Gal 1:15-16), an innovation that was the source of much controversy between Paul and the leadership of the Jerusalem church (Gal 2:1-14).

As Jews by birth or by near or complete conversion many of the first Christians would presumably have adhered to the same regulations on marriage that prevailed in contemporary Jewish circles; the same could not be said of converts who had been Gentiles, pure and simple. It does seem, however, that even then there were Jews born of interfaith marriages; the best example in the New Testament is Timothy, whose father was a Greek but whose mother was Jewish. For reasons unknown—perhaps his Greek father's typically European dislike of circumcision—Timothy had been raised Jewish and eventually Jewish-Christian by his mother and grandmother[14] without being circumcised. Paul, wanting to have Timothy as an assistant on his missionary journeys, had Timothy circumcised "because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek" (Acts 16:3).[15]

The Gospels have nothing to say about interfaith marriage, but it was probably seldom a question for Jesus and his disciples living in Galilee and Judea. For Paul, however, many of his newly baptized Gentile disciples, as well as some—and perhaps many—of his Jewish diaspora disciples may already have committed themselves to marriages before they met Paul and were baptized. In his Corinthian correspondence Paul deals with the issue in words demanding close scrutiny:

> To the rest I say—I and not the Lord—that if any believer has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. And if any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is made holy through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy through her husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so; in such a case the brother or sister is not bound. It is to peace that God has called you. Wife, for all you know, you might

save your husband. Husband, for all you know, you might save your wife (1 Cor 7:12-16).

Paul in this paragraph gives his own authoritative advice on interfaith marriages, noting that he is doing so because there is no law on this from "the Lord"—Jesus, now exalted in glory. But this passage from Paul must be understood in the context of the teaching of Jesus on marriage just reiterated by Paul: "To the married I give this command—not I but the Lord—that the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does separate, let her remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife" (1 Cor 7:10-11).

The teaching of Jesus forbidding divorce seems to have been unique among rabbis of his time and is best expressed in Mark's Gospel, although Matthew repeats versions of it twice and Luke once: "From the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate" (Mk 10:6-9). Note how Jesus, as quoted by Mark, cites both the Priestly and Yahwistic versions of the creation of man and woman. The union of husband and wife participates in the oneness of the God who made them; the united husband and wife are the unique image of God in the first chapter of Genesis. No iconoclastic force, as it were, should destroy that image of God; in particular, the bond that either husband or wife may have to parents should not destroy the married image of God. Marriage counselors can tell you how often the attachment of either husband or wife to his or her parents can put a strain on a marriage.

In a society that valued filial obedience to parents, Paul's reiteration of the words of the Yahwistic story of the creation of man and woman had revolutionary implications, since the Book of Deuteronomy recognizes that divorces happen (Deut 24:1-4).

The unbreakable union of husband and wife—a union even more important than the bond that links child and parent—lies at the heart of the teaching of Jesus about marriage, with its Priestly and Yahwistic literary roots in the proto-history of Genesis, and this teaching about marriage is repeated dutifully by Paul. What is peculiar to Paul's teaching, then, is the fact that he calls for such intimate union to apply as well to the marriage of Christians and non-Christians, provided that the non-Christian partner in such a marriage "consents to live with" the Christian partner. Why? Paul's answer opens up a startling perspective on the meaning of marriage: "[T]he unbelieving husband is made holy through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy through her husband." Little emphasis has been laid on this teaching of Paul about the sanctifying aspect of interfaith marriage between Christians and non-Christians. Paul was probably writing about the marital unions of couples he met in the Jewish diaspora or in purely Gentile settings of the eastern Mediterranean where only one partner sought Christian baptism, whether that partner was a Jew or a Gentile. It seems to me unlikely that he would have referred to Jewish partners who wished to remain Jewish in such marriages as "unbelieving." In that usage Paul is most likely referring to those marital partners who wanted to remain Gentile pagans, as it were, even if their husbands or wives were seeking Christian baptism.

There is in such interfaith marriages, according to Paul, the possibility of what the Jewish tradition calls *kiddushin*, "sanctification." Jewish wedding practice completes the ritual of *kiddushin*, the "sanctification" or "consecration" of the bride and groom that is usually translated as "betrothal," with *nissu'in*, usually translated as "marriage." The preliminary *kiddushin* or "sanctification," however, constitutes a valid marriage in the Jewish legal tradition that can only be ended by the issuing of a writ of divorce (*get*).[16] Paul recognizes the value of a marriage between a non-Christian and a Christian because such a marriage enables the Christian partner in some sense to "sanctify" or "consecrate" the non-Christian partner and their children. Furthermore, he extends

that "sanctification" of the non-Christian partner in a peaceful interfaith marriage to the children of that union as well: "Otherwise," Paul suggests provocatively, on the supposition that the non-Christian partner were not in some sense made holy by marriage to a Christian, "your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy."

Paul expresses these personal but authoritative opinions on interfaith marriage with one large proviso: "But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so; in such a case the brother or sister is not bound," and by "brother" or "sister" in this context he means the Christian spouse. Note that ending the already existent marriage of a Christian to a non-Christian seems not to depend on the Christian's discomfort with the continued marriage but with the discomfort felt by the non-Christian spouse. The so-called "Pauline privilege" is not a *carte-blanche* for Christians to dissolve marriages contracted before baptism.[17] The underlying rationale, however, for everything that Paul teaches in this brief passage is summed up in one terse sentence: "It is to peace that God has called you." If the non-Christian partner in an interfaith marriage contracted before the baptism of the Christian partner makes it impossible for the Christian to live in peace, then it would be better that they separate.

Paul, however, prefers that the two continue to live together in a peaceful marriage: "Wife, for all you know, you might save your husband. Husband, for all you know, you might save your wife." Does this mean that the Christian spouse might by peaceful living lead the non-Christian spouse to baptism? Perhaps, but Paul does not make that explicit. The New Testament scholar, Joseph Fitzmyer, S.J., in his recent exhaustive commentary on 1 Corinthians, remarks that "Paul sees the husband and wife as the possible source of salvation to each other. Unfortunately, he never explains further this aspect of marriage, and one is left to speculate about his intended meaning."[18] I hope my former and much revered teacher will forgive me for engaging in such speculation. Paul's words could be understood to signify that the Christian partner communicates her or his life in the Christian mystery to the non-Christian partner,

not necessarily through conversion or baptism, but through a certain "contagious" holiness, the counterpart of the notion of "contagious uncleanness" in a cultic setting. This seems to be what Raymond Collins, another New Testament scholar who has written exhaustively on 1 Corinthians, means when he writes of this passage that "Paul's notion of 'holiness' is cultic rather than ethical."[19]

In various Pauline writings generally considered deutero-Pauline today—genuine New Testament, but most likely written in the school of Paul a generation after the Corinthian correspondence—the advice given to married couples says hardly anything about the status of Christians married to non-Christians. Unlike the advice on spousal mutuality and equality given to husbands and wives in the authentic writings of Paul recognized as such today, the deutero-Pauline exhortations to married couples presume a more traditional subjection of the wife to the husband typical both of contemporary Jewish and Greco-Roman social settings.[20] At least one later New Testament teaching about the subjection of wife to husband hearkens back not to the theme of the equality of man and woman from the proto-history in Genesis (Gen 1:27, 2:24) but rather to the patriarchal narratives later in Genesis. The First Epistle of Peter urges wives to be subject to the authority even of unbelieving husbands so that these husbands "may be won over without a word by their wives' conduct, when they see the reverence and purity of your lives" (1 Pet 3:1). The exemplar suggested by the author is telling: "Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham and called him lord" (1 Pet 3:6). A scriptural passage like this is seldom read at Catholic weddings these days—single-faith or interfaith.

In the early Church, it has been suggested, interfaith marriages of Christians to non-Christians may have actually contributed to the Christianization of the Roman Empire. Peter Brown, the eminent historian of early Christianity, suggests that major changes in theological thought about interfaith marriages with pagan Romans came about in the two centuries that intervened between the career of Saint Cyprian (d. 258) and Saint Augustine (d. 431). "Christian opinion seems to have

changed considerably on this issue; Augustine could say that a mixed marriage, regarded by S[aint] Cyprian as a sin, was now no longer avoided as such."[21] Brown describes the gradual Christianization of several aristocratic lineages in Rome as the result of marriages contracted between upper class Roman pagan husbands and Christian wives.[22]

III.
INTERFAITH MARRIAGE IN THE MUSLIM TRADITION

Modern Muslim attitudes towards marriage, to say nothing for the moment about interfaith marriages, raise much controversy today in the relationship between Muslims and other peoples of monotheistic faith. For many modern people outside the house of Islam, Muslims seem out-of-step with contemporary Jews and Christians, especially with regard to the role of women in society. Some of this derives from the culturally inherited gender inequities of the traditional Arab setting in which Muhammad and his contemporaries lived in the seventh century CE, as well as the pre-Islamic gender inequities of many other traditional societies in which Islam has flourished over the past fourteen centuries, especially in south Asia and Africa. Such societies have changed and will undoubtedly continue to change, not necessarily at the same pace as, or in the same direction as, or in stride with North Atlantic societies of a post-industrial and often post-Christian bent. It must be noted, however, that the first great change in seventh-century Arab perception of the role of women in society came about when God's word in the Qur'an exposed the wickedness of the pagan Arab practice of female infanticide (Qur'an 81:8), a horrific type of population control still, alas, known in some parts of the modern world, at least in the form of female feticide in societies such as Communist China.

It should be understood, however, that in theological terms Muslims consider Islam not as a seventh-century Arab reality but as an option offered to all of humankind before creation in a metahistorical summons to a relationship with God, what later Muslim mystics called the Y*awm*

Alastu ("the Day of 'Am I not?'"). This Quranic passage centers on a question spoken by God to nascent humankind as a whole: "When your Lord took from the children of Adam—from their loins—their offspring, and made them bear witness for themselves [to what God said:]: 'Am I not your Lord?' they said, 'Yes, we have born witness'" (Qur'an 7:172).[23] Despite this pre-creational summons issued by God to everyone in every nation, the mundane historical roots of Islam in seventh-century Arabia continue to mark Muslims even today in a way that the second-millennium-BCE setting of the patriarchs and matriarchs of Genesis and the first-century-CE setting of Jesus and his disciples no longer mark many Jews and Christians.

Jews over many centuries have come to trace basic Jewish identity matrilineally, even though inheritance of property tends to be dominantly patrilineal. Christians, apart from certain European royal families and particular ethnic groups in some parts of the world, have paid less attention to patrilineal and matrilineal descent in determining religious or ethnic identity. Apart from the unique case of Jews encountered by Christians in various settings, Christians consider everybody else to be born pagan, and to remain pagan until baptized, despite whatever you may have heard about "born Catholics" and the like. ("Cradle Catholics" might be more accurate.) Muslims, however, generally trace Muslim religious identity in the patrilineal line, and that religious identity does not hinge on any ceremonial act.[24] There is no Muslim baptism and male circumcision among Muslims has little religious significance.[25] Not all the pre-Islamic Arabs were completely patrilineal in their practice of inheritance, but the rise of Islam ended the Arabs' partial pre-Islamic matrilineal social structures.[26]

Muslims traditionally consider all newborns in some sense Muslim, since Islam, they contend, is the religion of nature as nature was always planned by God. There is a famous saying attributed to Muhammad which asserts that "every infant is born according to *fitra* [i.e., God's way of creating]; then his parents make him a Jew or a Christian or a

Magian."[27] The just-mentioned metahistorical summons of the *Yawm Alastu* in the Qur'an plays into this prophetic tradition. Muslim embrace of patrilineality, as well as Muslim traditional tolerance for monotheists like Jews and Christians, makes it possible for all male Muslims, Arab or non-Arab, to marry Jewish or Christian wives, since Muslim identity is inherited from one's father, always with the understanding that the children of such marriages are to be raised Muslim. Sometimes this possibility of marrying Jewish and Christian wives has been extended, as well, to marrying other women considered to belong in some sense to the category of "People of the Book" (*ahl al-kitab*), scriptural monotheists. Zoroastrians were quickly included in this category when the earliest caliphs extended Muslim rule into Mesopotamia and Iran. The Arabic term for Zoroastrianism, *Majusiyya* (the faith of the Magians), has been employed more than once by Muslims to characterize valued trading partners far away from Mesopotamia and Iran with whom Muslims had to engage.[28]

A late passage in the Qur'an quite specifically warns Muslim men not to marry non-Muslim women and not to allow their daughters or other dependent female relatives to marry men in that same category:

> Do not marry those who associate [other gods with God] until they place their faith [in God]. A faithful slave woman [as your wife] is better than a free woman who associates [other gods with God], no matter how much the latter may attract you. Do not give your dependent females in marriage to a man who associates [other gods with God] until they put their faith [in God]. A faithful male slave is better [as your in-law] than a [free] man who associates [other gods with God], no matter how much the latter may attract you. Such [non-Muslim] spouses invite to the fires [of hell], whereas God invites to the Garden [of Paradise] and to forgiveness by [God's] permission. [God] makes His messages plain to humankind so that they may keep them in mind (Qur'an 2:221).

Another late passage in the Qur'an does, however, allow Muslim men to marry non-Muslim but monotheistic wives described as "virtuous women from among those to whom the Book was given before you, as long as

you [Muslim men] give them the dower due them, desiring to live with them as chaste husbands, not in prostitution or as secret lovers" (Qur'an 5:5). In other words, Jewish, Christian and Zoroastrian mistresses are not allowed to faithful Muslim men.[29]

If Christian wives gradually effected the Christianization of the Roman aristocracy by intermarriage, as noted above, Muslim husbands and fathers have gradually had the same effect on most of the Zoroastrians of Sasanian Iran and most of the Christians and Jews of those parts of the Byzantine Empire that fell to the forces of the Sunni Muslim Caliphate and later Muslim empires. In many of these areas, however, non-Muslim religious traditions have sometimes been transmitted along with mother's milk, and this fact may explain not a few regional peculiarities in the understanding and practice of Islam, as well as some of the problems involved in Muslim men marrying non-Muslim women. Certain sectarian developments within the Shi'i tradition, like the 'Alawis or Nusayris of Syria—Bashar al-Assad's people—show evidence in their ritual life of Gnostic and Christian influences, possibly one result of interfaith marriage with Christians and Gnostics in earlier eras.[30]

Muhammad himself may have set the first example of marrying a non-Muslim when he espoused, or at least entered into legally sanctioned relationship, with Mariya the Copt, presumably not only an Egyptian but also a Christian of the Coptic rite. Tradition has it that an Egyptian Christian figure called the *Muqawqis*—possibly Cyrus, the Caucasus-born Melkite Christian patriarch and governor in Byzantine Egypt[31]—sent this Egyptian Christian woman and her sister to Muhammad in Medina as a peace-offering sometime between the year 627 and 629.[32] Mariya the Copt seems to have embraced Islam; her entrance into Muhammad's life produced Muhammad's only son, a child whom the Prophet named Ibrahim, whose death at the age of 18 months or less deeply saddened Muhammad himself, who died six months later.

Later phases of the history of Islam have also known devout and powerful Muslim women of Christian origin who rose to high places and exercised

power not normally associated with the female state in the Islamic world. Shaghab started off her career in the tenth century as a Byzantine Christian but ended up as a devout Muslim mother of the Caliph in Baghdad, pursuing Sunni causes, including mystical piety (*tasawwuf*), at a time in Baghdad of rising Shi'i influence over her son, al-Muqtadir (r. 908-932 CE). Central to Shaghab's Sunni mystical concerns was the fate of the Sufi preacher and provocateur, Husayn Mansur al-Hallaj (d. 922 CE), who had been jailed by agents of her son's government.[33] It is possible that Shaghab's Byzantine Christian origins affected her Muslim piety.[34] The American Islamicist Herbert Mason, a poet who has written a verse play about al-Hallaj, suggests in his play that Shaghab, as a devotee of al-Hallaj, found in the mystic's willing surrender to execution a parallel to the crucifixion and death of Jesus as understood by Christians rather than by Muslims. "I even dreamed," Mason's Shaghab tells al-Hallaj, "I saw you crucified, your arms were wings/ And you took flight in soaring ecstasy/ To God, you flew with other creatures/ In your folds. Suffering seemed bliss ... [Y]ou are the first of our faith/ Who desires to die out of sheer love./ You are very frightening to some and/ Even to me. I know the way it will end."[35]

In 1870 Aurélie Picard, a young woman from Bordeaux in southwestern France, married Sidi Ahmad, the presiding Shaykh of the Tijaniyya Sufi Confraternity, and she did so without the permission of the colonial government in Algiers but with the blessing of Charles-Martial Cardinal Armand-Lavigerie, founder of the missionary congregation popularly called the White Fathers, then the archbishop of Carthage-Algiers. Lavigerie hoped that Picard's interfaith marriage with the Tijani *shaykh* might influence this burgeoning mystical confraternity towards friendship with their decidedly French rulers and with Catholic missionaries working in northwestern Africa.[36] Theoretically uncompromising with the non-Muslim world, *de facto* Muslims have found their own ways, more often peaceful than bellicose, to deal with the religiously other.

It must be noted, however, that Muslims have never, to my knowledge, authorized the marriage of non-Muslim husbands to Muslim wives in theoretical or legal terms. The 2010 wedding of former Congressman Anthony Weiner to Huma Abedin may constitute an exception; but it was civilly enacted by former President Bill Clinton, neither a rabbi nor an imam. The recent civil wedding in Italy of George Clooney and Amal Alamuddin does not fit into this category; Ms. Alamuddin, through her father, is a member of the Druze community in Lebanon, a group neither Muslim nor Christian, even though her mother is a Sunni Muslim. The marriage of Ms. Alamuddin's Druze father and Sunni Muslim mother in Lebanon several decades ago is another problem altogether.

All of which goes to prove that every hard and fast rule admits of exceptions and that not every encounter between Muslim and non-Muslims in the past fourteen centuries has been bellicose; some have even been romantic.

IV.
LOVE HAPPENS: INTERFAITH MARRIAGE TODAY

The Catholic Church in the United States, at least since the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), has looked with a kinder eye on what are described in canon law as marriages entailing not only *mixta religio* but also *disparitas cultus*. Although the former may sound like interfaith marriage as I have defined it, *mixta religio* (literally, "mixed religion") actually means marriages contracted by Catholics with other baptized Christians. The Latin word *religio* is used here as a term in its classic sense, denoting various ways of practicing the same basic faith tradition. *Disparitas cultus*—"disparity of cult" to translate literally and thus wrongly—has nothing to do with differing cults, in the modern sense of the word. *Cultus* in this usage refers to whole conglomerates of divine *cultus*, such as Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, etc. I am not a canonist and do not use these terms, except when dealing with canonists. For clarity's sake

I call the former type of marriages ecumenical marriages and the latter type interfaith marriages.

Between observant Jews and observant Christians there are many common themes in the understanding of marriage, especially here in the United States. In certain settings, and especially in majority Muslim countries, there can be great differences between devout Muslim understandings of marriage and devout Christian understandings of marriage. American Muslims, however—either Americans who have converted to Islam or Muslims of Middle Eastern, African or South Asian descent whose families have lived in the United States for a long time—may have developed expectations of marriage, for better or for worse, very similar to those of their Jewish and Christian fellow citizens. But even in these American marriages, the interfaith challenge can prove difficult.[37]

Shakespeare's play, T*he Merchant of Venice*, takes pleasure in the conversion of Shylock's daughter, Jessica, to Christianity, at the time of her marriage to Lorenzo. Little is made by Shakespeare of Jessica's role as a thief of her father's ducats, and we do not learn how the marriage of Jessica and Lorenzo worked out in the long run. Were there financial difficulties between them, given Jessica's criminal past in the handling of money? We will never know. What would have happened if Jessica had remained Jewish and Lorenzo had converted from Christianity to Judaism? All hell would have broken loose in Renaissance Venice, possibly bringing on the Inquisition. But Venetians at least had the advantage of knowing Jews. Shakespeare's England knew no Jews at all, since Jews had been exiled from England by royal decree since 1290. Jews only returned to England in the mid-seventeenth century under Oliver Cromwell, whose interest in having a Jewish community in England was apparently mercantile.

Interfaith marriage poses a tremendous challenge to each of the partners in such a marriage, and also to their extended families. If interfaith marriage leads to a Brand X generation of non-practicing Jews, non-practicing Christians or non-practicing Muslims, I think it is a disaster.

If one or other party in such marriage converts to the faith of the other, such marriages may work better. In some interfaith marriages I have known in Africa and in the United States, the religiously different parents have raised the children primarily in one parent's tradition, but with a healthy respect for the faith tradition of the other parent. I think that is better than raising the children in no tradition at all and leaving it up to them, when they grow up, to decide what they are going to do religiously. I would hazard a guess that most will do nothing at all.

There is much more I would like to say on this topic, but my respondents are chafing at the bit to make their contributions. Let me conclude with a dedication. More than four decades ago I advised fellow graduate students at Harvard to marry civilly. He was a French Canadian Catholic of Polish aristocratic parentage, his family in exile from Poland since the Nazi invasion of their homeland. She was a Lebanese Shi'i of mixed Sunni and Shi'i parentage. Marriage in a Catholic Church in or out of Lebanon was problematic for many reasons, as well as marriage in a Muslim setting anywhere. Until 2013 Lebanon, along with all other Arab countries, had never allowed any civil marriages.[38] After the civil marriage of my friends under the laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, I myself, dressed in mufti—not as a *mufti*!—served as master of ceremonies at the wedding reception in which they pledged their marriage vows to each other again in the Fogg Art Museum, with all their relatives and friends as witnesses. Their very happy marriage lasted until the wife's death last January 29th, more than forty years after their marriage. To André and to the cherished memory of Hayat Salam-Liebich I dedicate this lecture. I think of them whenever I read in the Nuptial Blessing at a Catholic wedding that in marriage "woman is joined to man and the companionship they had in the beginning is endowed with the one blessing not forfeited by original sin nor washed away by the flood." May we all meet once again at the wedding banquet in the world to come.

NOTES

1 On these divorce statistics, see "32 Shocking Divorce Statistics," in the blog of a law firm based in Seattle and Tacoma: mckinleyirvin.com/Family-Law-Blog/2012/October.

2 All quotations from the Hebrew Bible come from *JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1999).

3 On male-female duality in God in Kabbalistic Judaism, see Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1946, rpt. 1974), 229-35. On male-female duality in God in Gnostic Christianity, see Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Random House, 1979, rpt. Vintage Books, 1989), 48-69. On male-female duality in God in Islam, see the brief summary of the poetic elaborations of this theme by the Andalusian mystic Ibn 'Arabi (d. 1240) by Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 263-86, esp. 272.

4 Fear of certain aspects of exogamy may partially explain the mysterious and probably abbreviated narrative in the proto-history about the birth of the Nephilim, brought into this world when the exogamous "divine beings cohabited with the daughters of men, who bore them offspring" (Gen 6:4a). In the Book of Genesis, however, the Nephilim appear somehow admirable: "They were the heroes of old, the men of renown" (Gen 6:4b). The Nephilim are later identified in the Hebrew Bible with the gigantic original natives of Canaan, non-Israelites whose size made some of the spies sent by Joshua to scout out the Promised Land think that they themselves looked "like grasshoppers" (Num 13:33) in comparison. The Israelites were not to marry Canaanites, tall or short.

5 See *Joseph and Aseneth*, in *The Apocryphal Old Testament*, ed. H.F.D. Sparks, tr. David Cook (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 465-503.

6 Gary Rosenblatt, "Ruth's Conversion Would Be Rejected Today" (May 22, 2012) available online at thejewishweek.com/print/editorial_opinion/gary_rosenblatt.

7 The Mishnah as a compilation of laws—the first major writing down of the Oral Law derived from Moses—was promulgated around 200 CE by Rabbi Judah the Prince, the head of the Palestinian Jewish community. The expanded commentary on the Mishnah, the Gemara, was composed by rabbis between 200 and 500 CE. Combined with the Mishnah, the ensemble of these legal texts is called the Talmud. See Jacob Neusner, *The Way of Torah*, 7th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2004), 48-64.

8 One portion of the Gemara, elaborating on a Mishnah text about using or not using products like milk, bread or olive oil produced by Gentiles, goes on to note that "heathens and their daughters are all included in the eighteen things [prohibited by the Schools of Hillel and Shammai] ... [T]heir daughters should be considered as in the state of *niddah* [the ritual impurity normally associated with menstruation] from

their cradles." See '*Abodah Zarah*, 36b, tr. A. Mishcon (Folios 1-35a) and A. Cohen (Folios 35b to the end) in *The Babylonian Talmud* (29: *Seder Nezikin*), ed. Isidore Epstein (London: The Soncino Press, 1935).

9 "The idolatry that troubled the rabbis [writing in the tractate *'Abodah Zarah*] was the Roman equivalent [of ancient Canaanite idolatry], which included deification of various forces of nature, as well as deification of the emperor." This is the brief commentary of Ben Zion Bokser and Baruch M. Bokser, *The Talmud: Selected Writings*, tr. Ben Zion Bokser (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1989), 216.

10 See "A Jewish Statement on Christians and Christianity," in *Dabru Emet: National Jewish Scholars Project*. first published in *The New York Times* on September 10, 2000.

11 See *A Portrait of Jewish Americans: Findings from a Pew Research Center Survey of U.S. Jews* (Washington, D.C.: October 1, 2013) available online at pewforum.org.

12 See *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity: Abraham Joshua Heschel*, ed. Susannah Heschel (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996), 246.

13 On marriage in the Jewish tradition and interfaith marriage, I have been greatly helped by the following scholarly resources: Raymond Apple, Raphael Posner, Reuben Kashani, Ben-Zion Schereschewsky, Menachem Elon and Rela M. Geffe, "Marriage," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA/Keter Publishing House, Ltd., 2007), 13:563a-574b. Also, in the same edition of *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, I have benefited from the article by Erich Rosenthal, Ben-Zion Schereschewsky, Mervin Verbit and Sergio DellaPergola, "Mixed marriages, Intermarriage," 14:373a-385b.

14 In the letter to Timothy attributed to Paul, probably a post-Pauline composition, the writer praises not only the faith of Timothy but also that of his grandmother, Lois, and of his mother, Eunice (2 Tim 1:5).

15 All quotations from the New Testament come from the New Revised Standard Version (1989) as contained in *The HarperCollins Study Bible*, revised ed., ed. Harold W. Attridge (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2006).

16 *Kiddushin* 2a, tr. H. Freedman in *The Babylonian Talmud* (22: *Seder Nashim*), ed. Isidore Epstein (London: The Soncino Press, 1936). On the connection of these verses in Paul with Jewish wedding practice, probably in evolution at the same time that Paul was writing, see Raymond Collins, *First Corinthians*, Sacra Pagina Series 7, ed. Daniel J. Harrington, S.J. (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 266.

17 On the Pauline privilege, see *The Code of Canon Law: A Text and Commentary*, ed. James A. Coriden, Thomas J. Green and Donald E. Heintschel (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1985), canons 1143-47.

18 Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., *First Corinthians*. The Anchor Yale Bible 32. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), 298.

19 Raymond Collins, *First Corinthians*, 271.

20 See Col 3:18-4:1, Eph 5:22-6:9, 1 Tim 2:8-15, Titus 2:1-10 for examples in the Pauline corpus and 1 Pet 2:18-3:17 in the epistolary literature attributed to Peter. These passages seem to parallel examples elsewhere in ancient literature dealing with household management. They urge subordination not only on wives and children but also on slaves, while calling for kindness from husbands, fathers and masters. On this theme see Margaret Y. MacDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians*, Sacra Pagina Series 17, ed. Daniel J. Harrington, S.J. (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2000), 152-59, esp. 153: "[T]he household codes represent a more "patriarchal" position with respect to women than can be found in the undisputed epistles ... ."

21 P.R.L. Brown, "Aspects of the Christianization of the Roman Aristocracy," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 51 (1961): 6. Brown cites Augustine, *De fide et operibus* 21.37.

22 I am reminded, in another context, of several Dutch Catholic missionaries I used to know in Ghana whose French surnames indicated their Huguenot patrilineal ancestry, as well as of several Irish Catholic friends of mine who bear distinctively Scottish and Welsh surnames, suggestive of one-time Presbyterian and Methodist ancestry. Their patrilineal ancestors of these Dutch Catholic missionaries and Irish Catholic friends of mine seem to have embraced Catholicism when they embraced Catholic brides.

23 The first *your* in this passage is singular and refers to Muhammad; the second *your* is plural and refers to humanity. The translation of this passage, and of all other quotations from the Qur'an in this essay, is my own. I developed this theme of the metahistorical summons of *Yawm Alastu* in the first of these McGinley lectures, "Amen: Faith and the Possibility of Jewish-Christian-Muslim Trialogue" (New York: Fordham University, 18-19 November 2009), 14-15.

24 There are some Muslims in Africa, like the Tuareg (or Kel Tamasheq) of the Sahara and the Yao of Mozambique and Tanzania, who persist in following matrilineal social patterns, at least partially, despite their Islamization.

25 On the significance of male circumcision in Islam, see A.J, Wensinck, "Khitan," in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam: New Edition* (Leiden: Brill, 1960-2009), V:20a-22b. Further references to this *Encyclopaedia* will be abbreviated as *EI* 2. So-called "female circumcision" (*khafd*)—female genital mutilation—is more a pre-Islamic Arab and Nilotic cultural practice than a Muslim one and is practiced by many non-Muslims as well as Muslims, especially in Africa. See the article "Khafd" by the editors in *EI* 2, IV:913a-914a.

26 On the evidence for at least partial matrilineality in pre-Islamic Arab societies, see William Montgomery Watt, "Excursus J: *Marriage and the Family in pre-Islamic Times,*" in *Muhammad at Medina* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), 373-88, esp. 378-85.

27 See Duncan Black Macdonald, "Fitra," *EI* 2, II:930a.

28 See A. Melvinger, "al-Madjus," *EI* 2, V:1118a-1121b.

29 On marriage in Islam, see J. Schacht, "Nikah," *EI* 2, VIII:26b-29a.

30 For a very concise summary of the origins of the ʿAlawis or Nusayris, see Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press,1985), 58. For a longer presentation see H. Halm, "Nusayriyya," *EI* 2, VIII:145a-148a.

31 See K. Öhrnberg, "al-Mukawkis," *EI* 2, VII:511a-513a.

32 The *Muqawqis* who sent Mariya the Copt to Muhammad may have done so with the understanding that such gifts might persuade Muhammad and his followers not to think of conquering Egypt; the Arab Muslim conquest of Egypt only began in 639 CE, seven years after Muhammad's death. That conquest of Egypt did not entail the instant Islamization of Egypt; the process was very, very gradual, with Egypt remaining majority Christian until the early second millennium CE, perhaps as late as the Mamluk era (the mid-13th to the early-16th centuries), even if Egypt was ruled by Muslims from the mid-seventh century. See A.S. Atiya, "Kibt," *EI* 2, V:90a-95a.

33 On the historical Shaghab, see Louis Massignon, *The Passion of al-Hallaj: Mystic and Martyr of Islam*, tr. Herbert Mason. Bollingen Series XCVIII (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 1: esp. 398-406, 645; 2:62, 84-85.

34 Ibid. 3:221, esp. n. 341.

35 Herbert Mason, *The Death of al-Hallaj: A Dramatic Narrative* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), 70-71, 72.

36 See Jamil M. Abun-Nasr, *The Tijaniyya: A Sufi Order in the Modern Worl*d (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 74-76.

37 The Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has issued an excellent pastoral resource entitled *The Challenge of Catholic-Muslim Marriage* (Washington, D.C.: USCCC Communications, 2011) that deals with such marriages in considerable detail. Significantly the Committee acknowledges the help in preparing this resource provided by Muslim scholars, especially Dr. Zeki Saritoprak (John Carroll University) and Dr. Ghulam-Haider Aasi (American Islamic College). An even more detailed pastoral resource emanated from a Canadian source more than a decade ago, *Pastoral Guidelines for Muslim-Christian Marriages* (Montreal: Canadian Centre for Ecumenism, 2001), drafted by Yves Gaudreault, M. Afr., Rita Leblanc and Diane Willey, nds.

38 On the first civil marriage in Lebanon, see Dalal Mowad, "Lebanon Civil Marriage raises Hope for Change," last modified 02 May 2013, available online at aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2013.

Interfaith Marriage:

A Concern for Jews, Christians and Muslims

A Jewish Response by Rabbi Daniel Polish, Ph.D.
Congregation Shir Chadash

I want to express my thanks to Fordham University for its gracious hospitality. A special word of thanks to Sister Anne-Marie Kirmse—a rare combination of warmth, friendliness, and efficiency—for all she has done in handling the arrangements for our gathering. And my gratitude to Father Ryan for giving me the opportunity to be with you again, to again have the pleasure of collaborating with him, and especially for the challenge of turning my feelings on this very consequential subject into thoughts.

Let me begin by acknowledging that Father Ryan has, as usual, rendered any response from me extraneous by giving a thorough and compelling presentation of not only the Christian, but also the Jewish perspectives on this very charged subject. I am in complete agreement with everything that he has said. No response is necessary.

I would add, in candor, that the point at which he concluded his discussion of the Jewish attitude toward intermarriage is where my thoughts and feelings begin.

In responding, I can presume to add but little factual material to what Pat has already shared. Instead I will act as what anthropologists refer to as a native informant interpreting my own particular culture as best I understand it.

Let me, however, begin by adding some thoughts about the Bible as the foundational and shaping text of the Jewish tradition. Not out of any creedal orthodoxy but out of intellectual humility, I will desist from attempting to locate the date or social context of any particular verse or narrative. It's not that I would not want to know. It's just that we really don't. What we do have is the completed text as it has been handed down to us. And it is clear to me that that text does reflect an intense internal conflict between what we would call universalism versus particularism. For instance, I do not think it irrelevant that in the book of Jonah all the admirable and engaging figures are the clearly identified non-Israelites—the sailors who do not want to throw Jonah overboard, the king of Nineveh who recognizes that he and his people have been in the wrong and all those thousands of Ninevites who understand the error of their ways and repent—while the only odious character is the chauvinistic, self-righteous prig, the Hebrew prophet who gives the book its title.

And I think we see this tension between a universalist and particularist vision manifest itself most acutely in the issue of endogamous versus exogamous marriage. This anti-outmarriage case is expressed most explicitly from the very beginning of what Jews understand as Jewish life—by the very first person identified as a Jewish parent. In Genesis 24 we find Abraham admonishing his servant, "... I will make you swear by the Lord, the G-d of heaven and earth that you will not take a wife for my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell, but will go to my country and my birthfolk and take a wife for my son—for Isaac." (24:3-4). The freightedness of Abraham's demand is reflected in the

language that the text employs in expressing it, a precise inversion of the very language of the command by which G-d called him into Canaan in the first place, "leave your land and your birthfolk and your father's house" (12:1). So Jews hear an unambiguous and weighty anti-intermarriage appeal annually in the third Torah portion of the new year.

But the text we have received also includes contrary, if unarticulated, perspectives as well—not explicit, but no less consequential. I am thinking of the towering figure of the Pentateuch: Moses, whom we call Moshe Rabbeinu, Moses our Rabbi, our teacher. How many wives did he have? One or two? Or was it three? The text is unclear. It tells us (Exodus 3) that he married Zipporah, the daughter of Reuel, a priest of Midian. In the next chapter it tells of his father-in-law, Jethro, a priest in Midian. Perhaps he married two women who were daughters of Midianite priests. But for certain he married at least one Midianite woman. But wait. In Numbers 12, Aaron and Miriam, Moses' brother and sister, deride him for marrying an Ethiopian[1] woman "for he had married an Ethiopian woman." Is she wife number three? Or number two? Or is this some strange identification of Zipporah the Midianite? No matter how many wives Moshe Rabbeinu had, none of them were Hebrew.

And then there is the remarkable case of the House of David, the dynasty that ruled Judah from David all the way through the destruction of the first Temple. The dynasty that established Jerusalem as its capital and built the Temple. And the dynasty under whose aegis the text of the Torah itself began the process of composition. So it is not insignificant that the progenitor David of this dynasty is described as tracing his ancestry back to Judah the son of Jacob/Israel who, in the Torah portion that Jews will be hearing again this December, is described as marrying a Canaanite (Don't let great-grandfather Abraham know!). More immediately the Biblical text seems to go out of its way in identifying his great-grandmother as Ruth, whose story is, as Pat says, "touchingly beautiful," but who was also nonetheless a Moabite—Moabites whom the Bible especially derides (Genesis 19:30ff) and execrates: "... a Moabite shall not enter

into the assembly of the Lord; even to the tenth generation shall none of them enter into the assembly of the Lord forever" (Deuteronomy 23:4). And then there is Solomon, David's son from whom all the succeeding members of the dynasty were descended. The text, composed under the aegis of his dynasty, both tells us that he married thousands of foreign women—and excoriates him for that. More saliently, there is the fact that his mother is identified as Bathsheba, whom we can safely assume was a Hittite like Uriah to whom she was married when we first encounter her—and when David appropriated her (2 Samuel 11). The dynasty of rulers of the Judeans were, thus, not to put too fine a point on it, themselves descendants of multiple exogamous marriages.

And then there is Esther, who gained herself a book in the Bible and earned a holiday—Purim—by marrying the non-Jewish king Ahashuerus. Of course the rabbis were loath to include her book in the canon, perhaps because of her exogamy. I could go on, but the point is that the Bible is not as univocal on the subject of outmarriage as we might assume.

Later Jewish tradition was. The conventional reading of all the exogamous marriages in the Bible was that the non-Israelite partner "converted" to Judaism. Reading these commentaries today we recognize this as an anachronistic understanding of the text. But it reflects the value world of the commentators who were profoundly discomfited by the possibility of any of their ancestors entering a union that was anathema to them. They interpreted the prohibitions of Deuteronomy (and later Ezra) in the most general terms and proscribed any marriages to non-Jews. Nonetheless, the halachic insistence on matrilineal descent which defines one as Jewish on the basis of being born to a Jewish mother suggests not only the instances of rape that the community manifestly experienced, but the possibility that there were sufficient numbers of Jewish men married to non-Jewish women, the status of whose children raised questions.

And this remained the general attitude of the community for millennia—reinforced, it must be added, by prohibitions of various Christian rulers in

Europe. The conventional Jewish attitude toward outmarriage was one of betrayal, outrage and profound sadness. While we do not find the subject discussed at length in the texts and histories that have reached us (as one would not record unseemly things), it is not impossible that there was more of such outmarriage than official documents might suggest.

Surely with modernity the opportunities and the instances of it must have increased. Representative of this is the Rothschild family of international bankers. It became their family practice that sons were required to marry Jewish women, though daughters were allowed to marry "out." As *Fiddler on the Roof*, and its source material, the Tevye stories by Sholom Aleichem, remind us, this was already a recognized, if heartbreaking, reality in the old country as it encountered the modern world.

Which brings us to the situation today and calls for more personal reflection. Let me begin by noting what the conventional attitude is not. I do not believe that the issue is disdain for other religious traditions. Opposition to intermarriage can even include the recognition that we have much to gain from engagement with the faith perspectives of others, and that deep engagement can enrich us. That is not what we are discussing. I do not believe that traditional opposition to intermarriage is predicated on the notion that non-Jews are somehow inferior to Jews or that Jews are somehow special or better. Simple parochialism, chauvinism, or intolerance cannot be the issue here.

This is complicated. There was a time, not all that many generations ago, when the marriage of an Ashkenazic Jew to a Sephardic Jew was considered an intermarriage. And there are, still today, subsets of the Jewish community, such as the "Syrians" of Brooklyn and Deal, New Jersey, that actively discourage marrying even Jews from other subsets. I am puzzled by sectors of the community, Orthodox and others, that oppose intermarriage but will not allow anyone to convert to Judaism. Those postures feel to me to be almost biological in their understanding of what Judaism is. It does seem almost xenophobic. And it cannot be what the issue of intermarriage is about. What is at stake, as Pat has

already made explicit, is not a denigration of those who are not Jewish, but Jewish survival.

Here I can offer personal testimony. I can recall from my childhood the issue of people who married out being discussed in hushed tones—and certainly not in the presence of children. As recently as 1972 when CBS television broadcast a show called "Bridget Loves Bernie," a sort of updated *Abie's Irish Rose*, national Jewish bodies tried to get it taken off the air as offensive—or threatening. I remember when families would "sit shiva"—actually go through the mourning rituals for their children who intermarried. I have met people who literally considered their intermarried children to be dead—who never knew their grandchildren. So this is not a subject that can be discussed in bloodless objectivity.

This is a subject that has divided the Jewish community. There was a time when only renegade rabbis would officiate at intermarriage services and when such rabbis were censured by their rabbinical bodies. I was present at the convention of the Reform rabbinate when the official policy was changed to let every man (it was all men then) follow his own conscience. Today by some estimates 50 percent of Reform rabbis will officiate at intermarriages. No Conservative or Orthodox rabbis do. The Orthodox and Conservative movements still subscribe to the notion of matrilineal descent which means that children of intermarried Jewish mothers are considered Jewish, but children of intermarried Jewish fathers are not. It was only in recent decades that the Reform movement adopted the policy of patrilineal descent, which means that children of intermarried fathers, no less than intermarried mothers can be considered Jewish.[2] There was a time when Jewish congregations would not let anyone who was intermarried serve on their boards. Today in many liberal congregations the intermarried spouses themselves hold offices. All of these actions are clearly a response to the reality that intermarriage is becoming more prevalent in the American Jewish community. What does this portend for the American Jewish future?

Statistics tell us that as recently as the 1960s the rate of intermarriage was 7 percent. This past year the Pew Research Center issued a study called "A Portrait of Jewish Americans." It reports that the current rate of intermarriage is 52 percent. There are optimists who insist that such a rate of intermarriage means that ever more non-Jews will find their way into the Jewish community through their spouses. I am afraid they are woefully incorrect. All studies on this subject are in agreement: among intermarried families only 25 percent raise their children as Jews. 25 percent of 52 percent is not a prescription for many more generations of American Jewish life.

I know that there is no way anyone can mandate endogamy. And I know that even encouraging it sounds like chauvinism, parochialism, and intolerance—especially when you are talking to teenagers or people of marriageable age and especially in a community that teaches and is committed to the idea of human equality. All the more so when, happily, the mood of the age is tolerance and acceptance of people with all their differences.

As for intermarriage, I do not believe that every intermarriage expresses a rejection of Judaism. And I do not believe that every intermarriage represents a loss of a Jewish soul or a loss to the Jewish people. But I do believe that the loss of 75 percent of 52 percent of the Jewish community is bad odds. And so every intermarriage—and the message of Jewish disengagement it might send—worries me, and, yes, saddens me, and pains me so deeply personally, that it is emotionally beyond me to officiate at such rites.[3] Am I intolerant? I hope not. Am I contemptuous of other religious traditions? I reject that emphatically. Do I care that there is a healthy Jewish future? With all my heart.

So I would return to the question that remains implicit in all this—and which Pat has addressed. Why should anyone care about Jewish survival? I would conclude with my own deepest convictions about what is called Jewish continuity. I take the subject of Jewish survival seriously. On some level, perhaps unconscious, it haunts all serious Jews. Even though *Look*

magazine has long ceased publication, its cover article on "The Vanishing American Jew" is an expression of an undercurrent of anxiety that all Jews continue to share, like a nightmare erupting from the collective unconscious. The number of works of fiction that have been written about "the last Jew in the world" could fill a bookshelf. Why do we care?

The worry is hardwired into our tradition and culture. The Torah itself is focused on the subject of the future of Israel. What is the content of G-d's first promise to Abraham? "I will make you a great people ... as numerous as the stars in the heavens and the sands by the sea shore." The Torah we read is a family-centered book in which we are invited over and over again to think of the unfolding of the divine plan in terms of a family drama. It is a book which pays great attention to who marries whom and who begets whom. It expresses itself in terms of continuity of the generations. And it keeps instructing us who read it to "teach it diligently to your children." So many of our celebrations are about reinforcing in our children where they came from—so that they can carry that past into the future. The thought of the end of all that is shattering.

I offer two perspectives. And ultimately I do not believe they are in contradiction. As I have argued here before, Jews are not only a religion. We are also a people. And, like any group we have it as "an inalienable right" to exist. My attention is riveted whenever I read about someone being the last speaker of this language or that—speaking a tongue that literally no one else can understand. It is heartbreaking. The ecology of human culture is diminished. All of us are the poorer. I can envision that "last Jew on earth" experiencing the same sense of futility and profound sorrow. And I can imagine all humanity diminished for that.

And I feel this, as Pat noted, all the more keenly in the shadow of the Shoah. I am moved by what the philosopher Emil Fackenheim taught us. Jewish tradition speaks of the Bible as containing 613 commandments. Fackenheim says we should hear what he called the 614th commandment that calls to us out of the silence of Auschwitz: "no posthumous victories for Hitler." Everything that diminishes Jewish life is a posthumous

victory. Every disappeared Jew is such a victory. His or her loss is all the more wrenching in the face of that. When I read of some grandchild of a holocaust survivor who has "opted out" I am struck with a stunned sadness. So on the simple level of peoplehood the sense of abandonment is palpable and painful.

But I am a religious Jew. And I think of the loss of Jews in a different idiom. As a historian of religion I could speak of ecology again. The religious ecology would be diminished by the disappearance of any of the "great traditions." Speaking in the context of this interreligious exchange, more theologically, I would echo Saint Augustine in his toxic way and the twentieth century Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig in a diametrically opposite way and reflect on how the existence of Jews plays a significant role for the very viability of Christianity itself. Rosenzweig saw Jews as exemplars for Christian monotheism. And if we are that, the loss of a vital Judaism diminishes Christianity too. Perhaps the "how" of that is a fitting subject for yet another McGinley lecture. So it would not be inappropriate to speak here about Jewish survival as a benefit to Christianity itself. Fifty years ago when Heschel asked Gustave Weigel if the Church believed it would "really be *ad Maiorem Dei gloriam* to have a world without Jews" the answer was probably yes. In the years since then the Church has gone through profound re-evaluation of Jews and Judaism. If Heschel were to ask the question today, the answer would be a resounding "no."[4]

But as a Jew, speaking in a Jewish religious idiom, I believe that Jewish survival is, above all, of profoundly religious significance. I take seriously the notion that we are not only a people but a covenant people. We have an obligation to G-d to be faithful witnesses. I embrace the words of Isaiah, "'you are my witnesses', says the Lord" (43:10). And hearing them I feel the terrifying ramifications of its implied corollary: "if you are My witnesses I am G-d. And if you are not My witnesses, I am not G-d." For me this is the ground meaning of the bitter words of the Yiddish poet, Jacob Glatstein, challenging G-d in response to the horror of the Shoah:

Without Jews there is no Jewish G-d ...
The light is fading in your shabby tent
The Jewish hour is guttering
Jewish G-d!
You are almost gone[6]

Without Jews. ... And so, finally, every disappeared Jew is a loss of cosmic consequence. It is against that background that I feel so deeply the implications of the question we address tonight.

NOTES

1 Ethiopia serves, as well, as the locus of other universalist perspectives in the Bible. The Queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10) is represented as a woman of great intellect and dignity. More pointedly, the prophet Amos has G-d asking the Israelites, "'Are ye not as children of the Ethiopians unto me, O children of Israel?' saith the LORD." (9:7)

2 There are people who feel that this decision has "split the community" and caused an irremediable chasm between Reform and other Jews.

3 And let me hasten to add, conversely I am committed to doing everything in my ability to help intermarried Jews feel comfortable continuing their lives in the Jewish community; to letting their spouses know that they are always welcome, without pressure to convert, to attend services and participate in the life of the community; and to help intermarried families raise Jewish children.

4 Thomas B. Morgan, "The Vanishing American Jew," *Look* 28 (May 5, 1964), 42-46.

5 As exemplified in *Nostra Aetate*:

> Furthermore, in her rejection of every persecution against any man, the Church, mindful of the patrimony she shares with the Jews and moved not by political reasons but by the Gospel's spiritual love, decries hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone" (a. 4)

In a related context, the Catholic Theologian, Gregory Baum, writes

> After Auschwitz the Christian churches no longer wish to convert the Jews. While they may not be sure of the theological grounds that dispense them from this mission, the churches have become aware that asking the Jews to become Christians is a spiritual way of blotting them out of existence and thus only reinforces the effects of the Holocaust. ("Rethinking the Church's Mission after Auschwitz," in *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era*, ed. Eva Fleischner (New York: Ktav, 1977), 113.

6 "Without Jews," in *Blood to Remember: American Poets on the Holocaust*, ed. Charles Adés Fishman, tr. Nathan Hager (St. Louis, MO.: Time Being Books, 2007).

Interfaith Marriage:

A Concern for Jews, Christians and Muslims

A Muslima Response by Professor Jerusha Tanner Lamptey, Ph.D.
Union Theological Seminary, New York City

I would like to begin by thanking Sister Anne-Marie Kirmse, Father Patrick Ryan and Fordham University for the invitation to offer a Muslim response to tonight's topic. In my brief remarks I hope to reiterate some of the themes that have already been astutely introduced and to add a few new perspectives as well.

Context matters. It's almost cliché to say so. However, it remains true that whether we acknowledge it explicitly or not, we are shaped by our multifaceted identities: we are shaped by our various languages, religions, cultures, genders, professions, et cetera. I feel compelled by tonight's topic—interfaith marriage—to state this, and moreover to be very upfront about the aspects of my identity that impact what I will say this evening.

I come to this topic as a Muslim, as a woman, as a mother, and as a member of an interfaith (I sometimes prefer, multifaith) family. I also come to tonight's topic as a Muslima theologian (Islamic feminist theologian) whose research is largely devoted to probing the manner in which gender and religious difference are constructed and reconstructed within various traditions. In short, this means, I have far too much to say on this topic.

I will however restrict myself to four primary themes in relation to Islamic thought on interfaith marriage. These themes can be best encapsulated in a series of questions.

First, what does the Islamic tradition teach about interfaith marriage?

Second, what are the gender implications of traditional opinions on this subject?

Third, how are religious identity and diversity depicted in these opinions?

And finally, to conclude, is interfaith marriage really a "problem"?

I.
WHAT DOES THE ISLAMIC TRADITION TEACH ABOUT INTERFAITH MARRIAGE?

As Father Ryan has already indicated, the general stance of many Islamic scholars and jurists has been that a Muslim man may marry a righteous woman who is a member of "*ahl al-kitab*," the "People of the Scripture/Book." Muslim women, however, are not permitted to do the same, to marry righteous men from among the People of the Scripture. Muslim men and Muslim women, alike, are restricted from marrying "*mushrik*," a term that can be translated as idolater but is more accurately translated as "one who associates partners with God."

This has been the prevailing consensus within Islamic thought. There are though some important observations to be made regarding this consensus. First, the designation "People of the Scripture" is widely seen

to refer to Jews and Christians. However, there have always existed debates over its exact referents, debates over whether other religious communities might be included in the collective term as well. This is provoked by Qur'anic inclusions of groups named the Magians and Sabians, and it continues in contemporary debates over other groups, such as Buddhists.

Secondly, the restriction of Muslim women from marrying "righteous" people from this group is based upon "textual silence." This means that, as in the verse quoted by Fr. Ryan, men are explicitly given the permission. The Qur'an does not say anything explicitly about this to women. In other words, there is neither an explicit permission nor any explicit restriction stated for Muslim women in regard to the People of the Scripture.

Traditional scholars and jurists have argued that there would need to be an explicit permission granted in the Qur'an in order for it to be permissible, and since there is not, it is impermissible. This argument however is somewhat strained by the fact that juridical consensus on other topics, when there exists no explicit prohibition or permission, has largely tended to interpret such "silence" as forestalling any attempt to declare that thing prohibited or *haram*.

Moreover, this juridical conclusion does not effectively grapple with the fact that the majority of Qur'anic verses on marriage are addressed to men. Recent scholarship, for example, has attempted to explain this, not as Divine will and male superiority, but rather as responsiveness to the particular patriarchal context of seventh-century Arabia. If it is contextual, then there are important questions about how to reinterpret these verses in other contexts where men do not fulfill the same functions, roles and responsibilities as they did then.

Finally, the permission of men to marry from among the People of the Scripture is not unqualified; it is a limited permission to marry the "chaste", the "righteous," the "pious" from among the group. Significantly, this qualification is linked to the prohibition for both men and women from marrying "*mushrik*." While it may be tempting to define "*mushrik*" as non-monotheists or idolaters, the Qur'an defines this term as the

antithesis of being righteous. Therefore, it is not an interfaith restriction; it is not about restricting members of the Muslim faith from marrying members of other faith communities. This is evident in juridical discourse that indicates that even some self-identified members of the Muslim community may not be righteous or may even be *mushrik*. As a non-communal designator, it therefore prompts questions about whether Qur'anic dictates on marriage are really concerned with faith communities or with the nature and quality of faith commitment.

II.
WHAT ARE THE GENDER IMPLICATIONS OF TRADITIONAL OPINIONS ON INTERFAITH MARRIAGE?

In order to begin to discuss this question, we must focus on the areas of divergence between men and women in traditional opinions. We must probe, more specially, the reasons that jurists, exegetes and contemporary scholars give for allowing Muslim men to marry non-Muslim women, and disallowing Muslim women from marrying non-Muslim men. There exists very little rationalization or explanation in the primary sources. Most of the explanations come from various interpreters and are thus colored by their contexts and understandings of sex and gender.

One of the main explanations is that Islam is patrilineal, and religion is passed through the father; therefore, if a Muslim woman married a non-Muslim the child would not be considered Muslim. While it is clear that the Qur'an was revealed in a patriarchal and patrilineal context, it is by no means clear that the heart of the Qur'anic message intended to affirm patriarchy and uphold patrilineal heritage. This is why many Qur'anic verses critique the hallmarks of patriarchal society, asserting that women cannot be treated as property, must receive inheritance, and have self-autonomy.

Moreover, religious identity in the Qur'an is not something that can be inherited. This is blatantly evident in the prayer of Abraham, who is the foremost exemplar of righteousness in the Qur'an:

> When Abraham's Lord tested him with certain commandments, which he fulfilled, God said, "I will make you a leader of people." Abraham asked, "And will You make leaders from my descendants too?" God answered, "My pledge does not hold for those who do evil.'" (2:124)

This verse indicates that what is prized is not lineage but particular forms of practice, commitment to God, and interaction with others. This is confirmed in numerous other prayers of Abraham in which he asks God to make his "offspring" among those who submit to God in actions and beliefs (ex. 2:128). In sum, what is valued in the Qur'an is not automatically passed along, but must be taught, cultivated and then freely enacted. Exposure to this may come through lineage, but there is little evidence that religious patrilineage has inherent value in and of itself.

If exposure to and education in beliefs and practices are really the central concerns in interfaith marriage, then would this not be possible irrespective of whether the Muslim parent was male or female? Scholars, especially classical, argue against this, stating that a Muslim women can easily be coerced into foregoing her faith or acquiescing to her male spouse. While I am not interested in denying that this is sometimes true, I am concerned with the gender normative discourse it promotes. It indicates a generalized depiction of women as being submissive to men, dominated by men, and controlled by men. It is this understanding of sexual biology and gender norms that leads many Muslim scholars to explain the prohibition of Muslim women marrying non-Muslim men as a form of protection. Muslim women (and women in general) are weaker, less dominant, more likely to be coerced. Therefore they can only marry Muslim men in order to be sheltered and have the freedom to practice their faith. Muslim men are not similarly vulnerable, and therefore may marry non-Muslim women.

There is an interesting twist to the gender discourse that occurs at this juncture. Muslim men who marry women from among the People of Scripture are described in a very different manner from non-Muslim men who marry Muslim women. Muslim men are depicted as being tolerant

and respectful of the religious practices and beliefs of their non-Muslim wives (something that may or may not accord with the reality on the ground which oft tends toward conversion). This respect is frequently grounded in the value that Islamic sources and tradition ascribe to the prophets, leaders, revelations and practices of other faith communities.

III.
HOW ARE RELIGIOUS IDENTITY AND DIVERSITY DEPICTED IN THESE OPINIONS?

The tangling together of religious and gender discourse is fascinating. It not only promotes a very essentialized view of women and men, and a very glorified view of the religious tolerance of Muslim men, it is also premised upon two contrasting depictions of religious identity and religious diversity.

The first depiction is based on an assertion of internal homogeneity within religious traditions. The claim that Muslim women who marry Muslim men will be protected and free to practice their faith is premised upon a view of Islam as being a singular entity. Muslim women will be protected because their Muslim spouses believe and act in the same manner as themselves. There will be no conflict, and therefore no reason for the Muslim male to exert his normative male dominance. In this view, all Muslims believe the same things, do the same things, and care about the same things.

Of course there are areas of overlap, but any amount of contact with real-life Muslims will quickly disabuse a person of the notion that Muslims are homogeneous. Muslim-to-Muslim marriages can be charged with deep and profound disagreements on "religious" topics. Therefore, the claim to homogeneity here is not so much a descriptive claim but a prescriptive claim that aims to shore up the boundaries between religious communities. It is a particular construction of religious identity that barters in clear-cut differentiation between faith communities. In this construction, faith communities are distinct from one another, and a

person's faith commitment arises as an assertion of the preeminent truth or value of a singular community in distinction from all others.

This depiction of religious identity and diversity, however, differs from the depiction that underlies the rationale for why Muslim men can marry women from among the People of the Book. They are granted this on the basis of Qur'anic affirmations of the truth, value and divine origin of other prophets, revelations and practices. For example, Qur'an 2:62 states "Those who believe, the Jews, the Nazarenes (Christians), and the Sabians—all those who believe in God and the Last Day and do good—will have their reward with their Lord. No fear for them, nor will they grieve." And again in Qur'an 3:3: "God has revealed to you this Book with the Truth, confirming the scripture which preceded it, as God revealed the Taurat (Torah) and Injeel (Gospel) ... "

These Qur'anic affirmations are described as the foundation for the Muslim man's respect and tolerance. Qur'anic discourse on this topic, however, transcends respect and tolerance. The Qur'an describes diversity as an "*ayat Allah*," a sign of God. Signs of God are deliberate, purposeful creations uniquely designed to reveal intricacies and nuances about God's self and God's plan for humanity. To underscore this, the same terminology is used to refer to the verses of the Qur'an; those verses are also "*ayat Allah*." In this depiction, the signs—in scripture, in nature, in humanity, in other faith communities and members thereof—are God's revelation.

Moreover, the Qur'an provides an explanation and directive regarding this diversity: God states that diversity has been created "so that we may know one another" (49:13). While variously interpreted, this is widely affirmed as a call to relationship and to interaction. If diversity is a "sign of God" created so that we may learn about God, ourselves and others, then we are obliged through our very commitment to God to acknowledge diversity; to engage each other with humility and sincerity; and to grapple with the provocative tensions that arise from having a particular faith commitment that demands openness to other communities and ways.

In sum, and in distinction from the first view of religious identity, in this depiction religious commitment is not seen as being threatened by engagement with religious diversity. Such engagement actually may serve to enhance commitment.

CONCLUSION: IS INTERFAITH MARRIAGE REALLY A "PROBLEM"?

This brings me to my concluding question: Is interfaith marriage necessarily a "concern" or a "problem"?

I am not sure that this is the manner in which we should speak of interfaith marriage and families. It can appear disrespectful and demeaning toward actual members of interfaith families. While some interfaith families have spouses and children who do not prioritize their faith commitments and practices, this is not always the case nor is it necessarily indicative of anything beyond personal choice. The oversimplified perspective that states that interfaith marriages can only work if one tradition is "chosen," or if the spouses have only marginal commitments to their own traditions, is not the only or the dominant reality.

What is the reality is that many of our religious institutions and definitions of community continue to be based upon models of religious identity that are exclusionary and singular. This explicitly or implicitly precludes full participation of interreligious families, of people who want to learn, enact and pass along their faith commitments ... all of them. These families can be marginalized not of their own desire but due to other factors. In my humble opinion, and based upon my positionality as a Muslima theologian who affirms the second Islamic perspective on religious diversity and identity—the perspective that we are called to engage deeply across traditions and that this will enhance our commitments—in light of this, I believe that if there is a "problem" or "concern" related to interfaith marriage it is a concern for how communities can and should better support interfaith families as committed and vital members.

PATRICK J. RYAN, S.J.

Patrick J. Ryan, S. J., is the Laurence J. McGinley Professor of Religion and Society at Fordham University. He earned bachelor's and master's degrees in English language and literature at Fordham, and a Ph.D. in the comparative history of religion from Harvard University with a specialization in Arabic and Islamic studies. At Harvard he studied with the famous Canadian scholar of Islam, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, and the German scholar of Islamic mysticism, Annemarie Schimmel. Between 1964 and 2005, Father Ryan lived and worked in West Africa for twenty-six years, principally in Nigeria and Ghana, where he taught Islamic studies and comparative religion at both the University of Ghana and the University of Cape Coast. From 1999 to 2005, he was the president of Loyola Jesuit College in Abuja, Nigeria. In March 2014, he had a Fulbright Specialist Award to teach in Arrupe College in Harare, Zimbabwe.

Father Ryan held numerous positions at Fordham before becoming the McGinley Professor in 2009. He taught Middle Eastern studies (1983-1986), held the Loyola Chair in the Humanities (1996-1998), and served as Fordham's vice president for University mission and ministry (2005-2009). Author of numerous articles, scholarly and popular, Father Ryan has also published three books. In his semi-annual McGinley lectures he is currently working with Jewish and Muslim scholars on the commonalities these faith traditions share with Christianity.

RABBI DANIEL F. POLISH

Rabbi Daniel F. Polish is an accomplished author and scholar. He earned his bachelor's degree at Northwestern University and completed his rabbinical training at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati. He earned his doctoral degree at Harvard University. A frequent teacher of both Jewish and Christian audiences, he has addressed interfaith gatherings in places such as Warsaw, Seville, Istanbul, New Delhi, and Bangladesh.

Rabbi Polish is a published poet and has written or edited a number of books, including *Bringing the Psalms to Life: How to Understand and Use the Book of Psalms*; *Keeping Faith with the Psalms: Deepen Your Relationship with God Using the Book of Psalms*; and *Talking About God: Exploring the Meaning of Religious Life with Kierkegaard, Buber, Tilich, and Heschel*.

He has served as a leader of national Jewish organizations: as director of the Washington Office of the Synagogue Council of America and the director of the Commission on Social Action of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. He has also served as a university teacher and as a congregational rabbi for over thirty years. Rabbi Polish is currently spiritual leader of Congregation Shir Chadash in New York's Hudson Valley.

JERUSHA T. LAMPTEY, PH.D.

Jerusha T. Lamptey is assistant professor of Islam and ministry at Union Theological Seminary in New York. She earned her B.A. in anthropology and religion with a focus on traditional West African religious practices at American University in 1997. From 2000 to 2002, she researched interreligious interaction as a Fulbright Scholar in Ghana. She received an M.A. in Islamic sciences at the Graduate School of Islamic and Social Sciences in Leesburg, Va. in 2004, an M.A. in theological and religious studies at Georgetown University in 2009, and a Ph.D. in theological and religious studies with a focus on religious pluralism at Georgetown University in 2011. Before joining the Union faculty in July of 2012, she was a visiting assistant professor in the Department of Theology at Georgetown University. She has published articles and book chapters on religious pluralism, ecumenical relations, John Paul II, Vatican II, and African traditional religion. Her first book, *Never Wholly Other: A Muslima Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Oxford University Press), was published in 2014.