

The Rite of Marriage

One of the first things which any liturgical student learns is the Latin phrase *lex orandi lex credendi*. Thus, for liturgical Christians like Anglicans, the theology of marriage will be expressed in the liturgical rites which celebrate that marriage.

I mention this because there seems to be a mistaken assumption floating about the churches that a marriage rite for blessing same-sex couples will simply involve changing a few nouns and pronouns in the existing marriage rite found in the *Book of Alternative Services*. But is this truly the case? Can the existing rite be merely “tweaked” to accommodate same-sex marriage or will there result an incoherent rite which does not express what is intended?

For example, the preface to the marriage rite contains the phrase “as Christ is united with his Church” (BAS p.528) and the second blessing for the new couple contains the phrase “you have so consecrated the covenant of marriage that in it is represented the spiritual unity between Christ and his Church” (BAS p.534). These phrases bear an allusion to scriptural passages such as Ephesians 5.25-32, Revelation 19.7-8, and Revelation 21.2. In all of these passages the metaphor of marriage between Christ and His Church is clearly and unambiguously based on a heterosexual relationship. Can this metaphor be extended to same-sex couples, or would that distort what is implied in the metaphor?

Likewise, the preface to the marriage rite contains the phrase “become one flesh” (BAS p.528) and the prayers of the people contains the phrase “whom you make to be one flesh in holy marriage” (BAS p.533). The metaphor of “one flesh” has an allusion to several scriptural passages such as Mark 10.6-9 and 1 Corinthians 6.15-17, and these passages again presuppose a heterosexual relationship. Can the metaphor of “one flesh” be extended to same-sex couples or does that violate the intention of the metaphor? At the very least, it would be inconsistent (if not incoherent) to have a marriage rite for same-sex couples in which the scriptural allusions are to heterosexual relationships.

My point in all of this is that a rite for same-sex marriage cannot be assumed to be a slightly revised version of the existing marriage rite. Furthermore, if a generic rite for blessing two people of any gender is developed, what becomes of the existing marriage rites in the BCP and the BAS? Do they continue to be used alongside of one another, which would result in multiple rites expressing potentially contradictory theologies of marriage, or does the Anglican Church of Canada suspend permission to use the old marriage rites so as to have only the generic marriage rite? It would seem to me that the commission has to address these issues, in addition to the canonical ones, if there is to be a clearly presented motion at General Synod 2016.

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