

From Indifference to Dwelling in Difference: Catholic-Muslim Marriages and Families and the Non-Hegemonic Reception of Muslim Migrants

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With regard to marriage between Catholics and non-Christian migrants, this should be discouraged, though to a varying degree, depending on the religion of each partner, with exceptions in special cases.... Today, especially in certain countries, there is a high or growing percentage of Muslim immigrants, for whom this Pontifical Council also expresses its solicitude Beside these points of agreement there are, however, also divergences When, for example, a Catholic woman and a Muslim wish to marry ... bitter experience teaches us that a particularly careful and in-depth preparation is called for. During it the two fiancés will be helped to know and consciously “assume” the profound cultural and religious differences they will have to face, both between themselves and in relation to their respective families and the Muslim’s original environment

—Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, *Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi* (nos. 63-67)

THE INCREASED RATE IN THE MIGRATION of peoples in the last decades has presented normatively western, Christian societies with more frequent encounters with non-Christian migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, particularly from societies of Muslims. The so-called “Muslim Ban” by the Trump administration notwithstanding, this rate is likely to remain on the rise for the coming decades, at least without revolutionary change in our social, economic, and political systems.² Of industrialized countries, the European and Australasian regions have welcomed a number of Muslim migrants significantly larger than has the United States; in all regions, however, there has been a marked increase in Islamophobia, a

¹ Many thanks to Thomas Sundaram, JCL, and Suheil Laher, PhD, who offered their expertise in Catholic canon law and Islamic law, respectively, in my initial research for this article. Errors in the piece remain my own.

² See the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) “Figures at a Glance” and other data they have collected at www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html.

negative prejudice constituted by both racism and xenophobia.³ Not even prominent Catholic officials are immune to such Islamophobic sentiments: Cardinal Raymond Burke, at the Rome Life Forum on May 17, 2019, averred that “to be opposed to ... largescale Muslim immigration is ... a responsible exercise of one’s patriotism,” opining without evidence that Muslim immigrants are mere “opportunists” and falsely claiming that “Islam ... believes itself to be destined to rule the world.”⁴

This essay seeks not to address directly the moral and theological response to migrants. Instead, it endeavors to respond indirectly to this new context through the lens of marriage and family, and from a Catholic but interreligious perspective. In *Familiaris Consortio*, John Paul II maintains that “the family is the first and vital cell of society,” and thus it is “by nature and vocation open to other families and to society, and undertakes its social role” (no. 42). Furthermore, “The family is placed at the service of the building up of the [Reign] of God in history by participating in the life and mission of the Church” (no. 49). Generally, a marriage and family are called to be sites expressing the communion necessary for a society to reflect the Reign of God. Specifically, a Catholic-Muslim marriage and family may become sites expressing the unity-in-difference required of a society aiming for the non-hegemonic reception of Muslim migrants. By “non-hegemonic,”

³ Cf. Peter Gottschalk and Gabriel Greenberg, *Islamophobia* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers), 5, where Islamophobia is defined as follows: “‘Islamophobia’ accurately reflects a social anxiety toward Islam and Muslim cultures that is largely unexamined by, yet deeply ingrained in, Americans [T]his phobia results for most from distant social experiences that mainstream American culture has perpetuated in popular memory, which are in turn buttressed by a similar understanding of current events. ... This anxiety relies on a sense of otherness, despite many common sources of thought.” Islamophobia is in turn institutionally reinforced by the surveillance and police state, discriminatory practices by Homeland Security and other security apparatuses, and media representations of Islam and Muslims.

⁴ LifeSiteNews, “Cdl. Burke on resisting ‘large-scale’ Muslim immigration,” *YouTube*, www.youtube.com/watch?v=7LlxduKI9uY. Arguably, Cardinal Burke is representative of many Christians who equate their Christian faith with white, Western, and/or Euro-North American racial and/or nationalistic imaginaries, adhering to a form of Christian ethnonationalism. For an argument considering the religion-race-national identity nexus within American civil religion, and how it expresses a religio-racial tribal identity that ascribes a particular character and purpose to the American people, see Rhys H. Williams, “Civil Religion and the Cultural Politics of National Identity in Obama’s America,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 52, no. 2 (2013): 239-257. For a popular article regarding the rise of this form of nationalism, see David Albertson, “Whose Nation? Which Communities? The Fault Lines of the New Christian Nationalism,” *America*, September 19, 2019, www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2019/09/19/whose-nation-which-communities-fault-lines-new-christian-nationalism. For recent polling on this issue, see Joanna Piacenza, “Roughly Half the Electorate Views Christian Nationalism as a Threat,” *Morning Consult*, April 2, 2019, www.morningconsult.com/2019/04/02/roughly-half-the-electorate-views-christian-nationalism-as-a-threat/.

I intend the welcoming of a minority or marginalized group into the majority, dominant group in such a way that the former's differences are not erased, occluded, or subsumed by the latter's normative ideology.

Despite the prohibitive caution (arguably prejudicial) of the selection from *Erga Migrantes* that serves as this article's epigraph, the prescriptive hope at the end relates to this type of reception: the fiancés are called mutually to "consciously 'assume'" their differences. What does this mean? I suggest that the use of "assume" (i.e., take on, take up) is noteworthy. This word, with its Latin root and shared meaning across all Romance languages, was historically employed to describe the way the Word of God became human: "human nature was assumed, not absorbed" (*Catechism*, no. 470).⁵ Within the sphere of a Catholic-Muslim marriage and then of a society welcoming Muslim migrants, this "assumption" aims for a reception that neither absorbs, occludes, subsumes, nor erases differences. Before proceeding to a more detailed thesis, some preludes and provisions are necessary.

PRELUDES AND PROVISIONS

As a prelude and from a strictly soteriological perspective, Catholic doctrine nearly unequivocally states that *salvation* includes Muslims, who worship the one and merciful God along with Catholics.⁶ But teaching regarding *postmortem* salvation does not easily translate into practices for embodied living in community *now*. Work has been done regarding the (im)possibility of multi- or interreligious prayer between Catholics and Muslims, and this may get a step closer to impacting practices.⁷ While some sort of shared prayer life between Muslims and

⁵ "Assume" occurs ten times in "The Son of God Became Man" (Paragraph 1), indicating the centrality of the term. It is cross-referenced with *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 22, n. 22, which itself connects it to conciliar orthodoxy from Chalcedon to the Second and Third Councils of Constantinople. Footnote 22 of *Gaudium et Spes* traces this history and the importance of the unity-in-duality of the Incarnate Word: "Cf. *Second Council of Constantinople*, canon 7: 'The divine Word was not changed into a human nature, nor was a human nature absorbed by the Word.' Denzinger 219 (428); Cf. also Third Council of Constantinople: 'For just as His most holy and immaculate human nature, though deified, was not destroyed (*theotheisa ouk anerethe*), but rather remained in its proper state and mode of being.' Denzinger 291 (556); Cf. Council of Chalcedon: 'to be acknowledged in two natures, without confusion change, division, or separation.' Denzinger 148 (302)."

⁶ "But the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator. In the first place amongst these there are the Muslims, who, professing to hold the faith of Abraham, along with us adore the one and merciful God, who on the last day will judge mankind" (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 16). See also *Nostra Aetate*, no. 3.

⁷ For three viewpoints regarding Christian-Muslim interritual participation and interreligious prayer, see the following articles in Marianne Moyaert, *Ritual Participation and Interreligious Dialogue: Boundaries, Transgressions and Innovations* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015): "Receiving the Stranger: A Muslim Theology of Shared Worship," by Tim Winter; "Interreligious Prayer between Roman Catholic

Catholics has theological merit, the depth and breadth of such interreligious worship remain contested. All agree that the Holy Spirit may certainly inspire communal adoration of God. Nonetheless, soteriology and a theology of interreligious prayer do not directly concern the embodied and real unity-in-difference desired in a marriage, family, or society. Theories regarding postmortem salvation and how to pray together do not assist in developing non-hegemonic strategies for negotiating real and asymmetrical differences often at play in a marriage, family, or society.

Despite the disparate theological differences between the Catholic and Islamic religious traditions, a unity-in-difference between a Muslim and Catholic may become a site for God's revelation of what it means to be in relation to another, who is *never wholly other* (borrowing this phrase from comparative Muslima feminist theologian Jerusha Tanner Rhodes).⁸ A Catholic-Muslim family may model *in this temporal, fleeting* world the (hopeful) coming together, or assumption, of all persons in God during the last days. In this essay, I call this disposition an *eschatological hope* because it embodies in the present the hope of the *eschaton*. Indeed, it is a Catholic-Muslim marriage that may provide embodied insight into the meaning of soteriology and interreligious prayer life, not the other way around.

As a provisional statement, religious belief does not exclusively and inexorably inform practice, but social, cultural, political, racial, ethnic, economic, and other "non-religious" factors shape one's way of being and acting in the world as much as creedal statements, religious law, institutional authority, and prayer life. This caveat pertains particularly to the quote from *Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi* that opens this essay. While the authors of the document should have been more nuanced and sensitive with their wording, a generous reading suggests that they are more concerned about *cultural* and *social* differences between Europeans and recent immigrants. Sociological, anthropological, and indeed theological investigation into Catholic-Muslim marriages come to varied conclusions regarding these differences, but a point of agreement is that Catholic and Islamic creedal statements and religious law—be it canon law or Islamic law (*sharī'ah*) and jurisprudence (*fiqh*)—are not exclusively formative of the religious self. Indeed, a Catholic cardiologist from a suburb of St. Louis who married a Tamil Catholic recently emigrated from Myanmar would likely encounter more cultural and social discrepancies and dis-

Christians and Muslims," by Gavin D'Costa; and "Back-and-Forth Riting: The Dynamics of Christian-Muslim Encounters in Shrine Rituals," by Albertus Bagus Lak-sana, SJ.

⁸ See Jerusha Tanner Lamptey, *Never Wholly Other: A Muslima Theology of Religious Pluralism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

agreements than that same Catholic if they had married a second-generation American-Pakistani Muslim from Chicago practicing corporate law. When political affiliation in the context of the United States is factored into the equation, further complication emerges. A 2018 *PRRI* poll found that *more* Americans would be somewhat or very *unhappy* if their child were to marry someone of the *opposite political party* than if they were to marry someone *belonging to a different religious group or of a different race or ethnicity*.⁹

CATHOLIC-MUSLIM MARRIAGES AND FAMILIES EMBODY THE HOPE FOR A UNITY-IN-DIFFERENCE

Nonetheless, this essay proceeds from a theological presupposition that *religion matters* and that the spouses in a Catholic-Muslim marriage and family are *not indifferent* about their particular religious accounts of the world and how they may differ from each other. Drawing on scholarship from interreligious studies, I turn to the formative import of religious *hospitality* and *vulnerability*. These dispositions are necessary for encountering, negotiating, and learning from religious differences between individuals and communities. They are also a necessary prerequisite for fruitful interreligious engagement and inter-ritual practices.

These virtues of fruitful *interreligious engagement* provide initial insight into virtues that promote a thriving *interfaith marriage* between a Muslim and a Catholic. But the joyful, though far from perfect, “assumption” of religious differences to create a “unity-in-difference” between couples models a successful conciliation of the many potential disagreements—social, cultural, or with regards to finances, professional goals, housework, childcare, etc.—that may emerge in any marriage. If spouses can acknowledge difference but mutually support each other vis-à-vis ultimate theological truths, perhaps Catholic-Muslim families can all the more readily do so vis-à-vis other areas of marriage and familial life.

Furthermore, this coming together, or assumption, in a unity-of-difference prefigures the eschatological hope for the return and salvation of all things in God, without erasing or absorbing differences. Rather than either reducing religious differences to a least common denominator of agreement, or subsuming (by occluding) differences into an allegedly larger universal, fruitful interreligious engagement strives to maintain the very real theological differences among participants while *living in community*. Through a disposition constituted by vulnerability and hospitality, the spouses in a Catholic-Muslim marriage

⁹ See Maxine Najle and Robert P. Jones, “American Democracy in Crisis: The Fate of Pluralism in a Divided Nation,” *Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI)*, February 19, 2019, www.prri.org/research/american-democracy-in-crisis-the-fate-of-pluralism-in-a-divided-nation/.

may perhaps do likewise, i.e., *move away from indifference and toward a dwelling in difference*. This mutual indwelling in difference in the here and now, from a Catholic perspective, images not only the Incarnation (God's assuming, not absorbing, human nature), but also the communal nature of the Trinity, and embodies the eschatological hope for unity with God. This God, in both traditions, is not hegemonic and controlling, but capacious and generous enough for infinite differences: "[God's] mercy encompasses all things" (Qur'ān 7:156).

Since families are the cell of society, the virtues demanded of a Catholic-Muslim marriage and family may be transposed and expanded into the virtues demanded of a society humbly willing to welcome the Muslim migrant, but without erasing or absorbing their Muslim identity to assimilate and conform them to dominant white, Christian culture. More actively, the compassionate solidarity that exists within a Catholic-Muslim marriage and family overflows into solidarity with migrants and other communities faced with racism and xenophobia from the dominant society. The marriage and family in this case become transformative cells of society, reimagining and recreating the latter into one that seeks a unity-in-difference among all its members. Furthermore, the dwelling in difference of a Catholic-Muslim marriage and family implicitly challenges narrow conceptions of institutional, religious authority by drawing from the eschatological hope present in both revelations.

THE UNITED STATES CONTEXT

I narrow my purview to the US context. Here, it may shock Catholics that they share with Muslims today the fact of being strangers in a foreign land, migrants and refugees excluded from American civil discourse in various ways—Catholics historically but no longer, Muslims presently. The hypothesis driving this essay is that Catholic-Muslim marriages may learn to dwell in difference rather than be indifferent by focusing on the well-being and justice of the communities they bring together and in which they live. Indeed, just as *dwelling in religious difference* is an exercise that may beneficially extend to other areas of life, *being indifferent* to religious *disparities* may deleteriously extend to being indifferent to other social, economic, cultural, and racial disparities that often oppress the marginalized. By exercising attention to unity-in-difference in a marriage, we exercise the practice of communal justice that attends to the most precarious among us, to those most excluded by the norms and expectations of the dominant discourses and ideologies of nationalism, xenophobia, antisemitism, Islamophobia, and racism.

The topic of Christian-Muslim marriages in general and Catholic-Muslim in particular is not yet extensively researched in the US context. However, there are dozens of articles and books devoted to this

topic within the context of, inter alia, Australia, Iran, South Asia, Palestine, Lebanon, North Africa, and various European countries.¹⁰ This is because Christians and Muslims have cohabited in these regions historically since the advent of God's revelation to Muhammad ﷺ¹¹ and the subsequent expansion of Islam from Andalusia to South Asia; they also live together recently as migrants and refugees in far larger numbers in Europe, Australia, and New Zealand than in the US.¹²

¹⁰ See Abe W. Ata, *Christian-Muslim Inter-marriage in Australia: Identity, Social Cohesion or Cultural Fragmentation* (Melbourne: David Lovell, 2003); 'Abd Allāh Aḥmad Na'im, ed., *Inter-religious Marriages among Muslims: Negotiating Religious and Social Identity in Family and Community* (New Delhi: Global Media Publications, 2005); Heather Al-Yousuf, "Negotiating Faith and Identity in Muslim-Christian Marriages in Britain," in *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 17, no. 3 (2006): 317–29; Ibrahim Wade Ata, *Us & Them: Muslim-Christian Relations and Cultural Harmony in Australia* (Bowen Hills, Queensland, Australia: Australian Academic Press, 2009); Helen Richmond, *Blessed and Called to Be a Blessing: Muslim-Christian Couples Sharing a Life Together* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2016); also Ashraf Zahedi, "Negotiating between Shi'a and Catholic Rituals in Iran," in *Anthropology of the Middle East* 13, no. 1 (2018): 82–96, which is a revealing study of marriages between Catholic Filipinas and Muslim Iranian men, demonstrating that the women maintained their Catholic traditions within the home with other Filipinas while participating in Islamic Shi'a rituals publicly (their children were at home in both traditions). For non-English works, see Thomas Angehrn and Werner Weibel, *Mariages Islamo-chrétiens: Guide Pastoral De L'Église Catholique En Suisse* (Lucerne, Switzerland: SKAF, 1999); Associazione Canonistica Italiana and Congresso Nazionale Di Diritto Canonico, *Il Matrimonio Tra Cattolici Ed Islamici* (Città Del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2002), which is the most comprehensive and detailed study of Catholic-Muslim marriages from the perspective of Catholic canon law; Charles Saad, *Les Mariages Islamo-chrétiens* (Paris: Harmattan, 2004); Mairê Christodoulou, *Amour, Islam Et Mixité: La Construction Des Relations Au Sein Des Couples Musulman/non-musulman* (Louvain-la-neuve, Belgium: Harmattan Academia, 2012), in which the focus is more on intercultural differences, suggesting that theological differences are only one factor among many.

¹¹ The Arabic that follows mention of the Prophet Muhammad translates "peace and blessings be upon him [and his family]."

¹² There are some recent studies of interfaith marriages within the Muslim community in the US context. See John Cappucci, "I Do, I Don't, I Don't Know: A Study on Inter-religious Marriage in an Iraqi-Shi'a Muslim American Community," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 36, no. 4 (2016): 561–68; cf. especially 561, where, in this study, Cappucci observes that "the first wave [of Iraqi-Shi'a Muslim immigrants] is more interested in marrying outside of their subbranch and religion, while the recently-arrived second wave appeared more resistant to the idea of such intermarriages." There are of course a handful of online journalistic pieces covering this topic. See Aymann Ismail and Jeffrey Bloomer, "What Happened When a Devout Muslim and a Devout Catholic Got Married in Small-Town Iowa," *Slate*, April 24, 2018, www.slate.com/news-and-politics/2018/04/muslim-and-catholic-interfaith-marriage-when-neither-spouse-converts.html; Missy Weimer, "I Married a Muslim: Love, Google, and Three Intercultural Weddings," *INTER: Interfaith Ideas for American Life*, www.inter.ifyc.org/i-married-a-muslim-; Naomi Schaefer Riley, "When Muslims Intermarry, Do They Keep the Faith?" *The Washington Post*, April 12, 2003, www.wapo.st/170TJF4?tid=ss_mail&utm_term=.7532c0852945; Helene Ijaz,

While Muslims have been present in North America even before the Declaration of Independence—as enslaved Africans—and in larger numbers during the twentieth century since the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, the proportion of Muslim immigrants in the US is not at all near that of other so-called Western nations.¹³

Furthermore, there is a large body of literature regarding Christian-Jewish marriages, and one may venture to draw from these interfaith marriages an example from which to learn.¹⁴ However, the comparison presently falls short for two reasons, both sociological and political. First, the Muslim community within the US is still largely (with exceptions) composed of migrants, refugees, and at most first-generation Americans, whereas the Jewish community is (with exceptions) far more established and multigenerational. Second, the recent, alarming surge in antisemitism leading up to and during the presidency of Donald Trump notwithstanding, the Jewish community is far more welcomed by mainstream American religious and political discourse. However, given the strengthening of the police state and surveillance tactics that disproportionately target communities of Muslims ever since the USA PATRIOT Act of 2001, the precipitous uptick in Islamophobia that followed, and the recent swell in Islamophobia produced by Donald Trump's rhetoric during his campaign and presidency, Muslims remain largely excluded from political and religious discourses (no matter how much they may assimilate to them).¹⁵ Muslims are even racialized in ways reminiscent of how Catholics and then Jews were racialized in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, respectively.¹⁶ This, indeed, forms the hinge for the turn to inter-faithing for

“When Muslims Inter-marry,” *The Interfaith Observer*, November 15, 2018, www.the-interfaithobserver.org/journal-articles/2018/11/13/when-muslims-intermarry.

¹³ Kambiz Ghanee-Bassiri, *A History of Islam in America: From the New World to the New World Order* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

¹⁴ See, for example, Lee F. Gruzen, *Raising Your Jewish/Christian Child: How Interfaith Parents Can Give Children the Best of Both Their Heritages* (New York: Newmarket Press, 2001); Susan Katz Miller, *Being Both: Embracing Two Religions in One Interfaith Family* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2013).

¹⁵ An excellent case study of this is found in Rosemary R. Corbett, *Making Moderate Islam: Sufism, Service, and the “Ground Zero Mosque” Controversy* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2017); also helpful is Chris Earle, “Good Muslims, Bad Muslims, and the Nation: The ‘Ground Zero Mosque’ and the Problem With Tolerance,” in *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 12, no. 2 (2015): 1–18. For the manifold effects of Islamophobia in mainstream North American and European discourses, see the collection of chapters and articles available at *Islamophobia is Racism: Resource for Teaching & Learning about anti-Muslim Racism in the United States*, www.islamophobiaisracism.wordpress.com.

¹⁶ See Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew: an Essay in American Religious Sociology* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1960); John T. McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom: A History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003); Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995); and Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says about Race in America* (New Brunswick,

justice and peace in the final sections of this essay: solidarity with those oppressed by the powerful requires less an imaginative leap and more a recognition that both Muslims and Catholics are or “were once strangers in a foreign land” of the US (cf. Exodus 22:21).

The following essay proceeds in four sections before concluding. First, I outline Paul Griffiths’s theory of “religious accounts” to proffer what is at stake in a Catholic-Muslim marriage; if religion matters in these relationships, then we should propose a common framework for what “being religious” means. Second, I detail the various sacramental and legal constraints on marriage found in the Catholic and Islamic legal traditions. If I want to take differences seriously then I should not ignore them and thus fail at the very ethic I am proposing. Third, I explore the relatively new field of interreligious studies and its sub-discipline, interritual studies that look at both the fruits and limits of interreligious engagement. I give therein a consideration of hospitality and vulnerability as the necessary pre-conditions for glorifying God together. In the fourth section, I suggest that the limits of communal participation in sacramental, liturgical, canonical, and otherwise normative rituals of each tradition enforced by institutional authority may be breached by turning to other “rites” for justice and peace incumbent upon both Catholics and Muslims on account of the “immanent divine” (i.e., the divine presence in the world and especially in other humans) that imbues the embodied spirituality of each religious tradition; revelation thereby becomes a source of authority transcending but not contradicting institutional strictures. The interreligious virtues of hospitality and vulnerability grant preliminary insights into a Catholic-Muslim marriage and family, but it is their embodied practice of inter-riting for justice and peace that, I argue, imagines forth the eschatological community here and now, and not in some postmortem or prayerful state.

ATTENDING TO DISPARATE RELIGIOUS ACCOUNTS

At stake in a Catholic-Muslim marriage in which religion is formative of each spouse’s way of being and acting in the world is the coming together of disparate “religious accounts.” According to the theory proposed by Paul Griffiths, a religious account is the interpretive framework through which a person makes sense of her experience of the world. A religious account is (1) *comprehensive*, in that “it seems to the person who offers it to take as its object strictly everything, and thereby to have universal scope;”¹⁷ (2) *unsurpassable*, in that it is “not ... capable of being replaced by or subsumed in a better account of

NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998).

¹⁷ Paul J. Griffiths, *Religious Reading: The Place of Reading in the Practice of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 8.

what it accounts for;¹⁸ and finally, and most importantly, (3) *central* in that it is “directly relevant to what you take to be the central questions of your life, the questions around which your life is oriented.”¹⁹ Adopting language from Thomas Merton, I propose that a Catholic and Muslim may create a community of love grounded on a charity that seeks “far more than the satisfaction of [one’s] own desires” but is rather “an instrument in God’s Providence in [each other’s] lives.” In this case, one spouse’s “will is the instrument of God’s will in helping [the other] create their destiny.”²⁰ Consequently, careful attention to, and sincere respect of, disparate religious accounts will be demanded, lest spouses shape each other in *their own image* rather than in God’s image. Indeed, if we cannot find ourselves without a sincere gift of self,²¹ and if the self is constituted by cultural, social, *and religious* contexts and theological formation, then one’s religious account must be a part of the process of mutual self-giving and -receiving.

Griffiths’s theory should be nuanced with experience. When writing about Catholic and Muslim religious accounts, we must bear in mind, as Ata does in his work on Muslim-Christian relations in Australia, that “generalisations about groups of people are always misleading.”²² Generalizations are reductive and often dehumanizing and fail to address the particularities and unique positionalities of any given Muslim or Catholic. Rather than assume that a Catholic and a Muslim are each ineluctably and exclusively formed by the creedal statements, dogmatic constitutions, religious law, and holy scripture of, say, Catholic magisterial orthodoxy and canon law or Islamic legal consensus, we must admit that each individual religious adherent will “be religious” in their own idiosyncratic and personal way. This recognition is crucial within the Catholic-Muslim relationship itself, for

¹⁸ Griffiths, *Religious Reading*, 9.

¹⁹ Griffiths, *Religious Reading*, 10.

²⁰ Thomas Merton, *No Man Is an Island* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1955), 4. The full section reads: “Charity makes me seek far more than the satisfaction of my own desires, even though they be aimed at another’s good. It must also make me an instrument of God’s Providence in their lives. I must become convinced and penetrated by the realization that without my love for them they may perhaps not achieve the things God has willed for them. My will must be the instrument of God’s will in helping them create their destiny. My love must be to them the ‘sacrament’ of the mysterious and infinitely selfless love God has for them. My love must be for them the minister not of my own spirit but of the Holy Spirit. The words I speak to them must be no other than the words of Christ Who deigns to reveal Himself to them in me.”

²¹ Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 24: “Indeed, the Lord Jesus, when He prayed to the Father, ‘that all may be one ... as we are one’ (John 17:21-22) opened up vistas closed to human reason, for He implied a certain likeness between the union of the divine Persons, and the unity of God’s sons in truth and charity. This likeness reveals that man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself.”

²² Ata, *Us & Them*, 157 (cf. footnote 10 in this article).

spouses may reduce each other to their own prejudicial conceptualizations of Islam and Catholicism, just as any other social, cultural, gender, and professional identity may be restrictive rather than liberative with respect to a spouse's perception of the other.

This point merits critical consideration especially with respect to communities of Muslims. Historically the study of Islam has been shaped by Orientalist discourse that consistently reduced the meaning of Islam, and what it means "to be Muslim," to the Qur'ān, *ḥadīth* literature (canonical Prophetic narrations), and the *sharī'ah*. This negative stereotype prevails today in popular discourse.²³ Not only this, but these three discourses were understood to contain rigid, unchangeable beliefs and practices with no room for malleability and pluralism. Recent scholarship has challenged such conclusions regarding the scriptural-legal discourses of the Islamic religious tradition; it was and is far more accommodating and pluralistic.²⁴ Other scholarship has convincingly established that communities of Muslims, historically and contemporarily, make meaning, find value, and uncover truth through a variety of other Islamic discourses (e.g., poetry, music, contemplative practices, social action toward justice, holy days commemorating the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, his family, and various saints, otherwise known as friends of God) and in conversation with the larger social, cultural, political, and literary contexts they inhabit—just like every other religious adherent the world over.²⁵

Abdullah A. An-Na'im makes this very point in the introduction to *Inter-Religious Marriages Among Muslims*:

It is commonly assumed that Islamic societies and communities tend to strictly observe religious prescriptions in personal or family law

²³ In popular discourse, the 1987 academic assessment of William Roff, "Islamic Movements: One or Many?" in *Islam and the Political Economy of Meaning: Comparative Studies of Muslim Discourse*, ed. William R. Roff (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 31-32, to give just one late Orientalist example among dozens, still prevails: "All social action by Muslims, *acting as Muslims* (acceptors of the *sharī'ah*), is constrained by the objectively invariable prescriptions of 'Islam,' known to the believer first from the Qur'an and secondly ... the sunna. These prescriptions ... supply a major, sometimes determinative, part of the perceived objective conditions which direct or constrain action." Indeed, it is hard for mainstream Americans to recognize that "to be Muslim" does not necessarily imply to follow the proscriptions and prescription of the Qur'ān and normative Islamic law literally, explicitly, and exclusively.

²⁴ For introductions to Islamic law that demonstrate this, see Bernard G. Weiss, *The Spirit of Islamic Law* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2006); Wael B. Hallaq, *Authority, Continuity and Change in Islamic Law* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001) and *An Introduction to Islamic Law* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Sohaira Zahid Siddiqui, *Locating the Sharī'a: Legal Fluidity in Theory, History and Practice* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2019).

²⁵ See Shahab Ahmed, *What Is Islam?: The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016).

matters.... These aspects of *Shari'a* (the normative system of Islam, which is much broader than the term "law" indicates) are believed to have resisted the influence of modern secular legal principles. It seems clear, however, that such assumptions are often inaccurate, and always simplistic in failing to reflect the true diversity of beliefs and practices of Muslims everywhere.... Muslims live in multi-religious, multi-ethnic societies with varying degrees of social cohesion, and tend to marry non-Muslim spouses, sometimes in clear violation of what is generally accepted as *Shari'a* prescriptions.... In other words, the social identities of Muslims are a product of historical and contextual factors, including but not limited to competing interpretations of Islam, just like other believers in relation to their respective religious traditions.²⁶

Indeed, Griffiths's religious account presumes submission to institutional prescriptions. But in practice it is nearly self-evident that one's religious account is formed by other factors external to institutional authority.²⁷

Nonetheless, religious accounts—even if idiosyncratic—will inescapably contradict at various moments in a Catholic-Muslim marriage, if not before, then certainly after, children become a part of the inter-faith family. In practice, a Muslim spouse can attend a Catholic Mass, and a Catholic spouse can pray alongside a Muslim during the daily ritual prayers (*ṣalawāt*); but the Muslim cannot receive the Eucharist, and the Catholic is (in principle) unable to join in the ritual prayer, given that the recitation of the Islamic testimony of faith (*shahāda*) is a part of it. If children become part of a spousal relationship then in theory they can be taught about both traditions, about the comprehensive, central, and unsurpassable religious accounts of both parents. However, in ritual or sacramental practice there will come a point when children will celebrate initiatory rituals, such as Baptism and Eucharist for Catholicism, or the profession of faith (*shahāda*) and performance of ritual prayer (*ṣalah*) for Islam, that may inherently and mutually exclude the celebration of both. This, however, does not necessarily put an end to learning ever more deeply about the other tradition. The key is not to abandon, by being *indifferent*, the hope for engaging interreligious learning, but rather to wrestle with and *dwell in that difference*. A community of love is never hegemonic in its desire for unity, nor should it ever be dispassionate about real, fundamental disagreements and truths. At stake is the question of authority in both

²⁶ Na'im, *Inter-religious Marriages Among Muslims*, 9.

²⁷ One need only reflect on the popular essay from Thanaa El-Naggar, "Practicing Islam in Short Shorts," *Gawker True Stories*, February 23, 2015, www.truestories.gawker.com/practicing-islam-in-short-shorts-1683991294, to understand how "being Muslim" cannot be reduced to following the proscriptions and prescriptions of normative Islamic law, usually as propagated by the Wahhabi nation-state of Saudi Arabia.

religious traditions and with respect to their respective revelations, to which I return often throughout this essay.

To suggest that institutional norms are irrelevant, however, would be disingenuous. A Muslim self-ascribes as such because they in some way value Islamic beliefs, rituals, and communities that have been historically shaped by the tradition, and a Catholic self-ascribes as such because they consider an ecclesial relationship to be personally and communally formative. In what follows, I turn to the marriage rite as the first site on which difference and ultimately hospitality and vulnerability will necessarily emerge; the marriage rite is also an illustrative case study that demonstrates the limits of inter-ritual participation within the confines of institutional restrictions. This suggests that a Catholic-Muslim marriage and family wishing to dwell in difference may need to do so beyond institutional authority but not necessarily beyond the authority, meaning, value, and truth of their respective revelations.

ISLAMIC MARRIAGE LAW

It is inaccurate to assert, “Islamic law says” Rather, what we can offer is a general consensus of predominating opinions.²⁸ Marriage

²⁸ This will not be an extensive overview of Islamic law, *sharī‘ah*, *fiqh* (jurisprudence), or otherwise. For introductions on this topic, see footnote 24. What I am presenting in this section is a summary of viewpoints on Islamic marriage law from the *Encyclopedia of Islamic Jurisprudence* promulgated by the Kuwait Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs (my gratitude to Suheil Laher, PhD, for pointing me to this reference). This work summarizes the viewpoints of the four major sunni *madhhab*s, or schools of Islamic jurisprudence. Notwithstanding this summary, it is inaccurate to state, “Islamic law says ...” because there is no central and authoritative institutional power that binds all Muslims to a certain legal interpretation (whereas it is possible to say “Catholic canon law says ...”). Rather, the schools have come to a consensus (*ijmā‘*) on certain legal positions; but these are not incontrovertible. “The vitality, and indeed the flexibility, of Islamic law is attributable, in part, to the fact that the *sharī‘a* was not, throughout most of its history, a fixed legal code. The process of interpretation of the Qur’an and hadith, and the use of consensus and analogy, was an ongoing and open-ended affair. Legal schools (*madhhab*, pl. *madhāhib*) with a degree of doctrinal consensus did emerge”; see Judith E. Tucker, *Women, Family, and Gender in Islamic Law* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 14. Islamic legal scholars would write summaries of the legal schools or commentaries on important legal works; furthermore, jurists (*muftīs*) would promulgate legal and learned opinions (a *fatwā*) regarding context-specific legal questions. “Although the *sharī‘a*, in the strictest sense, is the law of God that humankind attempts to reveal, over time the term *sharī‘a* came, in popular understanding, to encompass this textual tradition—works of *fiqh* and *fatāwa*, various treatises on special legal topics of interest, handbooks for judges outlining proper procedure and comportment, etc. All these products of the intellectual endeavor to apprehend God’s law constituted the *sharī‘a* along with the legal materials of the Qur’an and the *ḥadīth*”; see Tucker, *Women, Family, and Gender in Islamic Law*, 14. All this is to say that “Islamic law” and “*sharī‘ah*” are not codified in a single authoritative book but is the ever-changing collection of legal opinions and works of jurisprudence. It is pluralistic, and this legal pluralism elides

within the Islamic religious tradition functions as a legal consent between two individuals; while it does not have the same sacred value that the other religious rituals incumbent upon Muslims have (e.g., the testimony of faith, the canonical daily prayers, Qur'ānic recitation, sufi practices of *dhikr* or remembrance of God), Islamic beliefs and practices constitutive of Muslim women and men are consequently formative of a spousal relationship. In a way, the Islamic religious account of a Muslim spouse in a marriage impacts the relationship and "sacramentalizes" it, as it were, even if it is not a holy rite in itself.

Marriage has a dual character under Islamic law: it is the fulfillment of a moral imperative to marry as an essential part of leading a good Muslim life, and it is a binding legal contract that must meet certain conditions in form and content. The jurists did not, in general, spend much time discussing the virtues of marriage: they assumed that almost all Muslims would marry (with the possible exception of a few with serious physical impediments that rendered sexual intercourse very dangerous or impossible) and they saw their task as one of providing guidance as to the proper procedures and conditions for arranging a marriage.²⁹

In other words, marriage was conceptualized as a moral, legal, and social good for the harmonious arrangement and sustenance of the community of Muslims; in this case, it related to one of the principles of Islamic jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), viz., *maṣlaḥa*, the public interest or good. Historically if not presently, it is noteworthy that "matrimony in Islam is as much a joining of two families as it is a joining of two individuals."³⁰

Central to the marriage rite is the signing of the marriage contract, termed the *'aqd al-nikāḥ*, the crucial portion of which is the *su'āl* and *ijāb/qabūl*, the "question" and "response or acceptance" that constitutes consent. This legal consent between spouses formalizes the marriage contract, but it is not consummated until later. Some key legal aspects that are necessary for a valid Islamic marriage contract include but are not limited to: (1) oral consent; (2) a written contract that at a minimum specifies the names of the spouses and, if contextually applicable, a dowry (nowadays this may be a prenuptial agreement, too);

with the de facto religious pluralism in which Muslim Americans live today. For an example of how the plurality of Islamic *fiqh* is being negotiated in the modern context with respect to interfaith marriage in Islam, see Alex B. Leeman, "Interfaith Marriage in Islam: An Examination of the Legal Theory behind the Traditional and Reformist Positions," *Indiana Law Journal* 84, no. 2 (2009): 743–71.

²⁹ Tucker, *Women, Family, and Gender in Islamic Law*, 41.

³⁰ Lois Lamyā' Ibsen al Faruqi, "Marriage in Islam," in *Perspectives on Marriage: A Reader*, ed. Kieran Scott and Michael Warren (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 461.

(3) that it be performed in a single sitting; (4) that two witnesses, generally required to be Muslim but with exceptions if one spouse is non-Muslim, be present. A written document alone is invalid, so oral consent is considered necessary; there are exceptions for spouses with disabilities. An imam or Muslim religious leader of any kind is *not* required to be present. In fact, no celebrant or officiant is required, and a marriage is valid when consent is exchanged between the spouses in the presence of two witnesses. However, today written contracts are nearly always registered with some Islamic society or registry, in addition to the civil license. Furthermore, nowadays an imam is usually present to make sure the marriage is valid, and all the requirements are followed, and it is recommended (but not required) that the religious dimension of the marriage contract be underscored by performing the *'aqd al-nikāḥ* in a mosque or some other Islamic place of worship or veneration. It is prohibited to include any statements or rituals that are polytheistic or otherwise contrary to Islamic beliefs. However, the Islamic religious tradition's diverse and inclusive conceptualizations of just what constitutes polytheism and what is explicitly contrary to Islamic belief makes this proscription flexible.

As to the question of interfaith marriages, the consensus legal opinion is often challenged by the practice of Muslims. At the most basic level, there are restrictions. Traditionally, the male must be a Muslim, while the female may be a Muslim or a religious member of the People of the Book (*ahl al-kitāb*). The People of the Book has classically been interpreted to include Jews and Christians. However, this classification has been stretched during various moments in Islamic history (e.g., in Islamic history Hindus were legally classified as People of the Book), and the categorization itself remains contested.³¹ In general, a Muslim man marrying a Catholic woman is normatively legal and constitutes a valid interfaith marriage. For a Muslim woman to marry a non-Muslim man, the latter would have to convert first.

However, the legal consensus regarding this is far more concrete than the Qur'ānic verses upon which it is based and arguably the restriction is a practical function of the gender norms of medieval and pre-modern societies of Muslims. This is a point that modern Muslim feminist scholars have repeatedly made.³² Islam is arguably a patrilineal religion; it was expected that fathers passed on the Islamic faith to their children. Today, Muslims often violate these consensus-based legal prescriptions and proscriptions and yet still consider themselves

³¹ The phrase is contested both with respect to which communities are included under it, and also with respect to the meaning of *kitāb* itself. See the work by Daniel Madigan, Khalil Andani, and Mohsen Goudarzi (particularly the latter two's doctoral dissertations at Harvard).

³² See in particular the work by, inter alia, amina wadud, Riffat Hassan, Asma Barlas, Raja Rhouni, Jerusha Tanner Rhodes, Aysha Hidayatullah, and Kecia Ali.

Muslims. In the US, ten percent of Muslim women are married to non-Muslim men, directly contravening normative consensus.³³ For the sake of this essay, the assumption is that a Muslim spouse (of any gender) who marries a Catholic (of any gender) still self-ascribes as Muslim and as “being Islamic” in very religiously formative ways, *except* with regard to these normative restrictions regarding interfaith marriage. Given how Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) functions, it would not be inconceivable for an Islamic jurist (*mufī*) to issue a legal opinion (*fatwā*) permitting interfaith marriages beyond the traditionally normative limitations; arguably, the *mufī* could adduce today’s de facto religiously pluralistic society as a reason for such exception, utilizing the legal principles of the aims (*maqāṣid*) of the *shari‘a* and the social welfare or public interest (*maṣlaḥa*) as legal reasonings for doing so.³⁴

This brief foray into Islamic law was intended as a starting point for understanding the differences between the Islamic marriage contract and the Catholic sacrament of marriage. It was not intended to suggest that Muslims everywhere and forever have always been and still are bound by the principles of Islamic law; nor was it intended to imply that “to be Muslim” means “to follow *shari‘ah*.” This reductive and harmful characterization has been astutely critiqued by Shahab Ahmed in his *What Is Islam?* for the historical and geographical bulk of the Islamic religious tradition and by contemporary religious scholars, sociologists, and anthropologists of Islam studying the diverse and pluralistic communities of Muslims today, especially in the US.

CATHOLIC CANON LAW AND SACRAMENTAL MARRIAGE

Catholic canon law regarding marriage is inextricably linked to sacramental theology; that is, the former details the various requirements for a valid and licit “matrimonial covenant... ordered by its nature to the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring,” which “has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament between the baptized” (Canon 1055). Schematically, the requirements for a valid marriage contract in canon law have broad similarities to Islamic law. These include but are not limited to: (1) *once and for all* consent by both parties (Canon 1056); (2) before a

³³ See the Pew Research Center’s Religion and Public Life analysis entitled “U.S. Muslims Concerned About Their Place in Society, but Continue to Believe in the American Dream,” July 16, 2017, <https://www.pewforum.org/2017/07/26/findings-from-pew-research-centers-2017-survey-of-us-muslims/>; cf. also data regarding Muslim marriage statistics at www.pewforum.org/2017/07/26/identity-assimilation-and-community/pf_2017-06-26_muslimamericans-02new-04/.

³⁴ “Actually, some Muslim intellectuals defend the opinion according to which the prohibition against a Muslim woman’s marrying a non-Muslim man does not have an authentically Islamic foundation, but derives from later commentators” (Associazione Canonistica Italiana and Congresso Nazionale Di Diritto Canonico, *Il Matrimonio Tra Cattolici Ed Islamici*, 153; my translation from original Italian).

local ordinary, priest, or deacon, and before two witnesses (Canon 1108, with exceptions); (3) notation in the marriage register; (4) and that the marriage be between two baptized Catholics, unless express permission is granted (Canon 1124).

The exceptions opened up by Canon 1124 are generous (a Catholic is free to marry anyone from atheist to Zoroastrian), even if the conditions regarding the education of children may appear restrictive. What concerns this essay is Canon 1086: “A marriage between two persons, one of whom was baptized in the Catholic Church or received into it, *and the other of whom is not baptized*, is invalid” *unless* a person is dispensed from this impediment under the conditions of Canon 1125. These conditions include more restrictively that

The Catholic party is to declare that he or she is prepared to remove dangers of defecting from the faith and is *to make a sincere promise to do all in his or her power so that all offspring are baptized and brought up in the Catholic Church*; the other party is to be informed at an appropriate time about the promises which the Catholic party is to make, in such a way that it is certain that he or she is truly aware of the promise and obligation of the Catholic party.

Arguably, the requirement that the Catholic spouse make a sincere promise to do everything in his or her power³⁵ is analogous to the Islamic requirement that the male spouse be Muslim. The implication of the Islamic restriction, as already stated, is that the father has historically been involved in the education of offspring. However, there is no explicit mandate that the Muslim spouse do everything in his power to have the offspring testify to the faith and educate them as Muslim, even if it is presumptively implied.

A CATHOLIC-MUSLIM MARRIAGE RITE

For now, it is noteworthy to imagine the first possibility of inter-riting: the Catholic-Muslim marriage ceremony. As stated, the requirements for a valid marriage between Catholic canon and Islamic Law are very similar: both require free consent, and both require witnesses. Interestingly, Catholic canon law has this additional restriction:

It is forbidden to have another religious celebration of the same marriage to give or renew matrimonial consent before or after the canonical celebration.... Likewise, there is not to be a religious celebration in which the Catholic who is assisting and a non-Catholic minister

³⁵ The text reads “*se omnia pro viribus*.” Indeed, the Pio-Benedictine Code of Canon Law of 1917 mandated excommunication for any spouse who did not baptize and raise their offspring in the Catholic faith (Canon 2319 of 1917 Code of Canon Law) and did not permit the otherwise less restrictive mandate of merely promising to do all one can to make it so.

together, using their own rites, ask for the consent of the parties.
(Canon 1127)

This restriction precludes confusion regarding which consent was “the real consent” that began the marriage covenant. The restriction is very specific: there can be a non-Catholic religious leader present and perhaps they can even offer readings, prayers, reflections, blessings, or otherwise, but they cannot “ask for the consent of the parties” again.³⁶ In this case, the Catholic sacrament of marriage in which consent occurs cannot be preceded or followed by an Islamic ceremony in which consent occurs, either oral or written. However, Islamic law and even practice are just as flexible as Catholic canon law and practice. Just as Canons 1125 and 1126 permit a dispensation of cult from Canon 1086, thereby permitting the Catholic and Muslim spouses to marry under the Islamic form (and rendering the marriage valid), likewise does Islamic law embrace the Catholic form of marriage. Indeed, if after spoken questioning the two spouses orally consent to marriage (which they do in a Catholic marriage rite), if two witnesses are present (which is required for a valid sacrament), one of which is Muslim (which Catholic canon law permits), and if the notation of marriage in a parish registry or the civil marriage license can stand in for a written contract (in which nothing is exchanged or expected), then a valid Islamic marriage has arguably been performed concurrent with the Catholic sacrament. Canon 1118 permits the celebration to occur outside a physical church; the rite may thus be performed, say, at the Muslim family’s residence, at an Islamic community center, or some other meaningful location.

If the spouses go the route of performing a Catholic form of marriage, one may venture to conclude that there is a successful inter-ritual event between the two spouses at the Catholic marriage ceremony. But of course, there will certainly be some sacrifices by the Muslim spouse, especially on the part of their family. Nothing, however, precludes the possibility of Islamic religious and cultural traditions from occurring before or after a Catholic wedding, so long as consent is not repeated. Given that local and regional Islamic customs and culture are just as, if not more, formative than Islamic law, there is plenty of space for inter-religious celebration throughout the wedding day (or weekend!). Nonetheless, the Muslim spouse and their family may be vulnerable in the unknown space of Catholic liturgical celebration; the

³⁶ The question of how or when Islamic readings, whether from the Qur’ān or from other Islamic literature (poetry, *ḥadīth*, etc.), may be read at the Catholic wedding rite depends on whether or not the sacrament occurs during a Mass, and on other particulars outside the purview of this essay. The purpose of this case study is merely to demonstrate that the marriage rites are formally compatible.

Catholic and their family must be gracious and hospitable in welcoming them. Conversely, the Catholic and their family may sacrifice their desire to marry in a church, and they may be vulnerable during the otherwise unknown Islamic religious and cultural prayers and celebrations; the Muslim and their family will have to practice the same hospitality and graciousness with them. Both spouses will surely grow in religious knowledge of the other through the inter-ritual event. This initial inter-ritual practice and the personal dispositions and communal compromises it requires foreshadow the dwelling in difference constitutive of a joyful but not easy Catholic-Muslim marriage.

THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION OF CHILDREN

Marriage does not ipso facto imply children. But should the couple elect to have children, it becomes arguably the single most contentious issue for interfaith couples, at least for ones whose religious accounts entail the desire to form their children in their faith, or at a minimum in *a* faith tradition. There are several options available to *any* interfaith family when it comes to the faith formation of children. Given the parameters of this essay, I am excluding options that are available when one spouse is “less religious” or “not practicing” their faith or is otherwise *indifferent* to the faith formation of their children; the decision to raise their children in the faith of the “more religious” and “practicing” spouse’s tradition is obvious in this case.

The first option is for children to be raised in one tradition. This option is nonetheless still available if the religious account of one of the spouses is comprehensive enough to include the possibility that other religious traditions offer meaningful expressions of divine guidance. The Muslim spouse may interpret Islamic teachings in such a way that his children’s formation in his partner’s Catholic tradition provides more than sufficient guidance for doing the true, the good, and the beautiful in this world and in the eyes of God. The canonical requirements for the Catholic spouse would pose serious impediments to choosing this avenue; however, theologically there is grounds for a Catholic theology of religions that embraces truth, goodness, and beauty in the Islamic religious tradition and that does not preclude their children’s conversion to God, *as* Muslims.³⁷ Indeed, magisterial teachings that affirm both the possible salvation of non-Catholics and all that is true, good, beautiful, and holy in other religious traditions

³⁷ If canonical rules were to be followed, the Catholic spouse would have to inform the Muslim spouse that they intend to do everything in their power to raise their children in the Catholic faith. There are certainly ways around actually raising the children Catholic, and it is *de facto* the case that many parish priests and other local ordinaries oftentimes forgo certain canonical regulations for pastoral reasons. However, the purpose of this essay is not to seek loopholes but to explore creative possibilities for dwelling in religious difference.

are arguably more capacious than canon law.³⁸

The second option is for children to be raised in both traditions. It is possible to *educate* children in the practices and beliefs of both the Catholic and Islamic tradition. It is likewise feasible that children interpret the world and their actions therein through the theological beliefs of both their parents. “Why should we respond this way to a bully in the classroom?” The Catholic and Muslim parent can both provide meaningful responses in the vocabulary of their faiths that do not exclude each other. “Why do we spend time at the homeless shelter every Friday?” “Why do we live in this part of town but all my classmates live in the other part of town?” Once again, both parents can provide two disparate but complementary theological responses appropriate to the child’s age. “What does the little wafer mean at Mass?” “Why do you get on your knees and bow on the carpet?” The list may be protracted, and the point is that faithful answers can be given that *educate* the child. However, it seems patent that at a certain point the parents will have to decide which initiatory rituals they want their children to celebrate. At this point, some negotiation will have to be made, and hopefully it has been decided *before* the marriage.

The final option is for children to decide themselves. It is arguably risky. Assuming that the children are being educated in both traditions, as they get older, the parents will likely have to take them to Church and mosque, or the children will witness, say, one spouse praying the Our Father or Hail Mary and another performing the Islamic daily prayers. They will be excluded from *some* practices by virtue of their not being of either faith tradition, officially, legally, or sacramentally. The children may ask to participate, and further theological education will ensue; perhaps the child decides to testify to the Islamic faith, or perhaps they elect to be baptized. Potentially, the psychological and emotional challenge with letting children decide is that it *may* be difficult for an adolescent to *disassociate* the preference for one religious tradition over the other *from* the preference of one parent over the other, at least without careful discussion. Nonetheless, even with reassurance and theological explication, this choice will arguably be successful only with the most emotionally and psychologically healthy, sincere, and mature of children *and* parents.

These options are all viable according to the religious accounts of the Muslim and Catholic. It is not the place of this essay to decide which is best, much less which is orthodox, but only to raise these possibilities. We have been focusing on the dogmas, doctrines, laws, and initiatory rituals of each tradition; but the study of religion, expe-

³⁸ See *Lumen Gentium*, no. 16, and also *Nostra Aetate*, no. 3.

rience, and theological reasoning tell us that “being Catholic” and “being Muslim” embrace far more than the external performance of Baptism or the testimony of the Islamic faith, far more than obedience to Catholic ecclesial law and Islamic legal opinion. They encompass how we make meaning, find value, discover truth, and work in solidarity with “the least” among us.

EMBRACING CONTRADICTION

The explicit positions of Catholic canon law and Islamic legal consensus—institutional authorities—are variably contradicted by open-ended, inclusive, and *hopeful* Catholic and Islamic theology regarding the salvation of all peoples and the ultimate communion with God that is potentially achieved: in the last days (the *eschaton*) “God will be all in all” (1 Corinthians 15:28) and “and all of you [of other revelations] will return to God together, and God will inform you about the differences you used to have” (Qur’ān 5:48). Revelation cannot be restricted by institutional prescriptions and proscriptions. While the law and dogmatic statements are intended to organize behavior in ways that keep the tradition alive (they are thus, as it were, intentionally conservative), religious traditions also include contradiction, ambiguity, and paradox in their respective revelations.

We can perhaps learn from the Islamic tradition in this regard because this contradiction in which differences comprehensibly come together is not foreign to communities of Muslims, who have historically supported “the coherent production and maintenance of inevitable tension and contradiction.”³⁹ The historical presence of “coherent contradiction” in societies of Muslims reflects a potential community of difference to be enjoyed in God “in the afterlife” that does *not* result in *indifference* to disparities in our present life. This is the tension between the law and the spirit, between justice and mercy, as it were. We

³⁹ Ahmed, *What Is Islam?*, 406. In this field-changing book, Ahmed “opens up conceptualization of Islam to paradox, exploration, ambiguity, ambivalence, wonder, aestheticization, diffusion, differentiation, polyvalence, and contradiction, as opposed to the normative claims of twentieth-century scholarship on Islam that delimit its conceptualization to scriptural-legal prescription, proscription, restriction, homogenization, monovalency, orthodoxy, agreement, authority, and control”; see Axel Takacs, “Review of *What Is Islam?*,” *Interreligious Studies and Intercultural Theology* 1, no. 1 (2017): 156. Ahmed proposes this theory through emic terms and concepts, because “to live with outright contradiction, as societies of Muslims historically have done, one must be able to conceive of contradiction in such a way that contradiction is coherent and meaningful in terms of one’s paradigmatic values and truths,” that is, in *Islamic values and truths*; see Ahmed, *What Is Islam?*, 404. He explicates the applications and implications of Islam conceptualized in terms of coherent contradiction, which is made possible by understanding Islam as *meaning-making in terms of hermeneutical engagement with Revelation to Muḥammad*, comprehensively defined to include not just the Qur’ān, *ḥadīth*, and *sharī‘ah*, but also discourses, genera, and methods outside of those textual sources; cf. footnote 70.

are unfaithful to God if we use eschatological hope as an excuse to ignore differences, injustices, and disparities today. Instead, we are called to dwell or sit in this difference, borrowing from feminist scholar of Islam, Fatima Seedat: addressing contradiction, difference, and paradox in the study of Islam means “sitting in the place of difference, where we are not all the same and also not irreconcilable, where we are not reducing and not excluding. By sitting, we remain present.”⁴⁰ This sitting or dwelling in difference sustains a Catholic-Muslim family’s difference, too. In this vein, I now turn to one avenue of how an interfaith family may dwell in difference rather than be indifferent.

INTER-RITING: HOSPITALITY, VULNERABILITY, AND THE POSSIBILITY OF GLORIFYING GOD TOGETHER

In a study of Muslim-Christian marriages in Australia, researchers elaborated six patterns of how couples engaged their interfaith relationship.⁴¹ Two complementary patterns concern this essay: couples who (1) took an active policy of espousing a plurality of faiths and couples who (2) had a respect for otherness. In the first, couples may *attend* (though not necessarily participate in) each other’s religious services and even participate in each other’s religious community’s social events. In the second, each spouse may partake in their own religious life and both may “practice a respect for difference, neither attempting to co-opt or minimize differences.”⁴² I suggest that the burgeoning field of interreligious and inter-ritual studies may provide insights into how an interfaith couple may come together in community that dwells in difference rather than indifference. Indeed, a marriage *co-venant* is nothing but a *coming (-venant) together (co-)* of two loving persons, along with their families and communities. This covenant, as I am suggesting, is an assumption and not an absorption or erasure of differences, a model for which is found in the Incarnational covenant between God and humanity.

Vulnerability and hospitality are two virtues required for successful interreligious or inter-ritual practice; this was noted above regarding the marriage ceremony. The host must practice hospitality, a “radical kenosis” whereby “the host becomes subordinate to the wishes of the guest.”⁴³ This kenosis imitates the self-emptying act of the Son of God in becoming flesh in the person of Jesus (cf. Philippians 2:7), dwelling

⁴⁰ Fatima Seedat, “Sitting in Difference: Queering the Study of Islam,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 34, no. 1 (2018): 154.

⁴¹ Ata, *Us & Them*, 157ff.

⁴² Ata, *Us & Them*, 161. Couples noted that “this style risked companionship and was confusing to children.”

⁴³ Pim Valkenberg, *Sharing Lights on the Way to God: Muslim-Christian Dialogue and Theology in the Context of Abrahamic Partnership* (New York: Rodopi, 2006), 14.

among us (cf. John 1:14); it is a kenotic hospitality that uproots one's existence and challenges the person to transform the beliefs and practices of one's religious account in the presence of another and for the sake of the relationship. Kenosis is paradoxically mutually empowering precisely because it is based in the Incarnational kenosis of God's Word. Hospitality is not only a biblical virtue, lauded often in both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament, but also an Islamic virtue, especially illustrated in the story of Abraham in the Qur'ān (51:24-30).⁴⁴ "For Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike, hospitality is an expression of faith and an act of worship of God."⁴⁵ The disposition of radical openness to transformation by the religious other, who forever remains a mystery, implies removing the desire to control or dominate the other and desiring instead the full presence of the other in Christ, with all their differences. But it also requires trust. The following counsel regarding interreligious hermeneutics applies all the more for an interfaith marriage:

The Spirit leads the community to the truth (cf. John 16:13). "The wind blows wherever it pleases" (John 3:8). But it is also the Spirit who warns against claims to domination. From this perspective, interreligious hermeneutics [or interfaith marriage] means receiving the religious other, thanks to the Spirit's help, in trust. This trust makes it possible to adopt an attitude of receptivity in hermeneutical hospitality and to allow one's own "structure of prejudices" to be interrupted. The Spirit makes it possible to understand the "strange religious languages" (cf. Acts 2). The Spirit *does not remove the differences but makes them accessible*. This trust in the activity of the Spirit confirms the trust of interreligious hermeneutics [and of an interfaith marriage].⁴⁶

This sage advice for interreligious relations may be transposed for an interfaith marriage. Indeed, arguably the interfaith couple, having practiced navigating the difficulties of dwelling in difference, will be all the more ready to negotiate the many differences they may encounter in other areas of their life—never seeking to dominate, never desiring to erase or subsume differences (by pretending they are already the same). This naturally results in a tension between faithfulness to one's own tradition and a radical openness to the truths discovered in a spouse's religion, openness that borders on the feeling of betrayal to one's own faith.⁴⁷ Of course, this tension may result in conflict all the

⁴⁴ See Marianne Moyaert, *Fragile Identities: Towards a Theology of Interreligious Hospitality* (New York: Rodopi, 2011), 262ff; and Valkenberg, *Sharing Lights*, 9–11.

⁴⁵ Thomas Michel, S.J., *Reflections on Said Nursi's Views on Muslim-Christian Understanding* (Istanbul: Söz Basım Yayın, 2003), 68.

⁴⁶ Moyaert, *Fragile Identities*, 267 (emphasis mine).

⁴⁷ Cf. Moyaert, *Fragile Identities*, 276: "From this point of view, whoever ventures

more, and this may be an argument *against* interfaith marriages. However, another interreligious virtue, viz., vulnerability, may assist in converting this tension into a positive relational dynamic of growing together for the glory of God.

There is no shortage of marriage and family counselors or theological ethicists who espouse the virtue of vulnerability in cultivating a flourishing, healthy relationship. Vulnerability is also a key disposition required for interreligious engagement and inter-ritual practices. In *In Response to the Religious Other*, interreligious studies scholar Marianne Moyaert details four key features of vulnerability that make it the necessary precondition for thriving interfaith engagement.⁴⁸ First, “The notion of vulnerability points ... to a deeper recognition that the human being is not whole or complete in and of herself.”⁴⁹ This incompleteness implies that the self is transformed in the search for an infinite wholeness in relation to another. But we must be wary of a spousal dialogue that lacks real hospitality and vulnerability, that is ultimately hegemonic in that “the other’s voice is permitted entry only as the voice of sameness, as a confirmation of oneself, contemplation of oneself, dialogue with oneself.”⁵⁰ Second, vulnerability admits to being affected and affecting in turn. It functions on the presupposition that to be human is to change. Thus, “We can imagine that to be invulnerable is to be *indifferent*, irresponsible, inaccessible, and inapproachable,” and thus to harm others in your indifference; it is to arrogate, dangerously and pridefully, to one’s mutable self the immutability belonging to God alone.⁵¹ Third, vulnerability is the precondition for reciprocity and relationality, and thus stands in stark contrast to the modern notion of autonomy and individualism.⁵² Fourth, vulnerability is ambiguous. It does not guarantee positive experiences of

into interreligious theology is also caught in the tension between faithfulness and betrayal. But this time the tension has to do not only with the relationship with the strange other who must be hospitably received but also with the relationship between the theologian [or the spouse] and God.”

⁴⁸ She is drawing from Paul Ricoeur’s hermeneutical anthropology. See Chapter One of Marianne Moyaert, *In Response to the Religious Other: Ricoeur and the Fragility of Interreligious Encounters* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014).

⁴⁹ Moyaert, *In Response to the Religious Other*, 38.

⁵⁰ Ulrich Beck, “The Truth of Others: A Cosmopolitan Approach,” *Common Knowledge* 10, no. 3 (2004): 433.

⁵¹ Moyaert, *In Response to the Religious Other*, 39. That persons change and are ever changing is an experiential and anthropological fact. To embrace that change and to be receptive to and ready for it are necessities in any marriage. Particularly for an interfaith marriage, couples must be prepared for the possibility that a spouse may experience a radical transformation of their religious account; e.g., the Catholic spouse may remain Catholic, but their Catholicity may change so much that it is unrecognizable compared to how it was before.

⁵² See Moyaert, *In Response to the Religious Other*, 39.

growth and creativity but is concomitant with the possibility of negative experience of loss and pain.⁵³ Vulnerability is positively grounded in the empowering act of the Incarnation, in which the assumption of suffering (the *passion of Christ*) is the very meaning of God's *compassion*.

Together, hospitality and vulnerability enable a dwelling in difference rather than a self-interested or apathetic indifference. What Moyaert concludes regarding interreligious hospitality can likewise be applied to interfaith marriages:

[This] hospitality refuses, on the one hand, to distance the other—this would lead to indifference—and to attempt to dominate the other on the other [hand]. The other is received in his or her otherness. What we learn from this ... is that happiness can also be found precisely in reciprocal hospitality, in becoming vulnerable to each other.⁵⁴

This vulnerability that creates a dynamic relationship, a “restlessness [that] is an expression of the here and now, caught in the tension between the already and not yet,”⁵⁵ suggests that *invulnerability* will result in “an indifference to the difference”⁵⁶ of not only the disparate religious accounts of the spouses but of the unique, irreducible, infinite image of God in which each partner, in both Islamic and Catholic theological anthropology, have been created. This dynamic tension or restlessness, grounded in the theological virtue of hope, is converted into an eschatological desire that stimulates action in the here and now.⁵⁷ Hospitality coupled with vulnerability should manifest as what feminist theologian Anna Mercedes calls “kenotic power,” which does not render oneself absent but instead bears a “kenotic desire [that] reveals our full presence ... marking the full presence of Christ.”⁵⁸ In this case, mutually *assuming* differences does not mean absorbing the other into the same. It does not mean erasing or occluding difference; rather, it means acting in solidarity with and through difference, finding eschatological meaning in the difference and assuming the suffering of others as one's own.

Indeed, this is the constructive theological takeaway from the final chapter in Ata's *Us & Them* regarding interfaith marriages.⁵⁹ The

⁵³ See Moyaert, *In Response to the Religious Other*, 39.

⁵⁴ Moyaert, *In Response to the Religious Other*, 182. Here, Moyaert is speaking of the intertextual hospitality central to the discipline of comparative theology, but her conclusions are drawn from, and are implied in, interreligious hospitality.

⁵⁵ Moyaert, *Fragile Identities*, 299.

⁵⁶ Moyaert, *Fragile Identities*, 299.

⁵⁷ See Moyaert, *Fragile Identities*, 299.

⁵⁸ Anna Mercedes, *Power for: Feminism and Christ's Self-giving* (London: T&T Clark International, 2011), 151.

⁵⁹ “Opting for an Eschatological Interpretation of Interfaith Marriages,” in Ata, *Us & Them*, 173–78.

unity-in-difference of the Trinity overflows into the sacrament of marriage, which is “a space of hospitality for the gift of love to be nurtured.”⁶⁰ Interfaith marriages that embrace this unity-in-difference live “an eschatological vocation” that is “an encounter with God, the world and humanity rather than just ... a personal and exclusive experience between [two spouses].”⁶¹ Ata notes that interfaith marriages have the potential for unique trauma, humiliation, persecution, and disagreement. I would add that in this way they are marked with the passion of Christ. Catholic-Muslim marriages, particularly in the US context, do not experience these negative reactions exclusively because of their being interfaith. Rather, within the Islamophobic and racist context of the US, it is likely that the Catholic spouse will live in real solidarity with the Muslim spouse; they will enter into the bigotry and exclusion experienced by a Muslim and their community because their persecution and humiliation is now familial. A Muslim spouse will be vulnerable to their partner, who will hopefully be vulnerable in turn. Each will make mistakes, will not always achieve careful, compassionate solidarity, but each will be hospitable to these errors. They will grow together in them. As such, they represent “an eschatological vocation of holiness, a life of difficult freedom that demands great responsibility,” precisely because they are innately “countercultural and counter-nationalistic,”⁶² as well as potentially antiracist and anti-Islamophobic in the US context. Interfaith marriages are vocations “of being otherwise, being other-centered and being other-oriented.”⁶³ As eschatological vocation, an interfaith marriage desires to achieve “the impossible, namely a difference-in-unity,” and this is lived only by nurturing and developing a sense of transcendence.⁶⁴ But this eschatological transcendence is lived and practiced immanently now: “An interfaith marriage opens the outer limits for people to become even intercultural and international within their worldview [= religious accounts]. These are seeds to overcome political and social injustice. It is apparent that a loving and responsible relationship is a model for overcoming difference.”⁶⁵

By practicing dwelling in difference with each other, the family members of an interfaith marriage may transpose this dwelling in difference and unity-in-difference with their larger communities and ultimately society as a whole. Certainly there are institutional (sacramental, legal) limits to truly coming together to inter-rite in each

⁶⁰ Ata, *Us & Them*, 173.

⁶¹ Ata, *Us & Them*, 174.

⁶² Ata, *Us & Them*, 174.

⁶³ Ata, *Us & Them*, 174.

⁶⁴ Ata, *Us & Them*, 175–76.

⁶⁵ Ata, *Us & Them*, 175.

other's practices; a Muslim does not receive the Eucharist, and a Catholic does not testify to the Islamic faith.⁶⁶ But if we re-imagine how to glorify God together through this eschatological vocation, Muslim-Catholic families may inter-rite in their own ways. The unity-in-difference of the *eschaton* may be imagined forth in communities and society today, disrupting or moving beyond institutional authority but remaining within the capaciousness of Christian and Islamic revelations. Indeed, within the Islamic tradition there is a Prophetic narration (*ḥadīth*) enabling this theological conceptualization that renders immanent the transcendent divine, which for Catholics is discovered in the Incarnation, the kenotic power of Christ. The following section is the hinge turning from the virtues of a Catholic-Muslim marriage and family to the virtues of a society that welcomes disparate communities in a unity-in-difference.

THE IMMANENT DIVINE: SHARING RITES FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE

The *ḥadīth* of Gabriel is the source of the classical theological distinction in Islam among submission (*islām*), faith (*īmān*), and “doing the good-and-beautiful” (*iḥsān*). In the narration, Muhammad ﷺ is questioned about his religion (*dīn*). It is noteworthy that Christians and Jews in the Qur’ān are occasionally referred to as those with faith (pl. *mu’minūn*, from *īmān*) and that those who are described as doing the good-and-beautiful (pl. *muḥsinūn*, from *iḥsān*) are not restricted to those who have submitted (sg. *muslim*, from *islām*). But the purpose presently is not to argue for a certain theology of religions within Islam but to indicate how the immanent divine is imagined forth by those who do the good-and-the-beautiful. In the *ḥadīth*, the angel Gabriel, appearing as a man, questions the Prophet ﷺ:

“Tell me, Muhammad ﷺ, about submission (*islām*).” He replied, “Submission means that you should bear witness that there is no god but God and that Muhammad ﷺ is God’s messenger, that you should perform the ritual prayer, pay the alms tax, fast during Ramadan, and make the pilgrimage to the House if you are able to go there.” The man said, “You have spoken the truth”.... He said, “Now tell me about faith (*īmān*).” He replied, “Faith means that you have faith in God, His angels, His books, His messengers, and the Last Day, and that you have faith in the measuring out, both its good and its evil”.... He then said, “Now tell me about doing the good-and-the-beautiful (*iḥsān*).” He replied, “*Iḥsān* means that you should *worship God as if you see Him*, for even if you do not see Him, He sees you.”⁶⁷

⁶⁶ See footnote 7 for excellent articles regarding the (im)possibility of Muslim-Christian interritual participation.

⁶⁷ This is the version cited in William Chittick and Sachiko Murata, *The Vision of Islam* (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 1994), 18, with some modifications. The *ḥadīth* is verified to be sound and is found in Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, vol. 1

To be *muslim* in this narration demands the adherence to what have classically been termed the “five pillars of Islam,” viz., the testimony of faith (*shahāda*), the daily ritual prayer (*ṣalāt*), almsgiving (*zakāt*), fasting (*ṣaum*), and the pilgrimage to Mecca (*ḥājj*). But of interest in this essay is what it means to do the good-and-the-beautiful, to practice *ihsān*.

To worship God *as though you see God* is arguably the Incarnational impetus in the Catholic tradition for treating the stranger, the oppressed, and all those suffering, as Jesus: “Just as you did it to one of the least of these ... you did it to me” (Matthew 25:40). There is in fact a nearly identical *ḥadīth* that suggests as much with respect to God.⁶⁸ What I suggest is that a Catholic-Muslim family is encouraged to practice *ihsān*, the acts of doing what is good and beautiful to those around them, so that the eschatological vision of God may be imagined forth (*as though you see God*) in this world here and now. To see members of their interfaith and intercultural community *as God* is to worship together in performing what is good and beautiful. The interfaith family may not be all Catholic or all Muslim, but they all may be *muḥsinūn*, those who do the good and the beautiful when they perceive God in or as the other.

The hospitality and vulnerability that is exercised in a Catholic-Muslim marriage may be expanded and transposed to being hospitable and vulnerable together, for, and with others in their larger communities and society. A Catholic and Muslim each have within their respective traditions the theological resources for seeing God in the world.⁶⁹

(*Kitāb al-Īmān*), as well as in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Iman 37, as per the reference format given in A.J. Wensinck, *Concordance Et Indices De La Tradition Musulmane* (New York: E.J. Brill, 1992).

⁶⁸ “Verily, God (*Allāh*), the Exalted and Glorious, would say on the Day of Resurrection: O child of Adam, I was sick but you did not visit Me. He would say: O my Lord; how could I visit Thee whereas Thou art the Lord of the worlds? Thereupon He would say: Didn’t you know that such and such servant of Mine was sick but you did not visit him and were you not aware of this that if you had visited him, you would have found Me by him? O child of Adam, I asked food from you but you did not feed Me. He would say: My Lord, how could I feed Thee whereas Thou art the Lord of the worlds? He said: Didn’t you know that such and such servant of Mine asked food from you but you did not feed him, and were you not aware that if you had fed him you would have found him by My side? (The Lord would again say:) O child of Adam, I asked drink from you but you did not provide Me. He would say: My Lord, how could I provide Thee whereas Thou art the Lord of the worlds? Thereupon He would say: Such and such of servant of Mine asked you for a drink but you did not provide him, and had you provided him drink you would have found him near Me.” This is a sound *ḥadīth* found in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, in *kitāb al-birr wa-al-ṣilah wa-al-ādāb*. See Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (9 volumes), eds. Muḥammad Sālim Hāshim and Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf Sanūsī (Bayrūt: Dār Al-Kutub Al-‘Ilmiyah, 1994), vol. 8.

⁶⁹ The resources are found not only in this *ḥadīth* and its later commentaries but also in the larger *sufī* tradition that was formative of communities of Muslims from the

This consequently sacramentalizes—or renders holy—one’s daily actions, one’s way of acting, being, living, and building community in the world, beyond the canonically or legally normative acts of worship. Inter-riting may be a near impossibility when it comes to Catholic sacraments and the Islamic pillars, but the impossible becomes possible when interritual worship includes sharing rites for justice and peace. *Ihsān* brings the Catholic-Muslim family together to imagine forth ways of being community that challenge hegemonic and oppressive social norms, ideas, practices, and discourses. This is only possible if one attends to difference by letting it challenge one’s normative presuppositions—becoming vulnerable and hospitable. Should one seek to remove differences or render difference into a least common denominator of the same, then one is seeking to silence the other and ultimately erase them.

By dwelling in difference, the Catholic-Muslim family practices the unity-in-difference necessary for a just society. Given the history of Catholics in the US, it takes no stretch of the imagination to have solidarity with Muslims today, who are facing the same religious and racial exclusion and hegemony that Catholics faced until the 1960s. Together, a Catholic and Muslim may share in solidarity with immigrants, refugees, and strangers today, and with those marginalized racially, religiously, economically, or otherwise. This is precisely the counternationalistic and countercultural, as well as antiracist and anti-Islamophobic, religious account that both the Catholic and Muslim could share as *muḥsinūn* in a marriage and family.

CONCLUSION: FROM INDIFFERENCE TO DWELLING IN DIFFERENCE

There is great theological and ethical potential for a Catholic-Muslim family to worship together when it comes to imagining forth an eschatological community that is not indifferent but that dwells in difference; there is also great difficulty. But when both spouses take their religious accounts seriously enough to engage differences, to learn from them, and to create novel ways of worshipping together alongside the marginalized (respecting *their* differences, too), they are arguably imitating the unity-in-difference of the Trinity and Incarnation in the Catholic tradition, and the unity-in-difference of the Divine Names of God⁷⁰ and theological cosmology in the Islamic tradition (“Wheresoever you turn, there is the Face of God” [Qur’ān 2:115]).

fourteenth to eighteenth centuries. Seeing God’s mercy suffusing the universe, seeing both the world and God, together and at once, was the superior mystical station in the Islamic tradition. In this tradition, we are called *to be God’s mercy* in the world.

⁷⁰ The Most Beautiful Names of God in the Islamic tradition were often theologized as a unity-in-difference within the One and Unique God. In fact, for the tradition generally, the Divine Names were considered *relations* (sing. *nisbah*).

Indifference in one realm leads to indifference in other realms; not caring about your spouse's or children's religious differences could carry over into a disregard for social, racial, gender-based, and economic disparities in one's larger community. Catholic-Muslim families who dwell in difference are authentically *present* to each other, and they make themselves and the divine *present* to others, when they imagine forth the eschatological community in the *present*.

A Catholic-Muslim family may find shared meaning and value in their own tradition's strong critique of modern social norms, values, and ideas that tend to marginalize those in the minority or those dominated by oppressive ideologies. *Together*, they have *disparate* theological resources for critiquing injustice and siding with the oppressed. A Catholic-Muslim marriage lives the dynamic tension of a unity-indifference, one that is full of difficult freedom and responsibility; they bring together disparate religions and cultures (and possibly races) not just in themselves but through their families and extended communities. Their community of love becomes an intensified site for solidarity and a transformative cell of society. Indeed, in the US context ripe with Islamophobia, a Catholic spouse dwells in solidarity with the rest of their family who may be the recipients of overt or covert acts of bigotry and exclusion. From being singled out at airport security to having their mosque attacked by a gunman or arsonist, the Catholic spouse suffers with the larger Muslim community now. But the Muslim spouse may be made uneasy by the harmful statements that Catholic coreligionists (parishioners, neighbors, acquaintances) or even public figures may assert about Muslims or Islam—such as those by Cardinal Raymond Burke quoted in the introduction to this essay. Shared sorrows and humiliations create solidarity with all individuals and communities that are marginalized by the dominant ideologies of a society and arguably a Catholic-Muslim family is well equipped and practiced to do just that, together, for, and with others.

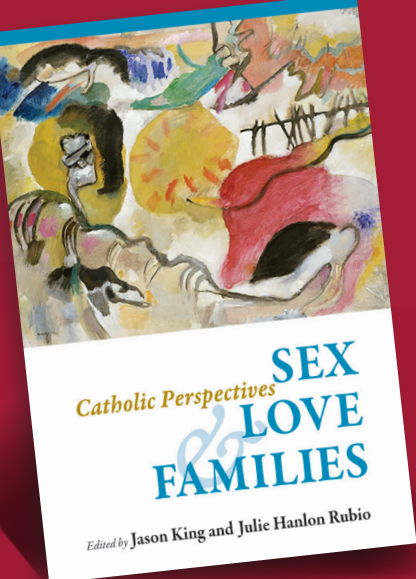
This essay was neither intended to present a single manner of being a Catholic-Muslim family nor was it suggesting that a Catholic-Muslim family would encounter only harmonious agreement and never hardship, struggles, and conflict. Like any marriage and family, both naiveté and skepticism need to be confronted with theological hope that communion is possible without erasure of differences; the same goes for society and the various communities that constitute it, at least if it is to be shaped by the moral and theological values of the Reign of God. It is a hope that seems contradicted by the more explicitly exclusive teachings of both the Islamic and Catholic traditions but supported by the more implicitly inclusive ones. Otherwise put, eschatological hope confronts institutional or legal authority by drawing from the immanent divine made present through revelation, which becomes

a source of authority in its own right.⁷¹

The virtues of a Catholic-Muslim marriage are not only applicable to all marriages but are also positive examples for society at large; as a cell of society, the flourishing Catholic-Muslim marriage that eschews indifference in favor of dwelling in difference builds a Reign of God that creates a unity-in-difference. This is achieved not through some critical threshold of individual, successful Catholic-Muslim marriages that miraculously transforms a society into a welcoming one. Instead, it is achieved only when the communal nature of a marriage is nourished, one in which solidarity with the oppressed is central, as opposed to autonomy and individualism, and one in which the family imagines forth the immanent divine in the communities they inhabit in this life here and now, rather than focus on the postmortem, soteriological promise of the hereafter. Such a society informed by the virtues of a Catholic-Muslim marriage eschews Islamophobia (and all forms of racism and xenophobia) and humbly welcomes, in hospitality and vulnerability, the ever-increasing number of Muslim migrants to predominantly Christian nations. It is a society open to the challenges, difficulties, and suffering of real solidarity, just like any flourishing marriage and family. A marriage, family, and society dwell in difference when they imitate the Incarnation: assuming differences, not absorbing, erasing, occluding, or subsuming them. 

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⁷¹ In the Islamic tradition, this is best conceptualized as what Shahab Ahmed has called the Pre-Text of Revelation in *What Is Islam?*, 346: “The Text of the Revelation [= Qur’ān and *ḥadīth*] requires as its premise an Unseen Reality or Truth that lies beyond and behind the Text of the Revelation-in-the-Seen and upon which the act, Text and truth of Revelation are contingent. This Unseen Reality is ontologically prior to and alethically (that is, as regards truth) larger than the textual product of the Revelation [= Qur’ān and *ḥadīth*]: it is the source of Revelation.” In this way, Muslims throughout history have had access to the Pre-Text of revelation via various mechanisms, human faculties, practices, imaginative creations, and more. The Pre-Text of revelation, in other words, is the authority that guides the interpretation *and* expression of the meaning, value, and Truth of the Qur’ān and *ḥadīth*; it is thus also more authoritative, in some instances, than institutional or legal authority.



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