Opinion
Guest Voices



Vice President JD Vance, right, and second lady Usha Vance watch a demonstration by Marines during activities to mark the upcoming Marine Corps' 250th anniversary Saturday, Oct 18, 2025, on Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton in Camp Pendleton, Calif. (AP/Gregory Bull)

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## Join the Conversation

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When Vice President JD Vance told an audience at a Turning Point USA rally Wednesday (Oct. 29) at the University of Mississippi that he hopes his wife, a Hindu, will one day "be moved by the same thing that I was moved by in church," it was more than a peek into their marital relationship. It carried a weight that should give every American — especially those in interfaith families — pause.

Let me begin with empathy. Faith is personal. Every believer wants to share what has transformed his life. Indeed, after his initial statement caused controversy, Vance said on Friday that "beliefs have many consequences, one of which is that we want to share them with other people."

But this wasn't any believer. When a sitting vice president makes this kind of statement at a political rally, that private conviction is amplified through the power of public office. It reverberates through a culture already grappling with whether Christianity alone defines morality, patriotism and family values. It reinforces an old and persistent story about belonging in America: That wholeness, even love itself, ultimately depends on coming to Christ.Americans who are Hindu, Jewish, Sikh, Buddhist and Muslim will hear Vance's hope as a public reminder that only one faith is really American.



Khyati Joshi, left, with three generations of Bartlett men during a Christmas church service in Dec. 2019. (Courtesy of Khyati Joshi)

I write as someone who has lived the life Vance describes, but differently.

For 26 years, I've been married to John Bartlett, an Episcopalian. I am Hindu. Together we have built a life where faith is not a contest, but a collaboration.

That collaboration began at our wedding, where, instead of alternating rituals like a game of ping pong, we blended Hinduism and Christianity in a single, seamless

ceremony, with my Hindu uncle reading a passage from the Bible's Book of Isaiah describing a bridegroom decked in garland. The verse, in that moment, felt both deeply Christian and unmistakably Hindu.

Over the years, we celebrate Christmas and Diwali. We sing carols and chant mantras. In our living room, the cross and a statue of Ganesh sit side by side, not as competing symbols, but as companions in a shared search for meaning. Our coexistence is not confusion; it is clarity born of love. Faith, at its best, expands the human heart.

Vance's words echo a deeper assumption: that Christianity is the norm in America that overshadows other faiths. When he says he "hopes" his Hindu wife becomes Christian, he repeats a cultural script that regards difference as something to be merely tolerated, not embraced. Pluralism, the foundation of both democracy and interfaith marriage, requires something more radical: the belief that multiple truths can coexist without needing to collapse into one.

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John and I have never felt compelled to resolve our religious differences. Instead, we dwell within them. My husband's faith has deepened my own. The Hindu prayer we say before meals does not threaten the Christian "grace" we recite next. His church has not diminished my temple. When I attend services at St. John's, I see the gospel through the lens of dharma; when he participates in puja and arati with me, he recognizes the divine.We are both moved by the sacred, even if it speaks to us in different languages and images.

Our son, meanwhile, is a baptized and confirmed Episcopalian who recites the Gayatri Mantra. He walks among both our traditions with gratitude and pride and knows he can find his own path. This is not moral relativism; it is moral abundance. He has learned what I wish more of our leaders understood: Faith and identity need not be zero-sum. The practice of "both/and" is one of the most profoundly American things there is.

Vance's remarks come as Christian nationalism is reshaping the public square. Across the country, we see efforts to mandate Christian prayer in public schools, to legislate "Biblical values," and to dismantle diversity initiatives that affirm our plural nation. Vance echoes the argument implicit in these efforts to make Christianity America's unspoken benchmark for belonging.

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But that is not, and has never been, the full American story. Immigrants and generations of Jews, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Muslims and humanists make this country great, today as always. Our nation's vitality is fed by people who bring their faiths into the public square without apology. The Constitution guarantees not one religion, but the freedom of all.

Interfaith marriage is, in many ways, a small-scale democracy. It demands humility, deep listening and the conviction that love does not require agreement. Each day, partners navigate difference with respect and curiosity. The skills that sustain such marriages — empathy, compromise, a belief in embracing difference — are the same virtues that sustain a pluralistic society.

Conversion was transformative for Vance. That is his truth. But for millions of interfaith families, transformation looks different. It is the widening of the heart, not the narrowing of belief. It is learning to worship beside someone who prays differently and discovering that grace is big enough for all.

The beauty of America lies in that widening. We see it when a Sikh soldier salutes a Jewish chaplain, when a Muslim student joins a Hindu friend for Diwali, when a Christian pastor defends the rights of atheists.