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Katie's Story

Catholic and Jewish? How Can It Be?

For some individuals, religion is a ritual imposed on them in childhood by their parents, a distant set of memories about church services or school. For others, religion is a practice, a routine that was begun when they were young and is continued through adulthood (Griffith & Griggs, 2001). Yet for others, it is a vibrant, active component of their identity. It shapes who they are and how they function. And the practices and rituals associated with religious beliefs are a way to connect with God, or a higher power; with other believers; and, most important, with themselves. The teachings and doctrines provide a blueprint and guide for living. Work, child rearing, volunteer services, and daily practices are guided by religion. Religion is often conceptualized as a developmental process; connections to religious beliefs change as people grow and mature cognitively and spiritually (Fukuyama & Sevig, 1999; Griffith & Griggs, 2001). Connection to religion also changes as people meet developmental milestones, including graduation, marriage, and child rearing. And religious beliefs change when people face crisis, trauma, or stressors; many people use these times to question spiritual beliefs and their relationship with God.

Katie's story follows this developmental focus. She was raised in the Catholic tradition, and her beliefs and connections changed with her developmental progress. The most important challenges to her religious faith came when she decided to engage in an interfaith marriage and had children. As you read the story, reflect on the intersection of religion, developmental

milestones, and life transitions. Also note how current events influenced Katie's development, indirectly influencing her religious beliefs.

Katie's Story

I was born and raised a Catholic, but I did not become one until I married a Jew. I was a Latin-chanting, chapel-veiled, genuflecting, rosary-clicking, Friday-fish-eating Baby Boomer of a Catholic. When I was born in 1954, I was quickly whisked off to the local parish church to be baptized, lest I wind up in limbo if I died a quick death (and which was worse: SIDS or limbo?).

My own mother (apparently a secondary player in my spiritual growth) did not attend the ceremony because she was readying for the gathering of relatives. And it would be a large crowd! This Catholic family had grandparents with farm roots, so large families were the norm. The collateral and collective nature of this family beckoned all aunts, uncles, and cousins to mark all major life passages. These gatherings were often colored by which one of my 41 first cousins (on my father's side of the family alone) was wearing the white dress of baptism, or adding the veil, or wearing the grown-up suit for First Communion. The predictable holidays, Holy Days of Obligation, and the Seven Sacraments marked the passage of annual time. These moments brought the certainty and sure knowledge that rote rituals and memorized prayers often provide, especially to the passive viewers that so many Catholics had become. We were dictated to by the rigors of the dogmatic Church rules that directed our practices.

Religion was my cultural identity, the sole source of what made me both belong and be distinctive. In my White, upper middle-class suburban family, there were only vague hints about any ethnic component to our family: like the Wednesday night sauerkraut and sausage dinners or times when my aunts and uncles sang German songs around our piano. I realize now that at that time an Irish Catholic marrying a German Catholic was considered an out-marriage and subject to derogatory terms, such as "shanty Irish." So one ethnic group was expected to take a backseat, and usually this ethnicity belonged to the wife.

Besides, no one had lived on "the old sod" for four generations. I was American, an American *Catholic*. (Wait! Which was the noun and which the adjective?) I learned the fate of John F. Kennedy when my principal, a nun, came into the class and said, "Our Catholic president has been shot." Yes, I went to Catholic schools, no questions asked. That was what good Catholics did. In my youth, there were only two religions: Catholic and Public, each with their own schools. We, of course, knew which one was better because

we were told at both church and school that we were The One True Faith. If we Catholics were true, then that meant everyone else's religion was false, right? (They did not call the schools parochial for nothing!)

At school, I dutifully memorized the answers to our Baltimore Catechism, those concise nuggets of theology and dogma that served as the basis of our faith. They are ingrained so deeply into my long-term memory banks through daily repetition and drills that I can today recall the lessons in my first-grade primer almost 45 years later:

Q: Who made the world?

A: God made the world.

Q: Who is God?

A: God is the creator of heaven and earth and of all things.

Q: What is man?

A: Man is made up of body and soul.

Q: How did God make you?

A: God made me in his image and likeness.

Q: Why did God make you?

A: God made me to know Him, to love Him, and to serve Him in this world and in the next.

This made Catholicism seem so easy. Here were all these clear answers—and without the questions ever being asked. Just memorize them and practice. All you need is a good memory. If I did my catechism well, at Confirmation, when the Bishop called on me, I would be able to recite the right response, bringing honor, not shame, to my family.

Weekends were marked by Sunday mass with both Mom and Dad, often after weekly Saturday confession. Mass was one of the few times we were together as a family. Church and services piqued our senses because Catholicism was richly filled with unusual sights, sounds, and smells at that time: incense, chants, the jingle of little bells, holy day pageants, wimpled nuns, collared and cassocked priests. Spectacular, yes—but . . .

It was still Latin mass. Now isn't that something a young child can relate to? We were estranged, marginalized from the adult world as we tried to sit there for the hour listening avidly for God's phone number (*Et-cum-spiritu-tu-o*). We would try to follow along in the missals (usually a First Communion present, along with a rosary, from a godparent). We could sound

out the prayers phonetically, but actually translate them? Make the words meaningful? No. We were present in body but absent in spirit.

The religion of my youth was something that I performed by going through the motions, like a perfect little marionette tied to the long line of family before me. My puppet practices were not hallowed but hollow, wooden. I learned I was not alone; the whole Catholic Church was chafing under the rigidity of the institution that theologian Martin Marty once termed as “mind-numbing boredom.”

I was an adolescent who reached not the Age of Reason but rather the Age of Give-Me-a-Reason-Why-Not. James Fowler in his seminal work *Stages of Faith* (1981) considers adolescence a watershed moment in faith development, a time when minds and hearts expand their worldviews and either conform to the conventions and standards of the past or break apart the ordered clusters of their values, beliefs, and practices.

I questioned what I had been told was unquestionable; I wondered, though I risked being punished for imagining. If I ever asked those tough “why” questions, the good nuns said, “It’s a mystery,” which seemed a theological version of the parental “because I told you so.” (It really refers to the Greek word *mysterios*, or “drama,” but no one told us that.) The problem with Catholic education was that you actually got educated. No longer willing to accept all precepts and practices on blind faith, I wanted to see deeper, and rote rituals and strict rules were blocking me.

The winter of my discontent, fortuitously, coincided with the Church’s own. Just as I could hear my inner strains of “Somebody better liven things up around here for me, or I will bail,” along came Pope John XXIII, his successor, Pope Paul VI, and the Second Vatican Council, or Vatican II. The *aggiornamento*, the “shaking up” of the Church that Pope John put into motion, played out before my eyes in high school.

In a short period of time, the sensations of my old Catholicism were changing as if overnight—literally it seemed. One day, my favorite English teacher was wearing a tight wimple around her face and a long habit, and the next day she had—gulp!—hair! And at mass, they turned the priest around to face the pews. And it was in English! I took communion not placed on my tongue but in my hand, though I had been told in my First Communion preparation that if we ever touched the host our hand would wither. And it didn’t! Ha! I was introduced to new titles and words: “People of God,” “ecumenism,” and “ecumenical.” The changes were exciting, odd, hard, scary, and fun. They were more than cosmetic: No longer expected to be passive, I was actually invited to participate in the life of the Church. I was watching. I was relearning and reexamining and beginning to look deeper to find my own place in a new spiritual world.

My aunts and uncles and my father grumbled and complained mightily about the changes, the guitar masses (“Those Hootenanny masses,” my father said), and, sotto voce, the infallible pope. Ah, yes, they were like Israelites in the desert, grouching at Massah and Meribah about the lack of food, water, and the leadership of that lousy Moses. After all, look what he made them do! Leave slavery! For what? Freedom. But the new way to the Promised Land was messy, hard, and uncomfortable. And they wanted to go back to Egypt! Biblical truth indeed because the first human response to change is usually resistance, and the second is fear or complaining. Change is a struggle, awkward and stressful. Yet is this crisis a problem, a catastrophe? Or might a radical, new energy to practice be an opportunity for rejuvenation, much needed for spiritual growth?

From 1967 to 1971, I rehearsed these new changes at an all-girl Catholic high school (free from embarrassing myself in front of boys!). My widening vistas saw peers all over America in the throes of massive changes: gender roles, politics, social activism, and so on. I tried on all sorts of nouns and adjectives as well: woman, outspoken, liberated, performer, blond, scholar. I was an eager shopper in an exciting identity mall.

A college education was a given in our family. My father was a first-generation college graduate who came from the poverty of the Depression and quickly worked his way through undergraduate and medical schools, graduating at 21 years of age. When it came my time to choose a college, I made a very bold move—educationally, geographically, psychologically, and spiritually. I chose a non-Catholic university in a major metropolitan area 350 miles from my northern Kentucky family-of-origin, a university that attracted students from all over the country and the world—Columbia College. I chose theater as a major, a jolting departure from the sciences so valued by my surgeon father and my mother, his nurse, who had reared me. This departure from the family circle was unheard of in my extended family and probably raised some eyebrows at the time. My beloved mentor in high school, who ironically was then a cloistered nun, encouraged me. (She has since left the convent.)

I loved both my college years and the sprawling city of Chicago. Here I stayed, continuing the process of finding myself as a young adult through college and my 20s. I stayed loosely connected to the practices of my Catholicism, still not exactly tied down.

My first job was teaching at a private all-girl Catholic high school, but I left that after 4 years to act in the theater instead of simply teaching it. The work hours of theater (and the various day jobs) conflicted with regular Sunday church attendance. I no longer saw myself as Catholic with a capital C but catholic, universal. I was just one fiber in this whole vibrant multicultural tapestry of my adopted city, Chicago.

Was This a “Crisis” of Faith?

In my early 30s, I fell in love, deeply, surprisingly, and irrevocably, with my best friend and could never look at life without him beside me. With him, I never felt more fully in touch with my truest self. What? A transplanted suburban Kentucky, Catholic girl wanting to spend the rest of her life with this urban Chicago, Jewish boy? But there we were. Religious traditions and cultural differences stared us in the face. And we cared deeply enough to care about it. Falling in love reawakened our spirituality, and thus, so naked and tentative, we began exploring our different symbol systems for faith.

Obstacles and changes create disequilibrium. You can either run away, stay stuck in the emotion of uncertainty, or adjust and cope. I was too old, determined, and educated to freeze and too much in love to leave. We encountered the official naysayers in our discovery’s way. Indeed, one rabbi railed, “Don’t do it. Break up right away! Think of what you are doing to the Jews! Your marriage will fail.” Another said, “Technically, you do not exist.” Because I was then working at a school renting from a Catholic Church, I sought a different tack. “Let’s go see one of the priests next door,” I suggested. My fiancé was convinced we would be shunned or shamed there, too.

Mentors are, first, angels—surprise strangers marking turning points in lives. We met Father Rick Matthews, the archdiocesan director of young adult ministry in Chicago. We sat down one afternoon at Chicago’s Old St. Paul’s Church and talked about our hopes.

“Are you in love?” he asked.

“Oh, yes,” we replied, beaming.

“Then we are all in the presence of God,” he said.

“I suppose it would be easier if I were Catholic, though,” my fiancé suggested.

“But being Jewish is who you are,” Rick said. “Why should you change that about yourself simply because you are in love with Katie? I think it must be wonderful to be Jewish. In fact, if I weren’t Catholic, I’d be Jewish myself.”

Then I asked, “What would you suggest about how we should raise our children?”

“What do you do for yourselves?” asked Rick. “You can’t expect your kids to do anything except what you as parents are doing with them. That’s a sure way to make religion a source of conflict.”

“Makes perfect sense,” we said, thinking about the pejorative words that sent us in this priest’s direction in the first place.

“Katie goes to church and I go to temple,” Daniel said. “Should we take them to temple on Friday night and church on Sunday morning?”

“Absolutely,” said Rick.

“Won’t they be confused?”

“You can help them understand the differences—and the similarities.”

“What should we teach them religiously—Judaism or Catholicism?” I asked.

Rick smiled. “I would teach them both. How can you do otherwise? You two are going to be your children’s most important teachers. How can you not?” Daniel was slightly incredulous. I made mental notes. (Five years later these seeds took root.)

As our meeting with Father Matthews ended, we asked him if there was a support group that he knew of for couples like us. “There isn’t one that I know of,” he said, wagging a finger. “But I’ve been thinking of starting one.” (And what that wagging finger foretold!)

The Wedding Plans

Any engaged couple previews the marital adjustment of the first 5 years in the wedding plans. As an interfaith couple, with additional familial and cultural differences, obstacles seemed compounded. Here is a brief glimpse of our navigations:

The Wedding List: His list of 45 friends and relatives for “a small wedding” made me laugh. I had a Catholic family. So 250 relatives and a handful of friends came.

The Ceremony: The Baltimore Catechism taught neither wedding etiquette nor Canon Law. Though I envisioned a beautiful backyard wedding, my church could not allow it outdoors. My Reformed Jewish fiancé did not have the visceral reaction that many Jews feel about entering a church and did not mind being married there. (It was a small hint of how he generously entered all kinds of arenas other Jews might not.)

The Celebrants: We wanted a priest and a rabbi, and that put both of our mothers in a spin. My mother was convinced she would have to bribe or blackmail the

pastor. She knew that in her generation interfaith couples seeking the Church's blessing were forced to convert and wed in nondescript, private ceremonies, hidden away in the priest's rectory. Not many of us "people-in-the-pews" knew that in 1965 *Nostra Aetate* had been issued, the Church's official acknowledgment of Judaism as a means of salvation and its hope of rebuilding the special relationship between the two faiths that had been broken apart by painful history. This had paved the way for priests, including our pastor, to happily and publicly perform these interfaith ceremonies between Catholics and Jews.

Indeed, it was finding the rabbi that was the rub because traditional Halachic (ritually observant) law frowns on marrying outside of Judaism. Fortunately, Cincinnati is home to Hebrew Union College, one of the key U.S. centers for educating Reform rabbis. We were referred to several studying there and immediately felt comfortable with our first encounter with Rabbi Weiss.

"The Paper": The vestiges of the medieval Catholic Church's fastidiousness about civic record keeping still exist today. The Church bureaucracy keeps great records on births (baptisms), marriages, and deaths. A couple with one non-Catholic is asked to sign a document colloquially called "The Paper" or "The Promise." In the Church of my youth, an interfaith couple was most often a Catholic marrying a Protestant, and I knew that both of them were required to promise to raise the children Catholic, with the subtextual tone of "On pain of death of your immortal soul."

It came to that moment that both Daniel and I dreaded. It was not that we were in disagreement about our children; we were not. We wanted our children to know both religions, but, yes, we would call them Catholic if we had to. Based on the Jewishness of Jesus and the Church's ecumenism, its content allows for more of both. Still . . .

Father John Walsh at Old St. Paul's met with us that day, immediately quelling our queasiness. He explained that Daniel need only acknowledge that I had made this promise. I was promising that in good faith "I would do all within my power" to raise the children Catholic, but sometimes our power might be great and other times not. The Promise opens up the conversation, not closes the door. And furthermore, the marriage is more important. Father Walsh—and indeed his entire parish community built around hospitality, acceptance, outreach, and ecumenism—remains another angel in our lives, another person saying, "Come on! Do not be afraid!" There we have found a home.

The Ceremony: Even after we secured the two clergy in Kentucky, it dawned on all four of us that there was no prepared text that these two men could plug in the names and that the assembled would be able to follow. What resources did we use to thwart another obstacle? We tapped into our basic skills and talents. Daniel is a media writer, and we both were theater majors. We wrote our own ceremony. Because it was unlike anything our family had seen, people in the pews paid alert attention.

And the Rest of the Story . . . ?

A wedding is one day, but a marriage is daily. Our intercultural differences led us forth in unpredictable ways. For the first time in my adult life, I joined a parish; Old St. Paul's had made both of us—both!—feel welcome and valued for who we are. Daniel's Jewishness is considered quite special there, and never was he asked to change who he was. He also kept his membership at his temple where he grew up but eventually left over the rabbi's stance on interfaith marriage, and we joined two other temples.

God is sneaky. Beware the wagging finger! A little less than a year after our 1987 wedding, Father Matthews told us after mass that the interfaith couples' gathering we talked about might be getting off the ground. In June we met for the first time with Father Matthews and the late Father David Monts. This meeting spawned the Catholic-Jewish Couples Group of Chicago, which still exists today. About a year later Rabbi Albert Sachel joined us. A grassroots support group that we help lead, its membership list has approximately 300 couples in varying stages of relationships. Some people come for one or two meetings; some stay for years. Our monthly meetings address a variety of topics, and we have spun off special interest groups for those planning weddings and birth ceremonies.

Teach your children diligently.

Deuteronomy 6:7

When couples marry, children often follow. In interfaith families, when children come, and the wrestling with early rites of passage are put to rest, the lingering question of "What exactly will we teach the children?" soon arises. There were other families in the group whose children were roughly the same age as ours. Sending our children to a traditional religious education program alone did not feel quite right, yet could there be such a thing as a Catholic-Jewish Sunday School? If so, what would this look like?

Rick Matthew's advice from years ago to teach them both still resonated. Certainly no established Jewish education program could really teach about Christianity, unless briefly presented as comparative religion. We thought that even suggesting such a course of action would cause rabbis or Jewish educators to shake their heads sadly or even become angry. Indeed, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (the central organization of Reform Judaism in America) has issued a directive to its religious schools that children who have had religious instruction in other faiths should be discouraged from enrolling in Jewish education programs.

So, as with our wedding ceremony, we rolled up our sleeves and tapped into another talent, education. With seven families we started our own grassroots

religious education program, The Family School, in 1993. Housed at Old St. Paul's, it is a bimonthly, parent-taught cooperative. There we strive for religio-cultural competence in two-faith community settings.

I developed a 9-year, K–8 curriculum during the summers, wrote four student texts, and composed a parent curricular overview and guide to teaching the weekly lessons in the curricula. People think I'm nuts, amazed that I would devote all this time for no pay. I knew we were trailblazers, breaking apart and putting together pieces of hidden pathways to the Spirit. I was invigorated, intellectually and spiritually! I did this for three not-so-simple reasons: (1) People told me it couldn't be done, and I wanted to dig in my heels and prove them wrong (a life theme perhaps?); (2) I did not want my own children to learn drivel and junk; and (3) if I were constructing this for my own kids, then why not share my efforts with others now and those to come behind me? Like any good curriculum, I never feel like I am finished, but it is finally in a form that I can share with future Family School families as well as other groups starting out across the country with similar hopes and dreams just like mine and Daniel's back in 1987.

Practice, Practice, Practice: A Practicing Catholic

The expression "I am a 'practicing Catholic'" fascinates me. When I hear it, I want to say right back, "And what the hell does that mean? Aren't we all just practicing?" Usually the phrase is a status report: "I am an active member of this club." Or it is shorthand for expected behaviors: "Yes, I go to church every Sunday, take communion, receive reconciliation at least twice a year (Christmas and Easter obligation, you know), get those ashes on my forehead, fast during Lent on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, practice only natural birth control" and so on. (That's not fully me.) This expression too often summarizes the external life of the practitioner, not the internal; the extrinsic, not the intrinsic; the level of religiosity, not the depth of spirituality.

The phrase "I am a nonpracticing Catholic" fascinates me, too. Do pieces of your childhood identity ever totally go away? Or is this too just shorthand for the absence of regularity of the rote practices, a hint that you got out of the discipline or habit?

So today I say with a subtle, wry curl at the corner of my lips, "Yes, I am a practicing Catholic," but that means I am still trying to get it right—the untidy discovery part that is active spirituality. I do not practice my faith because I know it all; I practice because I don't know and want to know more. Weekly rituals are no longer rote routines but reminders or catalysts,

so repetition and practice are no longer drudgery. The much-maligned Baltimore Catechism of long ago did teach me this (much to my adult surprise): Discipline, repetition, imitation, routine, and regularity are learning tools. Like music, dance, and drawing the basics must be practiced before you can infuse them with your creative spirit to make it become art, transcendent, divine. This reshaping is the start for growing into faith, of being-in-becoming the beloved of the God of love.

If religion is the lens through which we tease out our faith and spirituality and shape our focus of how we see the realities of our world, then today I wear bifocals. Intermarriage woke me up spiritually, or, as the metaphor says in Jesus' baptism stories, "the heavens opened." After 17 years with Daniel, I honestly think of myself as both Catholic and Jewish. It is not that I am Jewish but that I see my own Catholic practices and stories better, brighter, clearer through the added prism of the rich history, teachings, and traditions of another faith, indeed the very faith that gave mine birth. I like the threads of connection there. This is Catholicism within the light of Judaism. I am comfortable in both worship communities when it is inclusive of diversity, not pejorative.

Indeed some former Catholics do not practice because of the Church's controversial teachings, theological differences, or the psychic pain because of its myriad scandals, such as clergy abuse. I sadly know why some people want to say, "Screw the Catholic Church." Catholic history, past and present, is full of less than holy intentions and gestures filled with power and malice, not love and compassion. Yet would I, could I, drop my Caucasian identity because of our repugnant history of slavery and racism? I can't. I have to find ways to reconcile and forgive, without ever forgetting.

Many vocations and roles form parts of my identity, past and present: teacher, actor, waitress, mother, counselor, teacher, writer, and wife. I think that what threads these realms—religion, arts, education, and psychology—is this common root: an attempt to take the ordinary human experience and somehow transform it into the extraordinary, whether in body, mind, or spirit. The quality that distinguishes an art, religious practice, or career as disgraceful or grace-filled is the answer to this question: "Am I stuck in an empty, rote, dull space? Or am I vibrantly, dynamically seeking connection?" That indeed makes the ordinary extraordinary. To that I strive in all I do.

My spiritual life is richer because I have been forced to venture into cultural language and stories that were once unfamiliar. Many Catholics gloss over those marvelous Hebrew scriptures. I now enjoy mining these new metaphors for little sparks lighting the way to see kaleidoscopes of "truth."

My favorite for life, ethics, and faith is Jacob wrestling with the angel. He wants to reconcile his past mistakes and goes to see his estranged brother. He wrestles all night with “a stranger” and comes out of this close-encounter-of-the-divine-kind wrenched, bruised, and limping but changed, even with a new name: *Yakkov*, “the liar,” becomes *Yisrael*, “he who wrestled with God and prevailed.” Like the old Catholic girl falling in love with a Jew, Jacob’s old self gives way to the new future for him and all his children. By marrying Daniel, I have been converted, and for the better. I changed my identity, and my future. That’s metanoia!

Renewed, deepened faith practices risk changing the comfort of one’s set worldview. But my sense of spirituality is that it is messy, uncomfortable, but then ultimately soothing to the limping self. “Spirit” happens in sneaky, surprising eureka moments. In encountering anything novel or life altering, a fevered sense of struggle, anxiety, and strangeness ensues. If you are curious and deeply engaged in breaking apart schemas, mindsets, and rote practices, change will follow. It requires energy to increase knowledge, but only fear can hold you back. (A biblical, angelic motif is, “Do not be afraid.”) Humans, not animals, can choose between right and wrong and can push toward transcendence. Do we stay in place, held back by fear, or wrestle with the angel? The higher self may emerge, but the past identity may also linger, pained and limping.

Socrates tells us that an unexamined life is not worth living, and I concur. Any dynamic practitioner of a vocation based on the ethics of care, trust, change, and growth—be it an artist, a musician, an actor, a dancer, a painter, a theologian, a parent, a spouse, a counselor—has to break apart the basic frameworks of the field and reshape it to make it fit his or her own, however kaleidoscopic that framework might become. Otherwise, we risk becoming stagnant, succumbing to our own entropy, and hence dull, dead, lifeless. Dynamic encounters challenge us, and being shaken up makes for personal, professional, or spiritual transformation. First, you have to open all your many eyes (those cultural and spiritual visions) to fully see. Different lenses can take the lead at different moments. Only then will you move beyond life’s barriers into the realm of the possible.

Fate and choice has taken me from the closed system of the 50s South to the horizons of the pluralistic 21st century metropolis. My spirit has opened infinite vistas, and I can never be the same. (Love and age have seen to that.) I no longer see my identity as I once did as a child, a teen, a young adult, a middle-aged woman. At this midpoint, I no longer see God in the same way either: God is no longer just a noun but also a verb. I can no longer be cerebral about the human atrocities committed both in the past and today, often done in the name of my God. I hurt because that is not my God.

I chose and vowed to love and honor my beloved, my Daniel. How could I honor him if I were judging the “other” as good or bad? As “us” or “them”? I am a Jacob, wrestling to find out what is valuable and desirable and discarding or restructuring what is dissonant or devalued. I have had to leap, to release, to let it go, to reach out anew. I embraced the “stranger” and made him mine. Together we reconciled our choices to fit our future hopes with fewer barriers for our children to knock down.

Our future, our children! They will forge their own life path. Oh, yes, I would be hypocritical to bind them too tightly to the family ties of our pasts. It is their journey. Their parents only prepare them with some basics: traditions, values, ethics, curiosity, wonder, and stories. (Oh, never forget the stories! Wrestle those images.) Practice may be rote and dull at times. Give it time. Yet we are really only launching their cultural boats, hoping with all our might that they land happily in body, mind, and spirit on the welcoming shores at a place where “otherness” doesn’t divide their futures. To you both: Bon voyage. Peace be with you. Go with God. Go with Good. Shalom.

Content Themes

Katie’s story reflects the developmental process of religious beliefs and describes how it changes across time to reflect life transitions and current events. It seems as if Katie’s religious beliefs were an important component of her childhood but strengthened and changed throughout adolescence and high school and certainly when she decided to marry someone of a different faith. Katie’s story demonstrates how spirituality and religion permeate all aspects of a person’s life and actively influence and affect decision making. There are four important themes. The first theme is the developmental process of religious identity, which corresponds to milestones and life transitions. The second theme is the importance of religion in important decisions, particularly marriage and child rearing. The third theme is the role of socialization in religious identity development. The final theme is the relationship between current events, or the macrosystem and exosystem, in religious identity development.

Religious Identity Development

The development of religious faith and religious identity corresponds to other developmental components, including cognitive development. James

Fowler (1981) identified a six-stage model of faith development. In the first stage, intuitive-projective (ages 3–7 years), individuals' religious beliefs are based on stories or messages taught by their parents. Because of their cognitive capacities, the stories are primarily fantasy in nature. The second stage, mythical-literal, corresponds to concrete cognitive functioning and includes children's process of separating fantasy stories from reality. The third stage, synthetic-conventional, usually occurring during adolescence, includes a tacit acceptance of values and symbols from the religious faiths and practices. The fourth stage, individual-reflective, is a questioning stage in which people make their beliefs explicit. Individuals not only question their beliefs but also the context in which they developed. The fifth stage, conjunctive, includes a deepening sense of faith and an integration of beliefs. The final stage, universalizing faith, includes integrating ethical principles, including justice and love. It should be noted that, as is the case with most developmental models, individuals may not progress through the stages as outlined.

Katie's spiritual journey seems to follow this path. Her participation in Catholic traditions began in infancy, when she was baptized in the Church. During her school-age years, she participated in Catholic schools, and she was indoctrinated with the teachings of the Church through school and religious services. Katie's school-age development seems to reflect Stage 2. For Katie, religion was a rote practice, a part of family functioning, which she took literally and examined in a concrete fashion. Katie reports questioning teachings but being silenced by her teachers. One wonders if she tacitly accepted the teachings at that point, confident in her parent's acceptance of the teachings and doctrine. When Katie entered high school, she began questioning some of the teachings she had previously accepted, partly due to the empowerment she felt from the civil rights movement. She may have entered Fowler's fourth stage during adolescence due to the changes that were occurring within society. Although the primary doctrine of the Church did not change, there was more input from the laity within the service and more participation from parishioners.

When Katie entered college and began to work, as is the case with many, she participated less in religious services, focusing on other developmental tasks. Katie continued to move through the stages as she decided to enter an interfaith marriage. Religious beliefs that had perhaps become routine suddenly took on new meaning as she was faced with the prospect of needing to choose which religious faith to practice. For Katie, love conquers all, and Katie and Daniel examined their faiths within the commitment of the relationship. Although Katie entered the challenges of young adulthood, entering and completing college and establishing a career, her participation in religious

activities waned. But certainly the prospect of marriage and the challenge of choosing or defending faith helped Katie to reconnect with spirituality.

There are many issues that may propel individuals into Fowler's fifth stage, conjunctive, in which beliefs are reexamined and integrated. For Katie, it was certainly the decision to marry that caused her to examine her faith and to more fully embrace, accept, and make Daniel's faith a vital part of her life, beginning with the wedding ceremony. Following marriage was childbirth, which led to a new examination of beliefs. For Katie, the prospect of raising children in an interfaith marriage, providing the opportunity to study and embrace both religious traditions, moved her to the sixth stage of development, universalizing faith. People often choose to expose their children to religious teachings, even those who no longer actively practice their faith, to allow their children to choose whether to participate in religion as adults. But because Katie's faith was more developed, she decided not to just expose teachings and practices to her children but to enrich their lives. She was an active participant in their teachings by preparing curriculum for their studies.

Decision Making

Religious beliefs and teachings often influence decision making for individuals. Scriptures and teachings, along with religious leaders, are sought for guidance and advice. Religion influences values and determines rules and roles in interpersonal relationships, career decisions, and child-rearing practices. It is clear that Katie was influenced by her religion as she progressed through development. First, Katie's socialization through school reaffirmed values and teachings in the Catholic faith and within her family. For Katie, options for her future were defined by roles prescribed by the Church. When Katie was entering adolescence, the teachings of the Church were beginning to expand, allowing her to have the freedom to explore more options. These changes allowed her to choose to relocate across the country to attend a non-Catholic university, a choice that may not have been available to her before the Church began to expand. Katie's next major decision was to choose a career. She chose teaching and theater as a profession and decided to teach at a private, all-girl Catholic high school.

Following developmental trajectories, the next major tasks for Katie were marriage and child rearing, and, as with other aspects of her life, her religious teachings were used as guidance. Although she was taught not to marry someone who was not a practicing Catholic, love had other plans for her, and she fell in love with a Jewish person. Perhaps guided by the changes

within the Church and its impact on her identity as an adolescent, she decided to follow her heart. This was not a light decision for her, and she and her fiancé decided to seek advice on their marriage. Not only did religion influence her participation in the marriage, but it also dictated the nature of the wedding ceremony, the first challenge to the interfaith relationship. Their commitment to the process led them to developing a support group for interfaith couples. The second challenge came in the attendance of worship services, as the couple decided to worship together in a parish that was accepting of his belief in Judaism. The final area of decision making in Katie's story is of child rearing, specifically religious teaching and training.

Family Socialization

Katie describes the role of the family in the development of her religious identity. Katie was born into a German and Irish Catholic family, and the extended family worshipped together and played a role in her religious development. They were a part of her baptismal ceremony, and the family worshipped and fellowshiped together for all major ceremonies. Katie spent the weekends worshipping with her parents and participating in Saturday confession. The family often dialogued about religious teachings, reflecting and mirroring the teachings from mass and the Catholic school. The extended family, along with her father, for example, expressed discomfort with some of the changes that were happening in the Church, particularly the modernization of the masses. They also expressed some concern about the interfaith marriage, the wedding ceremony, and the influence on children.

Katie is continuing the family socialization of religious beliefs through her child rearing. She actively developed a curriculum so that her children would receive rich teachings in both Catholicism and Judaism. By ensuring her children's religious education, Katie is working toward securing their futures and aiding them in their spiritual development. Her advice to them, "Practice may be rote and dull at times. Give it time. . . . To you both: Bon voyage. Peace be with you. Go with God. Go with Good. Shalom."

Influence of Current Events

Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecosystem model of development is relevant for understanding religious development. The sociopolitical issues and human rights concerns within the world often influence religious teachings and tenets. When Katie began to question her religious teachings and doctrine, the Church also began to respond to the zeitgeist and make changes within

policies and the services. Katie experienced high school during the rise of the feminist and civil rights movements, which led to changes in her religious role models. Katie openly embraced the changes that occurred in the services, from having the priest face the congregation to changes within the Eucharist, but her family was resistant to the changes that were happening. Today there are social justice issues and policy issues that present moral dilemmas for individuals, along with teachings within churches and denominations. Various religious faiths wrestle with issues including abortion rights, civil rights, and same-sex marriages. Individuals, like Katie, look to religious teachings and leaders for guidance. For example, Katie had more freedom to attend colleges and explore careers due to changes within the Church. She was also not as bound to traditional gender-role expectations.

Current sociopolitical issues also affected the possibility of mate selection. A generation ago it would have been more difficult to marry someone of a different religious orientation. Changing attitudes, behaviors, and immigration patterns have literally transformed the past tendency toward homogeneity in mate selection patterns. Intermarriage rates have increased for all ethnic, cultural, and religious groups in the United States (Crohn, 1998). Katie falls into that category by marrying a Jewish man.

Clinical Applications

Assessment

There are two primary areas of assessment for spirituality and religion as illustrated in this story: religious identity and development and the influence of religion on decision making. First, clinicians should assess the religious socialization practices and teachings of childhood and adolescence. Teachings influence values, decisions, judgments, and relationships, so it is important to assess these early teachings with clients. Because the relationship with religion changes according to developmental stages, it is important to assess how these changes have influenced clients. It is equally important to ask these questions with clients who are no longer practicing a religious faith because often individuals leave religious institutions because they have been harmed or hurt by particular teachings. The second area of assessment includes the influence of religion on decision making. Clients often seek religious teachings or religious leaders when making choices, and it is important for therapists to understand how these are affecting clients. The following questions are recommended for assessing the importance of religion:

What is your religious background? Were you raised or socialized in a particular religious faith?

How important is your religious background to you?

How important was religion during your childhood?

How important are religious teachings and practices to you?

Are you currently participating in religious or spiritual practices?

How have your *religious beliefs* or your *connection to religion* changed during your development?

How do your religious beliefs influence your decisions? Do you seek religious leaders for advice in decision making?

How are your religious beliefs related to your presenting problem?

Techniques and Interventions

Examination of Specific Religious Teachings

Therapists need to help clients examine and explore their specific religious beliefs in treatment. As individuals progress through religious identity development, they begin to question their religious beliefs, separate perceived facts from myths, and understand how their beliefs are related to values and decisions. It is important for therapists to assist clients in their exploration, particularly because their beliefs are related to the presenting problem. It may also be helpful for couples who become overwhelmed by differing religious doctrine to discuss spirituality and spiritual needs. The couple may find more commonality in their sense of purpose in life or transcendence, for example.

Interfaith Relationship Issues

Only since the 1970s have churches and religious faiths sanctioned or allowed interfaith marriages; many people have been raised with teachings and practices that prohibited and did not recognize interfaith marriages. Clients who are contemplating these marriages may experience some trepidation because they may feel as if this decision goes against religious teachings and family rules. Therapists can assist clients in two ways. First, clinicians can help clients to outline the important doctrines and teachings from their religions and to find a compromise about worship services, rituals, and traditions. Premarital counseling should help clients explore and face their families' reactions to the marriage. Discussions about how to spend the

holidays, particularly the religious holidays, need to be included in the treatment. Counselors can be helpful in assisting clients in the discussion about the actual wedding ceremony as well. Counselors should encourage clients to have realistic discussions about the religious socialization of the children if the couple is planning to have them. Clinicians should suggest to clients that the original conversations in premarital counseling have to be repeated with major life transitions, stressors, or crises. For example, parents may be agreeable about having a civil service ceremony but insist that their grandchildren be socialized in a particular way.

Interfaith couples who are already married or who have children are most likely to seek help when some event in the life cycle disrupts the family's balance (Crohn, 1998). Many couples attempt to deal with their religious differences by trying to forget the past or deny their differences in religious backgrounds or commitments. However, a major life event or trauma may make couples more vulnerable to conflicts around those issues. Many people revert to religious practices and rituals they have been socialized with to deal with the crisis or tragedy, even if, for the sake of being in this interfaith couple, they had denied or rejected their religious practices in the past. Helping couples clarify their needs, differences, worries, and anxieties about the religious differences is important. It is also important for the therapist to help interfaith couples create their own religious rituals, routines, and traditions.

Countertransference

Two areas of countertransference are raised in this story: moral dilemmas and confusion around interfaith relationships.

Moral Dilemmas

Katie's story and her religious identity show the influence of current affairs, sociopolitical issues, and the cultural ideology on functioning. Religion influences our decisions and behaviors. When teachings and practices of the church change, people are left confused over what to believe or how to behave. Likewise, individuals may experience a lack of change in religious teachings and think that their religious training and beliefs are not relevant to today and leave the church. Counselors will experience these same feelings and be confused about how to assist their clients. For example, a person with an unplanned pregnancy may be confused about whether to terminate the pregnancy, which would go against their religious training. Therapists are advised to be aware of their own positions and be careful not

to impose them on their clients. A Rogerian approach that focuses on active listening may be useful in helping people with moral dilemmas (Rogers, 1980). The narrative approach that focuses on helping people understand the meaning they are constructing may also be beneficial in this area (Freedman & Combs, 1995).

Confusion About Interfaith Differences

Clinicians may become overwhelmed by working with clients who were socialized in two different religious traditions. Therapists who share a similar religious tradition and strong religious beliefs with one member of the couple may find it difficult to understand how and why the couple is interested in an interfaith relationship. Therapists with no religious training may underestimate the significance of the relationship and the troubles the clients will face. Clients need assistance in sorting out and prioritizing religious beliefs and family reactions. Clinicians may want to consult with religious leaders to assist in the process of helping the couple achieve a balanced view of their differences (Falicov, 1995).

TOOLBOX ACTIVITY—KATIE		
<i>Discussion Questions</i>	<i>Activities</i>	<i>Resources</i>
<p>Content themes What other themes do you see emerging in the story that the author did not identify?</p> <p>Assessment Are there any questions you would like to ask?</p> <p>Interventions What other interventions could you propose with Katie?</p> <p>Countertransference What countertransference reactions were emerging in yourself as you read this story?</p> <p>Other scenarios Imagine that Katie married another Catholic. How would this marriage have shaped her religious identity? Imagine that Katie married someone of the Islamic faith. What challenges would they have?</p>	<p>Research a religious faith that differs from yours. Imagine marrying a person from that faith. Write an essay on the challenges you would have to face.</p> <p>Develop a list of essential religious teachings that you would want to share with your children.</p>	<p>Suggested readings</p> <p>Cowan, P., & Cowan, R. (1989). <i>Mixed blessings: Overcoming the stumbling blocks in an interfaith marriage</i>. New York: Penguin.</p> <p>Hawxhurst, J. C. (1998). <i>The interfaith family guidebook: Practical advice for Jewish and Christian partners</i>. Boston, KY: Dovetail.</p> <p>Rosenbaum, M. H., & Rosenbaum, S. (1998). <i>Celebrating our differences: Living two faiths in one marriage</i>. New York: Ragged Edge Press.</p> <p>Yob, I. (1998). <i>Keys to interfaith parenting</i>. Hauppauge, NY: Barron's Educational Series.</p>