

I do not wish to retread the reams of theology produced over the past half-century or so on marriage in general or same-gender marriage in particular. The American priest and Gregorian friar Br [Tobias Haller](#) has expounded the heretical implications of reading the Creation narrative in a way that treats male and female as binary, static, complementary categories in the sacramental economy. Indeed, the Anglican Church of Canada departed from that position when it ordained the first women to the diaconate and priesthood.

What I do want to underline is the indefensible irregularity of the status quo. Virtually every objection I have heard to an equitable marriage canon has begun with the premise that all same-gender families are morally reprobate and live in sin. While this calumny is one in which the Church has long colluded, again the Anglican Church of Canada has begun to repudiate it, recognizing that many gay, lesbian, and bisexual Christians live lives of faithful service, ordained and lay, in our communities. Thus in 2007 did General Synod “affirm the integrity and sanctity of committed adult same-sex relationships.”

Thus, the question of what to do about the marriage canon must be considered *given* this acknowledged integrity and sanctity. While the Anglican Church welcomes considerable diversity of opinion on a number of theological and ethical questions, decisions about the church’s official statements ultimately have to be made in light of our existing official statements. Anglicans do not have a Confession or subordinate standard, unlike our Lutheran brethren. (I note that the author of one recent attempt to codify an Anglican Catechism, which was assigned to me as reading for my own reception into the Anglican Communion, has now himself been received into the Personal Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham for ex-Anglican Roman Catholics in Britain). Instead, our theology flows from our worship. In the Book of Alternative Services rite (which our American brothers and sisters simply call their Book of Common Prayer), we affirm that the purpose of marriage is “intended for their mutual comfort and help, that they may know each other with delight and tenderness in acts of love [and that they may be blessed in the procreation, care, and upbringing of children].” None of these purposes is one which same-sex couples cannot or do not undertake, and the parentheses around the last passage are not accidental.

At the moment, the position of gays and lesbians in the Anglican Church of Canada varies dramatically by diocese. The latest House of Bishops [guidance](#) at least attempts to ensure that they and their children will not be excommunicated on the basis of their sexual orientation. Moreover, provision is made, with the permission of the diocesan bishop, for the celebration of a nuptial mass for civilly-married couples, minus the nuptial blessing itself. Nevertheless, some dioceses, including most of the large urban ones where most Canadians Anglicans live, have gone beyond this. This has led to a chaotic patchwork of pastoral solutions. On one end of the spectrum, some dioceses like the [Diocese of Montréal](#) treat all civilly married couples alike, and the form for the blessing of civil marriages in the *Book of Occasional Celebrations* is authorized, with minimal editing, for use with same-sex and sex-discordant couples alike.

Other dioceses have crafted their own local liturgies for blessings of either marriages or unions. In some cases, these are specifically for same-sex couples, such as in the [Diocese of New Westminster](#), and the [Diocese of Toronto](#). In Niagara, by contrast, a [common alternative](#) (to the alternative!) rite is authorized for use on a gender-neutral basis, but it is a striking departure from either the prayer book or BAS rites. In contrast to the Montréal schema, such radical unilateral alterations lend credence to those who fear that reforming the marriage canon will necessarily entail a fundamental alteration to the institution itself.

Is it possible to envision an alternative to amending the canon outright? As we have seen, local options have been applied which provide for public liturgical recognition of same-sex relationships, while retaining marriage itself as a heterosexual preserve. And it is encouraging to see that by no means all of the respondents to the committee who have expressed reservations about marriage canon reform wish to exclude

the possibility of some kind of analogous rite. The American church has authorized a provisional office for same-sex unions, putting an end to *ad hoc* local uses without directly affecting the marriage canon.

Moreover since the Western Church recognizes the consent of the parties as effecting marriage, it is conceivable that a same-sex couple could simply exchange vows before witnesses and obtain God's blessing, for example, by kneeling at the altar rail during Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament (AOH #37-38 in the *Book of Common Praise*) without requiring any legislative change. I do not believe any of the foregoing alternatives would be a viable long-term solution, however, for three reasons: they are both inadequate, and yet also too radical; and they are œcumenically unsustainable

First, gay and lesbian Christians are generally uninterested in "half a loaf." While not all gays and lesbians consider their relationships to be marital, those who are minded to approach the church for its blessing do so because they take seriously the ideal held up in Christian marriage. "Services of blessing" are doomed to appeal to a niche market of gays and lesbians who are already committed Anglicans and prepared to make compromises with the institutional Church's scruples. Even the rite authorized in the United States is beginning to be used for the contracting of marriages *per se* in states where the civil authority (which the Episcopal Church's canons constrain it to defer to in solemnizing marriages) permits, and the Church has [signalled its intention](#) to consider standardizing its response.

And yet simultaneously, the creation of parallel rites has been criticized on fundamentally conservative grounds: the Bishop of Milwaukee, in voting not to adopt the American provisional rite, [explained his concern](#) that doing so would constitute a departure from the Church's message that the marriage vows best express the vocation of Christians spouses, and that the nuptial blessing is the appropriate means of hallowing a conjugal relationship.

Finally, declining to amend the marriage canon would be a hollow and futile gesture of spite. Thanks to the Waterloo Declaration, it would not prevent two Anglicans of the same sex from marrying according to Anglican rites before a priest recognized by the Anglican Church of Canada. Rostered pastors of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada are "priests in the Church of God" and the sacraments they celebrate are recognized in the Anglican Church of Canada. They are permitted both to solemnize same-gender marriages and to make use of the BCP and BAS in their ministrations. I was surprised, during the proceedings of Joint Assembly, that nobody seemed to raise the elephant in the room: amid all the reports on the work on the marriage canon, I did not hear any mention of the fact that this decision has in effect already been made for us.

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