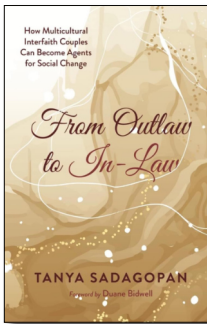


## BOOK REVIEW

***From Outlaw to In-Law: How Multicultural Interfaith Couples Can Become Agents for Social Change.*** By Tanya Sadagopan. Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2024. ix + 174 pp. ISBN: 978-1-6667-7951-6 (hardcover). ISBN: 978-1-6667-7950-9 (paperback). ISBN: 978-1-6667-77952-3 (e-book). \$40.00 (hardcover). \$25.00 (paperback and e-book).



In the introduction to her book, Tanya Sadagopan names the positionality that shapes her research: She and her husband are a multicultural interfaith couple, giving her an insider’s view. She often shares her lived experience through anecdotes throughout the volume. Her goal, however, is not to put forward a memoir, but rather to highlight and investigate couples who are authoring their own theologies of religion from their multicultural interfaith contexts. *From Outlaw to In-Law* is largely based on Sadagopan’s dissertation research, which incorporated both quantitative and qualitative research, with a particular emphasis on interviews with a small but diverse number of interfaith couples.

The book is comprised of twenty relatively short chapters, each centering on a theme, with titles including “Disapproval and Conflict,” “Intersectionality” and “Remaking Rituals.” While each chapter offers salient points regarding the lived experience of interfaith couples, a few are noteworthy in offering fresh insights. In Chapter 8, “Expanding Identities and Double Belonging,” Sadagopan identifies a unique characteristic of some multicultural interfaith couples that is emerging in the wider culture: spiritual fluidity and multireligious belonging. She describes how many of the couples she studied developed “braided identities,” in which they experience a deep connection to their partner’s religious tradition to the point of choosing to celebrate and raise their children in both traditions. This form of “double belonging,” a term she borrows from religious thinker Duane Bidwell, gives these individuals a spiritual fluidity that provides insight into two worlds. The fruits of this dual perspective include “gifted leadership, global perspectives, and insightful analytical abilities” (52).

Two other chapters, both of which refer back to themes in the above section, are of particular note. In Chapter 13, “Seeking Justice for Others,” Sadagopan examines how these couples often develop social change agency, in which they “challenge norms in a way that invites positive social change moving towards inclusion and welcoming of those who were once thought of as strange” (92). Multicultural interfaith couples have had to cross religious, racial, and even national borders to be together, often facing opposition from both their families and their communities. Because of these difficulties, they develop a thirst for justice for others who experience exclusion or prejudice. In Chapter 14, “Reimagining Faith and God,” the author probes how the interfaith dialogue in these relationships changes and expands each partner’s understanding of ultimate questions. Whether or not these couples develop double belonging, Sadagopan shows how each member of the couple expands their understanding of faith and God because of their experience of their partner’s belief system. She applies the theology of Raimundo Panikkar which is premised on the idea that dialogue across traditions is a form of interreligious fertilization that mutually transforms each dialogue partner, leading to a new form of religious consciousness.

Sadagopan’s work is a valuable contribution to understanding the difficulties and gifts of interfaith relationships. The book is strongest when it describes the experiences of particular couples in order to illuminate its themes. The rich diversity of the couples she interviews includes Sikh-Muslim and Hindu-Buddhist couples as well as couples where one partner is Christian and the other is Jewish, Buddhist, or Hindu. She does not center Christianity as the reference point for interfaith relationships, which is too often the paradigm in the Western world. Sadagopan sees her work as having multiple constituencies including interfaith couples themselves, parents and relatives of these couples, academics, and clergy and religious professionals. While there is something here for everyone, I believe that Sadagopan’s identity as both a member of an interfaith couple and a clergy person makes this work especially useful for religious professionals. Sharing the experiences of these couples from her vantage point, can help other faith leaders to see the gifts of interfaith relationships and become advocates for them in their own religious communities.

Sadagopan understands the limitations of her work. While it did incorporate some quantitative research, her sample size is small and the results somewhat inconclusive. She also understands that while she has studied couples with complex intersecting identities, she did not interview any couples from the LGBT community. Given the complexity and divergent views of sexuality in religious communities, research about LGBT interfaith

couples would add a great deal to the conversation. Perhaps this will be her next avenue of research.

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