

**The Effect of Christian Values  
on Marital Satisfaction**

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**A Literature Review**

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# **The Effect of Christian Values on Marital Satisfaction: A Literature Review**

**by John W Bennett<sup>1</sup>**

## **ABSTRACT**

Do Christian values have an impact on marital satisfaction? This review of literature finds that while there are benefits for Christian marriages in religious beliefs and practices, the homogeneity of the religious beliefs and practices between husband and wife, and the extent to which the religious beliefs are internalised are more significant in reducing the risk of divorce than factors such as denomination, doctrine, or 'style' of religious practice. Despite anecdotal claims of a very low divorce rate for certain Christians (around 0.1%), no evidence is found to support such a claim, which is specifically refuted by some researchers.

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## INTRODUCTION

### ***Why This Topic?***

It is a claim often repeated: for Christians who attend church together regularly and pray together regularly, the divorce rate is about 0.1%, whereas the national average is approximately 50% of all marriages. The aim of this review of literature is to test the authenticity of that claim, and to examine the factors involved in the divorce of Christians.

### ***Origin of the Low Divorce Rate Claim***

Since the origin of the claim was rumoured to have been from well-known evangelist Dr Billy Graham, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA) was contacted for further information. Dr Graham is advancing in years and unavailable, however a researcher from BGEA advised that she found references to the claim in three of Dr Graham's sermons, the earliest being from the early 1970's. Other references were either not the direct result of formal research, or based on very old research (before the introduction of no-fault divorce laws). If there ever was any basis for the claim, it may well be irrelevant now. Several authors have stated that this anecdotal evidence is unsubstantiated, e.g., Robinson (2002).

### ***The Importance of Marriage and the Effects of Marriage Breakdown***

Marriage breakdown is a threefold problem: social, economic and health. Wolcott and Hughes (1999) list a summary of findings from various sources about the benefits of stable and satisfying marriages, viz:

- It is associated with improved physical health, mental health and material wealth for both men and women;
- There are better outcomes for the wellbeing of the children.

In Australia, divorce was estimated to cost \$3 billion per year, a cost which the nation cannot afford to carry (Grace, 1998). The divorce rate is about 50% of all first marriages, which is the same as in the USA (Groom, 2001).

William Raspberry said "Children are in trouble because marriage is in trouble" (2002, cited in Blankenhorn, 2003). The number of children of divorced couples in Australia rose from 12,950 in 1966 to 48,055 in 1993. There is much research which

demonstrates conclusively that adults and children have an increased risk of mental and physical problems following divorce, whereas the environment in marriage is associated with better health and lower mortality (Grace 1998).

### ***Divorce is not the Answer***

A study by Waite et al (2002) challenges what they call the “divorce assumption”: that an unhappily married person becomes happier by getting a divorce. This study has shown that unhappily married people who divorce are typically no happier on average than those who stay married. Similarly, unhappily married people who divorce and remarry are on average no happier than those who stay married. This survey took 645 people who claimed they were unhappily married in the National Survey of Family and Households (USA) in the late 1980’s, and reinterviewed them five years later. Rating them on 12 measures of psychological well-being, the survey found that there was no reduction in symptoms of depression, and no increase in self-esteem or sense of mastery, in fact divorce was associated with a significant decline in happiness and psychological well-being. The size of the sample and the methodology suggest that these findings are reliable.

In short, marriage is associated with better health and well-being, and divorce has the opposite effect. For the well-being of thousands (probably millions) of adults and children affected by divorce, something needs to change. That is a good reason to study marital satisfaction and to seek ways to improve it.

## **METHOD**

Most of the references used were located by using the keyword phrases “christian divorce” and “christian marital satisfaction” in searches using the Internet search engine Google<sup>2</sup>, the EBSCO database<sup>3</sup>, and the INFOTRAC Online Library<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> At [www.google.com.au](http://www.google.com.au).

<sup>3</sup> Accessed from the University of South Australia Library.

<sup>4</sup> Accessed at [www.infotrac-college.com](http://www.infotrac-college.com).

## MARITAL SATISFACTION

### *Measures of Marital Satisfaction*

It is useful to discuss the variety of terms used for marital satisfaction in the papers referred to.

1. **Marital Satisfaction:** measured by various instruments to give a consistent evaluation of satisfaction with the marriage in the perception of the subject(s).
2. **Marital (or Relationship) Stability:** The probability that a marriage will not end in divorce or separation.
3. **Marital (or Relationship) Quality:** Measured by instruments in which subjects rate the quality of the marriage. According to Lewis and Spanier (cited in Worthington 1990), these are related but not correlated.
4. **The Divorce Rate:** has been defined in various ways listed below: the first is the most common (Kerckhoff, 1976).
  - The number of divorces per 1,000 marriages in existence;
  - The number of divorces per 1,000 of population;
  - The number of divorces per 1,000 married women;
  - The number of divorces as a percentage of all marriages;
  - The number of divorces as a percentage of all first marriages.
5. **The Probability of Separation:** The probability that a marriage will end in divorce or separation.

Some of the data referred to in this paper are drawn from the US National Survey of Family and Households (NSFH), which provides a large sample. In the 'first wave' of the NSFH conducted in 1987/88, there were 13,008 respondents, of whom 10,008 were also in the 'second wave' (1992-1994). This survey provides a respectable size of sample for couples research (4,587 couples in the 'first wave'), and it also gives the opportunity for longitudinal research (Call & Heaton, 1997).

### ***Marital Satisfaction for Christians***

There have been many studies in this area. Mahoney et al (1999, cited in Bradbury, Fincham & Beach, 2000) showed that several aspects of marriage quality (e.g. marital satisfaction) are predicted by religious activities such as praying together and considering the sanctity of marriage.

Hatch, James and Schumm (1986) studied the interaction between (inter alia) Spiritual Intimacy and Marital Satisfaction. They found that while Spiritual Intimacy correlated significantly with Emotional Intimacy and Marital Satisfaction, it did not have a direct effect on Marital Satisfaction, rather it affected Marital Satisfaction indirectly, via Emotional Intimacy.

Another view is that of Thornton and Camburn (1989, cited in Call & Heaton, 1997) which suggests that there is a reciprocal relationship between religiosity and family oriented behaviours, that is religiosity may be affected by a change in family behaviours, and family behaviours may be affected by a change in religiosity.

Berggren (1997) found that religion discourages divorces, to the extent of a 14% decrease in one city in Sweden. Gartner, Larson & Allen (1991, cited in Legako & Sorenson, 2000) found that religious psychotherapists experience higher levels of marital satisfaction and lower divorce rates, especially if they attend church together regularly. Jones, Watson & Wolfram (1992, cited in Legako & Sorenson, 2000) found that of the alumni of seven Christian psychology graduate programs, 80.5% were married, 15.9% were single, 0.5% were cohabiting, and 4.7% were divorced.

Robinson (2002) refers to studies which show a lower divorce rate for agnostics and atheists than for Christians, and suspects that there may be two factors which skew the results: firstly that some couples drop out of church after divorce; and secondly, that financial and educational levels may need to be considered (Christianity seems to be stronger among poorer communities, where educational levels also vary from the norm).

Larson & Swyers (2002, cited in Larson, 2002) claims that religiosity does have a significant effect on divorce rates. In a 15 year national (USA) study, they found that 37% of couples who rarely or never attended a religious service had divorced, whereas only 14% of couples who attended frequently had divorced. Larson & Goltz (1999, cited in Larson, 2002) found that couples who attended church frequently were more

committed to marriage, while denomination and affiliation were not related to marital commitment. Larson summarises that a strong commitment to marriage, and jointly engaging in religious activities both help to promote marriage quality.

The study by Booth and Johnson (1995) correlated five indicators of religiosity with five indicators of marital quality. They found that all five of the religiosity indicators significantly affected one indicator of marital quality (*Divorce Proneness*), but did not affect any other indicators. They also found that two indicators of marital quality (*Interaction* and *Happiness*) affected religiosity. *Marital Happiness* affected both *Church Attendance* and *Religious Influence In Daily Life*, and *Interaction* affected *Church Attendance*. They also found one gender difference: *Marital Interaction* had a positive effect on *Prayer* for men only. In all other respects there were no gender differences. Overall they concluded that any increase in religiosity leads to an improvement in the marriage, and the link between marriage and religiosity is reciprocal and weak. They concede that Fundamentalism and Religiosity of the individuals at the time of marriage are factors which should be considered.

Heaton and Albrecht (1991, citing Glenn and Supancic 1984, Greeley 1989, and Larson and Goltz 1989) summarise by saying that religious norms act as barriers to marriage break-up, especially among Catholic and conservative Protestant communities, which encourage couples to resolve their conflicts as a positive alternative to divorce. On a similar note, de Vaus and Wolcott (1997) report that church attenders in Australia are more likely to believe that divorces are too easy to obtain.

The results of this section are summarised in Table 1.

**Table 1: Summary of Marital Satisfaction for Christians**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Author(s)</b>	<b>Result</b>
1986	Hatch, James & Schumm	Spiritual intimacy affects marital satisfaction indirectly
1989	Thornton and Camburn	Reciprocal relationship between religiosity and family oriented behaviours
1991	Larson & Allen	Higher marital satisfaction and lower divorce rates if attending church regularly
1992	Watson & Wolfram	Low divorce rate among Christian psychology graduates
1995	Booth & Johnson	Religiosity indicators negatively related to divorce proneness
1997	De Vaus & Wolcott	Christians think divorce is too easy to obtain
1997	Bergren	Religion discourages divorces
1999	Mahoney et al	Marital satisfaction predicted by religious activities
1999	Larson & Goltz	Church attendance related to marriage commitment
2002	Larson & Swyers	Divorce rate much higher for irregular/non-attenders at church
2002	Robinson	Divorce rate for Christians higher than atheists and agnostics

### ***Denominational and Other Aspects***

Fu (1992) cites Clark (1990), and Trent & South (1989) who studied the effect of Catholic and Islamic beliefs on divorce rates. Trent & South found that religion was insignificant, but Trent found that religion was significant. (The citation does not say in which way it was significant, but the context suggests that there is a negative relationship between religious values and the divorce rate).

## **HOMOGAMY: CONGRUENCE OF VALUES**

### ***The Significance of Values***

*Homogamy* means a marriage of two people having the same values and background, from the Greek *homos*, the same, and *gamos*, marriage (Webster's Dictionary, 1979). (Heterogamy is the opposite – married people having different values). Kerckhoff (1976) says that homogamy is similarities in race, religion, and social status. Denominational affiliation, attendance, and beliefs are all dimensions of religiosity which promote similarities between a husband and wife, and hence a more



stable and satisfactory marriage (Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993, Heaton 1984, and Heaton & Pratt, 1990, cited in Call & Heaton, 1997).

By contrast, Ortega, Whitt & Williams (1988, cited in Call & Heaton, 1997) found that the greater the difference between a couple's doctrine and practices, the greater their unhappiness with the marriage. Marital conflict over religion is most likely when the partners have differing views on the salience of their religion, their religious activities, the priority they give to shared religious activities, and the importance to them of religious compatibility (Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993, cited in Call & Heaton, 1997). In addition, Call & Heaton point out that religious homogamy is as significant to predicting marital stability as any other religiosity indicator.

People tend to select as their spouse someone who has similar values to themselves. One explanation is that they feel comfortable with, and like being around someone with similar values, so their "field of desirables" is made up of people like themselves. This is the most common view. Another explanation is that the circles they tend to move in are made up of people like themselves in terms of locality, interests, institutional settings etc. The preference for a partner with similarities mentioned above may be an expression of the individual's preferences and also the preferences of other significant persons around them (e.g., parents, friends, church authorities). Homogamous marriages are satisfying to the participants because it is socially convenient, they have much in common, and it fits with their social situation.

So it is not surprising that most people tend to marry people similar to themselves in some ways, although there is a trend towards more marriages which mix values such as faith, ethnic background, culture. These will be discussed later.

### ***Gender Differences In The Practice Of Religion***

Differences between spouses in the way they practice religion can affect the risk of divorce. Call & Heaton (1997) found that the risk of a dissolved marriage was greater when there were differences in church attendance. Glenn and Supancic (1984, cited in Call & Heaton, 1997) found that a couple's participation in religious activities was more significant to marital stability than their denominational affiliation.

Larson & Swyers (2002, cited in Larson, 2002) found that pursuing religious activities jointly was more significant to improve marriage quality than the respective individual's religiosity or denomination.

Call & Heaton (1997) found that a difference in attendance increased the risk of divorce: compared to the risk for couples who attend together weekly, it is 2.4 times higher for couples where neither attend, and 2.9 times higher if the wife attends weekly and the husband does not attend. They also found some significance in the orthodoxy of the wife's beliefs: women with more orthodox beliefs (where the exact meaning of *orthodox* was not defined) are more committed to marriage and less approving of extra-marital relationships, and are therefore less likely to divorce. They postulate that homogamy improves marital satisfaction in two ways: firstly, by socialisation in an environment which teaches values such as the importance of marriage; and secondly, by networking with friends in a way which promotes good communication between spouses.

Teachman (2003) found that men who believe that religion is important are at a higher risk of marital breakdown. Men in this category may be Fundamentalists (see section on Fundamentalists).

Heaton and Albrecht (1991) ranked gender differences in marital stability by religious or denominational affiliation into order:

- The rankings for highest to lowest marital stability for men:
  1. Jews;
  2. men with no religious affiliation;
  3. conservative Protestants;
  4. Baptists;
  5. other religious groups;
  6. moderate and liberal Protestants;
  7. Catholics.
- The rankings for highest to lowest marital stability for women:
  1. Catholics, moderate and liberal Protestants, other religious groups, and Jews ranked similarly;
  2. No religious preference;
  3. Baptists and conservative Protestants;

They found that the differences were not great, and that religious participation and affiliation were not major barriers to divorce or separation.

Glenn and Supancic (1984, cited in Clydesdale 1997) noted that some studies, when questioning subjects about religious activity and divorce, received answers about

recent religious activity, whereas a divorce may not have been recent. This begs the question of whether divorced subjects who do not attend church or attend infrequently do so because the church frowns on divorce: they don't attend because they know they are in conflict with church teaching, or they may experience alienation or criticism from clergy or lay members. My comments about sanctification raised elsewhere are also pertinent.

The study by Chinitz (2002) tested the effect of religious homogamy on Jewish and Christian couples. Expecting a positive correlation between religious homogamy and marital satisfaction and commitment, they found this to be true for Christian couples, but neutral for Jewish couples. They also found that for Christian couples with low religious homogamy, there was more marital satisfaction for couples who used an integrating/compromising or obliging style of conflict resolution.

### ***Interdenominational Marriages***

Kerckhoff (1976) suggests that divorce is less likely in homogamous marriages, particularly religious homogamous marriages, and various studies have supported this. He cites Burchinal and Chancellor (1962) who found that after seven years, 96% of homogamous Catholic marriages survived, 86% of homogamous Protestant marriages, and 78% of Catholic-Protestant marriages. They found some variation for these marriages depending which partner was Catholic or Protestant. A marriage of a Catholic wife and Protestant husband had an 80% survival rate, whereas for a Protestant wife and Catholic husband the rate was 75%.

Michael Lawlor of the Creighton University Center for Marriage and Family (Lawlor, 2002) presented results of a study which showed that in the USA, denominational affiliation of a couple was significant to their divorce rate. For couples of the same denomination it was 14%, for couples of different denominations it was 20%, but for couples who were engaged as members of different denominations, but then became members of the same denomination, it was only 6%. Also significant was that the highest rate (20%) was only half of the national average rate. The same study found that shared religious activities were more significant to marital success than shared beliefs.

## ***Fundamentalism***

Morgan and Scanzoni (1987, cited in Call & Heaton, 1997) note that variations in religious beliefs and practices cross denominational boundaries, so that the boundaries become fuzzy. Fundamentalism is an example of such a belief: it may be found in Evangelical and Pentecostal churches. *Fundamentalism* is another term which is not exactly defined, so for the purposes of this paper, I will include here references to *fundamentalism* or being *born again*.

One definition of *Fundamentalism* is the belief that the Bible should be interpreted literally, where it makes sense to do so. As examples, a record of Jesus Christ saying “I am the door” could not be taken literally, it is clearly allegorical, but a record of him turning water into wine could be taken literally, even though it also requires a belief in miracles. This is a common hermeneutic principle.

A definition of *born again* is the status of a person who has confessed a belief in Jesus Christ as he claimed to be. Such a statement can be made without a full understanding of the doctrine of Christology.

George Barna of the Barna Research Group (Barna, 2001) surveyed 7043 born again USA residents (he gave a definition of *born again*) about divorce. He found that 33% of born again adults who were ever married have been divorced, compared to 34% of non-born again adults. Barna found that 90% of born again divorced Christians experienced the divorce after being born again. A problem with his technique however, is that he did not ascertain the elapsed time between being born again and being divorced. The significance of this is that a person being born again does not instantly adopt a new set of values. This process, referred to in Christian theology as *sanctification*, is a gradual process, so a person who becomes born again while experiencing marital problems may be divorced soon after, before adopting Christian values about marriage. In this case, being born again is not relevant.

Allport (1950, cited in Strahan 1996) proposed two orientations, *intrinsic* and *extrinsic*, to religious belief and practice. He defined intrinsic orientation as internalised religious values in more mature individuals, and extrinsic orientation as typical of individuals who had not internalised religious values but tended to use them in self-serving ways. Strahan’s findings were that a literalist approach was associated with lower marital satisfaction; as also was introjection (a feeling that one should obey religious teachings); but (intrinsic) identification with religious beliefs and practices was

associated with higher marital satisfaction. Although this study is very old, its intrinsic/extrinsic approach is still relevant, and may relate to the elapsed time since conversion to a religion or form of religion.

Medoff and Skov (1992) studied the impact of fundamentalism on several behaviors deemed (by them) to be ‘deviant’, one of these being divorce. Their finding was that Fundamentalism had a positive impact on the divorce rate, that is, Fundamentalists were more likely to divorce. They cite Ammerman (1987) who found similarly, and Argyle (1959), who argued that Fundamentalists are unable to live up to the strenuous standards of their beliefs. This led Medoff and Skov to suggest that Fundamentalism may actually be inducing divorce.

Thornton (1978, cited in Chi & Houseknecht, 1985) found that Protestants had a higher rate of dissolution of marriage than Catholics, but when Fundamentalist Protestants were excluded, the rate for other Protestants was the same as for Catholics, but Fundamentalists had a higher rate. Chi & Houseknecht (1985) note that there were two limitations to this study: the sample was all female, and the religious orientation was based on their childhood preference, which was probably dictated by their parents. Such subjects may well have changed religious preference since. They also comment that some divorces may have occurred before the subject converted to Fundamentalism. (I would go further: as noted elsewhere, a convert does not immediately adopt Fundamentalist values at conversion, so a divorce occurring soon after conversion may also skew data). Chi & Houseknecht postulated that congruency is very significant for Fundamentalists. Their results are reproduced in Table 2.

**Table 2. Marital Dissatisfaction rate per 100 satisfied by religious congruency**

(adapted from Chi & Houseknecht, 1985)

Affiliation	Congruent		Incongruent		Incongruent/ Congruent Ratio	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
Fundamentalist Protestants	2.6	2.7	9.2	8.0	3.54	2.96
Non-Fundamentalist Protestants	2.0	1.8	2.9	5.1	1.45	2.83
Catholics	1.6	2.8	2.8	2.2	1.75	0.79

The results in Table 2 show that the highest dissatisfaction occurs for non-Fundamentalist females in an incongruent relationship (Incongruent/Congruent ratio 2.83), and Fundamentalist males (ratio 3.54) and females (ratio 2.96) in an incongruent relationship. This incongruency is more significant to marital satisfaction/ dissatisfaction than the 'style' of religion.

### **Conformity vs Conversion**

Another aspect examined by Chi & Houseknecht is the effect of religious conformity and conversion on divorce rates, where conformity is following the parents' religion (or style of religion), and conversion is choosing a new religion (or style of religion). Their results are summarised in Table 3.

**Table 3. Persons ever divorced per 100 never divorced by conformist or convert**  
(adapted from Chi & Houseknecht, 1985)

Affiliation	Males		Females	
	Conformist	Convert	Conformist	Convert
Fundamentalist Protestants	13	22	13	22
Non-Fundamentalist Protestants	12	26	11	15
Catholics	7	30	5	22

The results in Table 3 show that those who *convert* to a religion are more at risk of divorce than those who *conform* to it, and in most cases the increase in risk is significant. For conformists, the difference between Fundamentalists and non-Fundamentalists is insignificant. This study also raises the question of the elapsed time since conversion, and also what religion (if any) was adhered to previously.

### **Holiday Rituals**

Fiese and Tomcho (2001) examined the relationship between marital satisfaction and the practice of family rituals as an expression of religious homogamy. There has been much study of negative influences of the family of origin, but less is known about positive influences: family rituals may be such a positive influence. They found that marital satisfaction was related to ritual meaning, and for wives, satisfaction was also related to the roles and routines associated with the ritual. Rituals affirm relationships so they are especially significant to women, who are relationship focussed. The more

men focus on relational issues such as religious holiday rituals, the more marital satisfaction women have.

### ***Interfaith Marriages***

Burchinall and Chancellor (1962, cited in Kerckhoff, 1976), found that after 7 years, 96% of Catholic marriages, 86% of Protestant marriages, and 78% of Catholic-Protestant marriages had survived. Of those interfaith marriages, they found that 80% survived if the wife was Catholic, and 75% if the husband was Catholic.

Mims (1999, cited in Robinson, 2002) studied interfaith marriages involving Mormons. For Mormon couples, after 5 years, he found that the divorce rate was 13%, but for interfaith marriages involving a Mormon, the rate was 40%. The rates for Jewish couples and Jew married to non-Jew were 27% and 42% respectively. A similar study by Kosmin, Lerer, and Mayer (1989, cited in Sussman & Alexander, 1999) gave a divorce rate of 17% for Jewish couples and 32% for a Jew married to a non-Jew. Maller (1992) reports rates of 17.6% for Jewish couples, 41% if one is Jewish, 11.2% for Catholic couples, and 28.9% if one is Catholic.

### ***Inter-Racial Marriages***

Teachman (2003) found that there is a higher risk of disruption of a marriage if the man and woman are of different races. They have different experiences, and cultural values and attitudes which are likely to create conflict (Kerckhoff, 1976).

### ***When One Partner is Homosexual***

The paper by Clark and McKheen (1994) examines the plight of straight Christian women who married gay Christian men, both believing that the male's homosexuality had been converted into heterosexuality following the male's conversion to Christianity and what the paper refers to as "conversion therapy"<sup>5</sup>. What typically happens in such a case is that the male realises eventually that his homosexuality has not been "healed" or "converted", and he still has those leanings. He may resume homosexual activity, he may confess to his wife, he may leave home, or he may say nothing and remain in the marriage, with or without a sexual relationship with his wife. One way or another the

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<sup>5</sup> There are some theological issues with the paper and with conversion therapy as it is described, however they are beyond the scope of this paper.

wife comes to realise that things in the marriage are not as they were portrayed. Each of them may experience a loss of trust in the church and God, as well as each other.

According to Wyers (1987, cited in Clark & McKheen, 1994), only 12.5% of homosexual men who married told their wives of their sexual orientation before marriage, and Gochros (1989, cited in Clark & McKheen, 1994), says that in most cases the disclosure is incomplete.

Ross (1983, cited in Clark & McKheen, 1994) found that male homosexuals are more likely to marry in countries which are less tolerant of homosexuals (the rate in Sweden is half the rate in the USA). In less tolerant countries, there is more social pressure on homosexuals to marry and lead a normal life. Combined with bad teaching on the way out of homosexuality, many Christians feel pressured into a marriage likely to fail.

Clark & McKheen’s paper does not specify a divorce rate for marriages in this category, but it does point out that for the couples which remain together, the price of staying married includes significant compromises such as celibacy, or consenting to adultery. The paper concludes with some appropriate suggestions for the church to avoid mistreating and misleading the men and women involved.

The effects of Marital Homogamy are summarised in Table 4.

**Table 4: Summary of Marital Homogamy**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Author(s)</b>	<b>Area of Homogamy</b>	<b>Result</b>
1950	Allport	Intrinsic/extrinsic beliefs	Intrinsic beliefs positively related to marital satisfaction Extrinsic beliefs negatively related
1962	Burchinall & Chancellor	Interfaith	Catholic/Protestant marriages at greater risk than intrafaith marriages
1976	Kerckhoff	Denominational	Divorce less likely if homogamous
1978	Thornton	Fundamentalism	Non-Fundamentalist Protestants and Catholics have same divorce rate, Fundamentalists higher rate
1984	Glenn & Supancic	Religious practice	Joint participation more important than same denomination
1985	Chi & Houseknecht	1. Fundamentalism 2. Conformist/	Highest marital dissatisfaction for Fundamentalist males and females and non-Fundamentalist females in incongruent marriages. Fundamentalist conformists no more



		Convert	at risk than non-Fundamentalists, Converts at significantly more risk.
1989	Kosmin, Lerer & Mayer	Interfaith	Jewish couples 17% divorce rate vs 32% interfaith
1991	Heaton & Albrecht	Denominational	Liberal Protestant & Catholic men, and conservative Protestant women have lowest marital stability
1992	Medov & Skov	Fundamentalism	Positively related to divorce and may be inducing it
1993	Lehrer & Chiswick	Salience & priority of religious practice	Differing views lead to more conflict
1994	Clark & McKheen	Homosexuality	Significant problems may lead to divorce, or unsatisfactory 'solutions' which lead to loss of trust in each other, church and God.

1997	Call & Heaton	1. Religious homogamy 2. Church attendance	One of most significant predictors of marital stability Differences lead to greater risk of divorce
1998	Ortega, Whitt & Williams	Religious doctrine & practice	Differences related to marital unhappiness
1999	Mims	Interfaith	Interfaith marriages for Mormons at significantly greater risk (40% vs 13%) than intrafaith. For Jews, 42% vs 27%
2001	Fiese & Tomcho	Religious holiday rituals	Marital satisfaction is positively related to ritual practice and meaning. For wives, it is also related to the associated roles and routines.
2001	Barna	Being born again	Divorce rate for born again Christians is same as non-born again persons
2002	Lawlor	1. Denomination 2. Religion	Divorce rate better if same denomination, best if couple switched to same denomination. Shared religious activities more important than shared beliefs
2002	Chinitz	Religious homogamy	Positively related to marital satisfaction for Christians, neutral for Jews
2002	Larson & Swyers	Religious practice	More significant to marriage quality than individual's religiosity or denomination
2003	Teachman	1. Importance of religion	Men who believe it is important are at higher risk of marriage

		2. Inter-racial marriage	breakdown. Much higher risk of divorce for inter-racial marriages
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## RECONCILIATION

Wineberg (1994), using the 1987-88 National Survey of Families and Household data, examined the success of marriage reconciliations of 506 women in the USA. His findings were that religion played a significant part in the success of the reconciliation:

- Reconciliations of marriages were twice as likely to be successful for those in which one spouse changed religion after marriage compared to marriages in which there was no religious change (45% vs 22%);
- Reconciliations of marriages in which the husband and wife had the same religious affiliation were nearly twice as likely to be successful compared to marriages in which the spouses had differing religious affiliations (33% vs 18%);
- Reconciliations are slightly more likely to be successful when the couple attend a religious service at least once per week (36% vs 29%).

## DISCUSSION

### ***Overview of the Results***

While the results are mixed, there are three conclusions which may be drawn from the results.

1. The anecdotal claims of a very low divorce rate for Christians who observe certain religious practices are not supported by the data, and are refuted by some researchers.
2. Most Christians (apart from Fundamentalists) are at a slightly lower level of risk of divorce than non-Christians. Religious beliefs and practices are significant in reducing the risk of divorce.
3. Homogamy of religious beliefs and practices is a more significant factor in divorce risk, especially if any of the following apply:
  - The marriage is between Fundamentalist and non-Fundamentalist;
  - One partner is a convert to Fundamentalism;
  - One partner's beliefs are not internalised (intrinsic);
  - The couple don't practice their beliefs together;
  - The male is a homosexual.

### ***What Factors May Affect Results?***

There are some factors which appear not to have been considered (or fully considered) in these studies.

The first is the process referred to earlier as sanctification. A person who converts to a religion, e.g. Christianity, or a form of religion, e.g. Fundamentalism, does not instantly become fully cognisant of or capable in all the values, beliefs and practices associated with that religion. It takes time for that person to conform to the them. During that time, the person may be divorced, and in such a case, the divorce is unrelated to the religion he nominally adheres to at that time. Therefore, any studies involving religion or change of religion should consider the elapsed time since conversion, and the extent to which the person has adopted the values of that religion. The nearest any of the studies referred to comes to this is Allport's consideration of intrinsic & extrinsic values (1950, cited in Strahan 1996). While some people may never internalise the values of their religion, those that do internalise them would do so gradually.

## **RECOMMENDATION FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

### ***Pre-Marriage Counselling***

As mentioned earlier, divorce cost Australia about \$3 billion in 1998, whereas only \$3.5 million is spent on marriage and relationship education – a ratio of almost 1,000 to 1 (Grace, 1998). There is a need for education of couples getting married and already married in the skills required to negotiate solutions to their differences, especially if those differences include religious heterogamy. In 1999 the Australian Government conducted a trial of vouchers for free pre-marriage counselling for engaged couples (*To Have and to Hold*, 1998), but the trial was not deemed a success, as relatively few couples availed themselves of it. Counselling experience has shown that many couples do not understand the trials of married life and are under-prepared for them, consequently, research is required into ways of encouraging engaged couples to undertake pre-marriage counselling.

### ***Church Attendance After Divorce***

There is a saying that “The church forgives murder but not divorce”, but in theological terms, neither of these is an unpardonable sin. Nevertheless, divorced Christians do cease attending because they feel alienated or uncomfortable in church, due to the Church’s opposition to divorce. Some of them then cease to practise Christianity. It is possible that statistics on divorced Christians are skewed by such people. It would be useful to conduct a study of divorced Christians to ascertain whether their alienation was perceived or real, and to recommend measures to change the attitude of church members and clergy, so that divorcees receive the support and encouragement they need to continue their walk of faith.

### ***Fundamentalism***

It may be that across national, denominational, and cultural borders, there are variations in the definition of Fundamentalism, and also what Fundamentalists believe, compared to what their leaders thought they were teaching them. I would propose a study into Fundamentalist teaching on marriage, how that teaching is received and understood by Fundamentalist church members, and the mechanism of effects on the divorce rate for Fundamentalists. This would provide useful feedback to the clergy in Fundamentalist churches.

### ***Conformists and Converts***

It would be useful to update the work by Allport (1950, cited in Strahan, 1996) on intrinsic and extrinsic values, in conjunction with examination of the process of sanctification and the time required to internalise religious values after conversion. This proposal may intersect with the previous proposal for research into fundamentalist marriage values.

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