



# 'Til Faith Do Us Part: How Interfaith Marriage is Transforming America

By Naomi Schaefer Riley

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In the last decade, 45% of all marriages in the U.S. were between people of different faiths. The rapidly growing number of mixed-faith families has become a source of hope, encouraging openness and tolerance among religious communities that historically have been insular and suspicious of other faiths.

Yet as Naomi Schaefer Riley demonstrates in *'Til Faith Do Us Part*, what is good for society as a whole often proves difficult for individual families: interfaith couples, Riley shows, are less happy than others and certain combinations of religions are more likely to lead to divorce. Drawing on in-depth interviews with married and once-married couples, clergy, counselors, sociologists, and others, Riley shows that many people enter into interfaith marriages without much consideration of the fundamental spiritual, doctrinal, and practical issues that divide them. Couples tend to marry in their twenties and thirties, a time when religion diminishes in importance, only to return to faith as they grow older and raise children, suffer the loss of a parent, or experience other major life challenges. Riley suggests that a devotion to diversity as well as to a romantic ideal blinds many interfaith couples to potential future problems. Even when they recognize deeply held differences, couples believe that love conquers all. As a result, they fail to ask the necessary questions about how they will reconcile their divergent worldviews—about raising children, celebrating holidays, interacting with extended families, and more. An obsession with tolerance at all costs, Riley argues, has made discussing the problems of interfaith marriage taboo.

*'Til Faith Do Us Part* is a fascinating exploration of the promise and peril of interfaith marriage today. It will be required reading not only for interfaith couples or anyone considering interfaith marriage, but for all those interested in learning more about this significant, yet understudied phenomenon and the impact it is having on America.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"Riley, a former editor at The Wall Street Journal, is neither a cheerleader nor a scold. Her book functions more as a flashing yellow light at an intersection: slow down, be alert--pay attention to what serious differences may mean to a close relationship. She brings a careful, nuanced and thoughtful approach to an often contentious subject. And she adds considerable value by including results of a poll she commissioned to survey 2,450 Americans on the subject of interfaith marriage." --Gustav Niebuhr,

"The book is chock-full of fascinating statistics ('Jews are the most likely and Mormons are the least likely to marry members of other faiths'), but at its heart is a cautionary thesis: the growing number of interfaith couples don't know what they're getting into..."

--Stanley Fish, *The New York Times*

"Engaging and incisive account--combining clear-eyed analysis with polling data and the details of more than a hundred interviews..." --W. Bradford Wilcox, *The Wall Street Journal*

"Naomi Schaefer Riley's well-researched and exceedingly well-written book...is a great gift to clergy and an even greater challenge to them. It ought to be required reading for anyone who attempts interfaith matrimony, and it's a crucial resource for anyone seeking to minister to those who contemplate or practice interfaith marriage."

--William H. Willimon,

"Riley's book is a very readable blend of survey data (she commissioned a nationwide Interfaith Marriage Survey with the help of the University of Notre Dame's David Campbell) and anecdotes." --John Turner, *Patheos*

"Growth in the number of inter-faith marriages in the U.S. has been a major trend in recent decades, yet few have paid it much attention. `Til Faith Do Us Part redresses that oversight, exploring the meaning and implications, advantages and realistic difficulties of people of different faiths uniting in marriage. Naomi Schaefer Riley is a sociologist's journalist, and more. She takes empirical data seriously, is balanced and fair-minded, and writes superbly. I recommend this book most highly."

--Christian Smith, author of *Lost in Transition: the Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood*

"Almost half of all Americans who marry nowadays marry people not of their own faith. In this informative and well-written volume, Naomi Schaefer Riley explores this phenomenon from an inter-religious perspective. Her penetrating interviews and eye-opening statistics paint a fresh portrait of contemporary intermarriage and how it will shape America's future."

-Jonathan D. Sarna, author of *American Judaism: A History*

"Interfaith marriage became steadily more common in America throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. Nationally speaking, these marriages have eased interfaith tensions and increased religious tolerance, producing a country that is at once remarkably religious and remarkably tolerant. But in the lives of individuals the blessings of interfaith marriage are more mixed. *Til Faith Do Us Part* brilliantly highlights the rich complexities and compromises and difficult tradeoffs that intermarriage entails. It is a profoundly important book—a must-read for the growing majority of Americans living interfaith lives."

--Robert D. Putnam, co-author of *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*

"Having been an atheist married to a Christian, I know the turmoil that a spiritual mismatch can create in marriage. Here's a well-researched book that offers invaluable insights into this important yet seldom discussed topic."

--Lee Strobel, coauthor of *Surviving a Spiritual Mismatch in Marriage*

About the Author

**Naomi Schaefer Riley** is a former *Wall Street Journal* editor and writer whose work focuses on higher education, religion, philanthropy, and culture. She is the author of *God on the Quad* and *The Faculty Lounges*.

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