

PRACTISING THE FAMILY FAITH

Duty or choice?

For many, religion is an obligation rather than a decision. With Ramadan and Easter approaching, Duniā investigates how young people walk a religious path.

by Eleana Ntagia

Having an association with a religion can benefit you as a child and throughout adulthood according to various studies. These may include fewer drug, alcohol, and cigarette usage, as well as decreased suicide rates and a greater life satisfaction, according to researchers at the Mayo Clinic.

Some children, have a diverse perspective of religion, as they are surrounded by people from differing beliefs, cultures, and traditions, from a young age. But where does this leave parents and why do some feel obligated to pass on the faith which they were raised in?

Almost half of the British population, 49%, identify as atheist, according to World Atlas. Statista states that Christianity will remain the largest religion by 2060 with Islam expected to experience the fastest growth over the next four decades. Pew Research Centre believes that the number of Muslims will nearly equal the number of Christians by 2060, highlighting people are more likely to convert to Islam than any other religion.

According to Dunyā's exclusive research, 50% of respondents often find it difficult to maintain their family's traditional religious beliefs in Britain. "I never had any religious, spiritual experiences, or faith. I was forced into religion through an environment that expected and required it, causing me a lot of issues, and a trauma-based avoidance of religion for years," says one respondent. "I then learnt that not all religious people are the same. I was never going to be made into a religious person, the school tried, and it was never going to work."

Pew Research Centre states that when parents attend religious services, they mostly do so with their children, and so religion may be passed down.

Lewis Tivey, 31, grew up in an and atheist household. As a child, he struggled with bullying but was always faithful. He says: "I was quite fluid with religion, but when I was at university I identified as a Buddhist. I was quite spiritual. Since then, it's kind of been on and off."

Tivey joined the army at the age of 27. He says: "On Sundays, me and a group of guys used to go to the camp church because there was nothing to do. Six weeks later, five of us got baptised." Tivey now identifies as a Christian Protestant, making him the only religious member in his family. "My mum always told me to treat everyone how you would like to be treated yourself, so when it comes to me being religious it doesn't really bother my parents."

Although Tivey grew up in a structured religious pathway, he hopes to give his children the opportunity to explore religion, whether that is Christianity or not. "Children should be able to discover religion themselves after they've been taught about all of them equally. If I would have had religion enforced on me, I know I would have rebelled," he says.

According to the BSA the proportion of the British population identifying as Christian has fallen from two thirds (66%) to just over one-third (38%) since 1983.



Getting baptised in camp church.

Photos from: Lewis Tivey

According to British Social Attitudes (BSA), figures from the 2018 survey reveal those describing themselves as "very or extremely non-religious", more than doubled from 14% to 33% during the past two decades at the expense of the intermediate groups.

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Self-assessed religiosity survey 1998-2018 by BSA

	1998	2008	2018
Describing oneself as	%	%	%
Very or extremely religious	6	7	7
Somewhat religious	31	30	24
Neither religious nor non-religious	30	23	19
Somewhat non-religious	13	11	11
Unweighted base	807	1986	1552

According to BSA's 2018 survey, 83% believe religion does not stop you getting along with neighbours who feel differently. Parents assume that raising their children religiously will teach them how to behave ethically. In some religions, being spiritual also aligns with other customs and duties as part of religious culture.

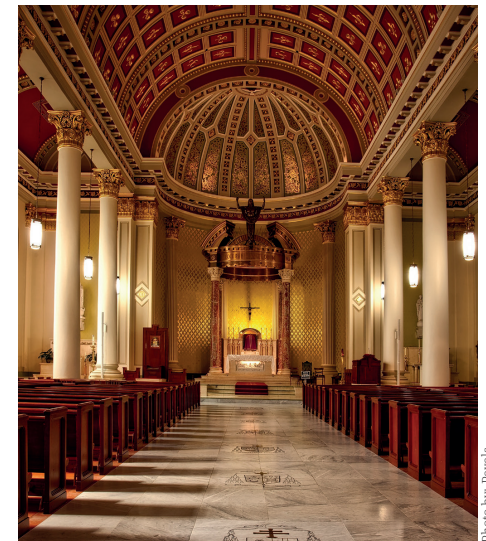
Sam Kirk, 23, is a university student, identifying as a Christian Protestant from a young age. Kirk grew up surrounded by religion, with his reverend father and spending half of his life as a missionary child.

His father, grandfather, and great-grandfather were all vicars, so religion always had a large influence on Kirk's life. He says: "It's a generational thing, which goes back a lot of generations in our family. So it's neither influence nor enforcement, because I most definitely could become an atheist if I chose to. In fact, one of my brothers is very much an atheist."

Kirk explains even though he has studied in different schools such as Catholic and Protestant, the school system is very limited. He says: "I just don't think you can really have a school that teaches every single religion under the sun and do so in a way that is representative of that religion. I did go to a school where they taught us about Hinduism, they taught us about Islam, they taught us about other religions."

He adds: "I don't think they covered [religion] in enough breadth and depth, for me to have a thorough understanding of what I'd be getting myself into if I converted over to another religion. I think that's something to be wary of."

Kirk clarifies that to some extent, children must be influenced as otherwise they may face being ostracised from their family. "There have been moments where I've felt as if to fit in with a crowd, you have to almost pretend you're from that religion in order to get along. If you



Christian church being prepared for service.

Photo by: Petals

enforce a religion on someone, there's always going to be an internal conflict," Kirk notes.

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Dr Sarah Brush, a tutor in pastoral theology works with young children, sharing stories of faith from the Bible and other cultures. Dr Brush is a firm believer that religion should be spoken about, whether you believe in it or not, for people to make an informed decision.

"Children pick up all sorts of things from their parents, so I think whether or not we instil in our children a sense of being religious, it will happen, whether that's somebody who has faith or somebody who doesn't have faith," she explains.

"Nevertheless, that does not mean every parent does it deliberately." Brush believes if people are not brought up religious, it will be harder for them to become faithful later in life.

Dr Brush adds: "I hope parents pass that sense of being connected with God on to their children, and how being connected with God can be a positive thing. But equally, I'd hope that parents would encourage them to explore the possibility of faith, even if they weren't faithful themselves."



Dr. Sarah Brush in Church Service.

Picture from: Dr. Sarah Brush

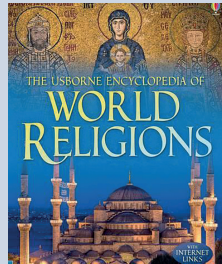


Brown wooden benches inside a cathedral.

Photo by: Antoni Sikraba, Pixels

What to listen to

If you would like to explore an array of religions, listen to BBC Radio 4. Various religious movements are spoken about from the theories behind them to the individuals that follow them.



What to read

Encyclopedia of World Religions £12.99 from Waterstones. A book which offers a balanced exploration of the beliefs, history and customs of the major world religions, as well as many lesser-known faiths.

Photo from: Camva and Waterstones

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