

DETAILS



Blessed Are the Nones ***Mixed-Faith Marriage and My Search for Spiritual Community***

September 8, 2020 | \$16, 250 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-4827-0

“Stina Kielsmeier-Cook’s memoir, *Blessed Are the Nones*, tells a timely story of learning to grieve and to make our peace with the people and institutions around us as they inevitably change. Her story reminds us that the blessed community that God is crafting on earth is a diverse one, and she paints for us a compelling picture of belonging to one another without uniformity of thought or belief.”

—C. Christopher Smith, founding editor of *The Englewood Review of Books* and author of *How the Body of Christ Talks*

When You Find Yourself Spiritually Single

After her husband became an agnostic, Stina Kielsmeier-Cook was left spiritually single—struggling to live the Christian life on her own, taking her kids to church by herself, and wrestling with her own questions and doubts.

In this memoir, Kielsmeier-Cook tells the story of her mixed-faith marriage and how she found community in an unexpected place: an order of Catholic nuns in her neighborhood. As she spent time with them and learned about female Catholic saints, she began to see that she was not spiritually single after all—and that no one really is.

Blessed Are the Nones:

- Offers an honest depiction of a spouse’s deconversion and the spiritual toll it took on the author
- Presents the author’s choice to remain committed both to her disbelieving husband and her Christian faith
- Describes the hope and healing the author found in a nearby convent, finding spiritual wisdom in the monastic tradition and relating the author’s spiritual singleness to the nuns’ singleness
- Reflects on America’s changing trends in religious belief and interfaith marriage

Dana Trent, professor of religion and author of *Saffron Cross: The Unlikely Story of How a Christian Minister Married a Hindu Monk*, said, “*Blessed Are the Nones* turns ‘unequally yoked’ on its head. There is no sense of winners and losers, lost and found, broken and born-again. Rather, *Blessed* is an invitation: How do we dive deeply when confronted with inevitable changes in relationships and faith? Kielsmeier-Cook is an eager cartographer; she maps the path of two faith-full people facing crises—and how they travel together, not apart. With visceral vulnerability, her powerful narratives stir and inform. She is our steady companion in the uncharted territory of those of us who loved—and lived—the evangelical movement of the late twentieth century. Utilizing nuns and nones, mystics and saints as her fulcrum, Kielsmeier-Cook provides equally eager guides for our own journeys of questions, change, wrestling, and doubt, equipping us with resources for our ultimate calling: love.”

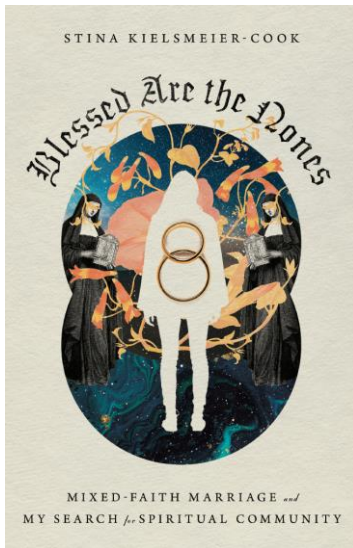


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“For the many who find themselves evolving in their spirituality in a different way than those they love, it can be a scary, disorienting, isolating experience. Stina’s book is a lyrical, honest, moving portrayal of marriage in the time of divergent deconversion and deconstruction. . . . *Blessed Are the Nones* will be a gift to those reorienting their lives and marriages.”

—Sarah Bessey, author of *Miracles and Other Reasonable Things* and *Jesus Feminist*

Mixed-Faith Marriage and “A Bunch of Nuns”

It would be easy to make this story about my husband’s faith crisis, but in fact my spiritual life started changing too, in my midtwenties. I stopped reading my Bible, though I still packed it in my overnight bag whenever I left town. *The Book of Common Prayer* developed a permanent water ring on the front cover, functioning mostly as a coaster on my nightstand. My prayer life, once a raging river, petered into occasional drips. It wasn’t that I stopped believing in God. The scandalous beauty of the incarnation, the upside-down kingdom, these things still captured my imagination. I still loved God, yet my spiritual disciplines fell away.

Was it apathy? Laziness? Cynicism? Probably. But many of my college friends were in similar places. For four years we had been immersed in an evangelical environment where spirituality was spoon-fed (and sometimes force-fed) to us every day. So much importance was placed on our individual piety, on our personal relationship with God, that it seemed inevitable we would experience a spiritual drop-off after graduating, as our small, protected pool was sucked into the big, wide ocean.

As time passed, I grew afraid of examining my own beliefs. I felt like Kathleen Norris in *The Cloister Walk*, where she describes the contemplative life as plowing up the earth within her heart. “As I take my spade in hand,” she writes, “as far as I can see, great clods of earth are waiting, heavy and dark, a hopeless task.”

Even now at age thirty-three, I am standing here, my spade in hand, assessing my own barren fields. I am afraid of digging into my own dark clods. I am worried about what I will find.

If you’re not aligned spiritually, then nothing will match up—or so the Christian marriage messaging goes.

I didn’t know our mixed-faith marriage was hardly an anomaly. Millions of other married people are doing the same hard work of reevaluating their unions after a faith change. A 2015 report from Pew Research showed that more and more marriages are between people of different religious beliefs and that “most generational cohorts actually are becoming less religiously affiliated as they age.” The rise of the religious nones suggests that young adults are experiencing faith changes or even abandoning Christianity more now than ever before—which is often a sucker punch for those left in their wake. New conflicts arise as married couples navigate how to spend Sunday mornings, what to teach their children about religion, and how to spend the holidays.

For Christians like me who are married to nonbelievers, finding new models for living a faithful Christian life is often an exercise in frustration. Most churches have married people attending services, yet those who come as singles are often on the sidelines of the community—an experience that unmarried people in the church

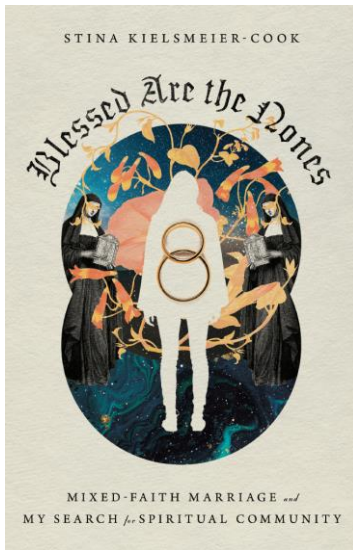


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have long lamented. Add to that the depressing divorce statistics of interfaith marriages (the highest rates being between evangelicals and religious nones), and the future seems bleak, indeed.

What am I supposed to do now? is the question I asked God the night Josh told his father he wasn't a Christian anymore, and it's the question I've been asking every day since. After so much time in Protestant churches that center on the traditional Christian family, I don't need a self-help guide on how to pray my husband back to faith. Instead, I need hope that my interfaith marriage isn't an affliction I need to bear but a vehicle through which God can move.

God did eventually answer my question, though not in the way I expected. It wasn't by bringing Josh back into the fold (though I still believe in the parable of the lost sheep) but by giving me a place where women don't rely on husbands for their spiritual identities.

God answered my question by giving me a bunch of nuns.

—Adapted from chapter one, “The Fall Out”



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Stina Kielsmeier-Cook is a writer from Minneapolis. She is managing editor of *Bearings Online*, a publication of the Collegeville Institute, and her writing has appeared in *Image Journal*, *CT Women*, *Sojourners*, *The Other Journal*, and *The Christian Century*. Visit her website and read her blog at stinakc.com. Follow her on Twitter: @stina_kc.

Faith Isn't Meant to Be Lived Alone

Why did you decide to write this personal memoir?

Stina Kielsmeier-Cook: When my husband, Josh, deconverted from Christianity, I went searching for books about mixed-faith marriage and couldn't find any I connected with. I wrote this spiritual memoir for people who have had a loved one (spouse, family member, friend) walk away from the church. My book doesn't offer platitudes or strategies for converting people, but it does share my story of struggling with faith and spiritual community as the only Christian in my marriage. I think millennial Christians, in particular, who are disillusioned with the evangelical church will connect with my story.

What is the story behind *Blessed Are the Nones*?

Stina: The book begins when the Protestant narrator discovers a community of nuns in her neighborhood and wonders if the monastery is the place she can explore her spiritual singleness now that she is, unexpectedly, in a mixed-faith marriage. After spending a year of spiritual formation with the Catholic Sisters and learning about female saints, she discovers that she is not spiritually single because no one can live the Christian faith alone.

What do you hope readers take from your story?**Stina:**

- Being in a mixed-faith marriage can be just as holy as living in a Christian marriage.
- Faith isn't meant to be lived alone.
- Christians don't need to live in fear because their loved ones don't share their faith; they can trust God with those loved ones.
- Many post-evangelical millennials are spiritual explorers within the Christian tradition and that Catholic spirituality holds a lot of wisdom for Protestants.
- Love and faith are often lived out when our ideals and dreams come crashing down. Christian spirituality is more about loving actual people than doing big things for God.



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