



## **Rites Relating to Marriage**

### **A Statement and Resources from**

### ***The International Anglican Liturgical Consultation***

Auckland 2009 - Canterbury 2011

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## **Preface**

### ***From Auckland to Canterbury***

Statements of the International Anglican Liturgical Consultation are always several years in the making. They grow from a period of consultation and conference discussions and the sharing of scholarly papers and discussion. Ideas ferment over time, and lead into a full Consultation, during which time a statement is finalized.

The IALC meeting at Auckland in August 2009 introduced the topic of "rites relating to marriage," and welcomed presentations by Charles Sherlock (Australia), Richard Leggett (Canada) and Winston Halapua (Aotearoa-New Zealand-Polynesia). Over five days, members reflected together on critical issues ranging in general topic area from sacramentality to cultural context, theological anthropology to ritual movements.

It was clear by the end of the Auckland meeting that, though the Consultation had been able to work up some beginnings of a Statement by consensus, even more time was going to be needed for continued discussion and fermentation. Those gathered at Auckland decided to try something new, and this was to engage outside of our membership in a process of interim consultation. The very-much-draft Auckland document was therefore circulated, as an "interim, exploratory" white paper, to Provinces around the Communion, with the intention of gathering back comments and materials that would be of assistance to the 2011 gathering.

When the IALC met at Canterbury, participants had had much time to reflect on the Auckland initial draft. They had also received a good number of feedback documents from individuals from around the Communion whose contributions reflected a variety of perspectives. Scholarly articles - most notably the Grove book (2011) edited by the late Kenneth Stevenson - had also been circulated for advance study.

At Canterbury, further papers were presented by Simon Jones, of Oxford, and Mdimi Mhogolo of Tanzania, as a way of introducing some of the challenges put forward to the gathering. The rest of the week was spent in working groups, in discussion and drafting sessions.

The presentation of this Statement is an invitation for both study and further reflection.

The principal aim of *Rites Relating to Marriage* is to provide a resource for theological reflection and further inquiry, and to be of assistance to those Provinces and Regional Churches in their ongoing work of liturgical work and ritual development. It is at the interface of reasoned reflection on local culture and pastoral practice together with discernment of God's salvific mission revealed in Scripture and Tradition that the particularities of liturgy and theology are developed. This is very much the case with respect to pastoral rites.

*Eileen Scully, IALC Chair*  
*Toronto, Canada, 2012*

## ***Rites Relating to Marriage***

### ***Introduction***

*Rites Relating to Marriage* unfolds in three main sections: Theology of Marriage; Ritual Matters; and Culture and Context. Each of these sections has a slightly different general style to accompany the aim of the topic under consideration.

The theological section sets out some key propositions relating to theological anthropology, ecclesiology, human beings in the life of the Trinity and so forth. These set the foundations for considerations of matters of sacramentality and the gospel life of discipleship.

The section on ritual matters contains principles and questions relating to the rites in a larger 'nuptial continuum' from betrothal to endings. Noting that the development, for example, of milestone rites within marriage is something to be worked out in very particular circumstances of time, place and both relational as well as cultural context, much in the latter part of this section can be considered as 'guides' for such developments in liturgical and pastoral life.

The shortest of the sections is that which deals more with the *breadth* of issues than with the depth of assertion of theological principles -- though some key theological and liturgical principles undergird the work. It also perhaps requires the longest introduction. This last section includes a series of questions intended to stimulate further reflection from within the context of the reader. Wherever Christians marry, around the world, the discernment of married discipleship, and the liturgical celebration of the sacrament, always takes place as one of discerning the 'signs of the times' in present and in inheritance, particularly around cultural symbols and practices. What are the values inherent in these symbols and actions? How do we draw out the Good News of Christ that is being celebrated in the marriage of Christians, from within the complex of these many layers of local context, culture and symbol? What is presented in this section is intended not to stand alone, but, as an addendum to what has been build in the previous sections, to turn the reader toward critical and creative reflection.

The five papers presented -- three at Auckland and two at Canterbury -- are included as an appendix to this Statement. For their own originality and depth of scholarship and theological reflection they stand on their own. They also provide references, in the form of notes attached to the papers, that may be of further assistance to researchers.

***Rites Relating to Marriage***  
***A Statement of the International Anglican Liturgical Consultation***  
***Part One: Theology of Marriage***

**1. Theological Foundations**

1.1. The origins of marriage lie in instinctive patterns of human behaviour. Amongst those patterns is the tendency to partnership and pair bonding of women and men. Such pair bonding appears to be for a variety of reasons, including procreation, mutual support, creation of community, affective love between partners, and the cohesion of society. From this also issues the potential of stable family life supported by the two partners; such functional family life is itself the foundation of a healthy society. And there is reciprocity here: a healthy society will also nurture stable patterns of marriage and family life.

1.2. Such a pattern of human relationship appears to be common throughout most cultures, both contemporary and historical. This is clear within the traditions of Judaism and Christianity, where it is witnessed to by holy Scripture. Within those sources the practices which form the basis of a stable society are interwoven with the divine purposes for humanity. The purity codes and ethical direction of the Hebrew Scriptures point to an evolving ideal of monotheism and monogamy.

1.3. There are numerous examples which illustrate this. There are codes of behaviour, including the ten commandments, statements of law in Leviticus, and Jesus' comments concerning marriage and divorce. In the Hebrew Bible, there are frequent but not always consistent references to the suppression of other cults and the prohibition of intermarriage outside the holy people: this is particularly clear in the writings of the Deuteronomic historian. The prophets also echo this trend toward monotheism and monogamy, and further, the prophetic tradition, for example, Hosea, begins the theologization of marriage as an allegory of divine love. Finally in the wisdom tradition, there are reflections on marriage and family life. In the book of Proverbs, there are references to the virtues of a good wife. Then, and notably, in the Song of Songs, human erotic love is greatly celebrated. In the wisdom and prophetic traditions marriage becomes an allegory of God's love for God's people, and indeed, this final process permeates the New Testament's discussion of marriage.

1.4. Scripture proclaims the primacy of God's action. God acts by creating male and female to be companions (Genesis 2.18-24); creating attraction and desire (Genesis 2.23); giving us grace for intimate, loving and faithful relationships; giving the pattern of divine love; giving boundaries for relationships (Exodus 20); giving the grace to forgive and giving the grace to be faithful to the end. Each of these actions of God's grace implies that marriage is a gift from God.

1.5. Understanding marriage as a gift from God is consonant with the stream of biblical narrative. Such a theology of marriage is informed by the garden narratives in Genesis 1-2 (though it appears elsewhere as well). Because of this, we affirm that this applies to the whole human family, not just to 'Christian' marriage but to any marriage. Thus many Anglican marriage rites declare that "marriage is a gift of God in creation."

1.6 The concept of marriage as gift from God to be received joyfully should be reflected throughout the rite. This should not be overshadowed by legal or other contractual requirements. Some corollaries follow. First is that many of the same basic principles for the rite apply to both 'Christian' and 'non-Christian' marriage. Second, the couple receives God's gift of marriage and in response, give themselves to each other. Third, both man and woman should regard each other as God's unique gift to each other throughout their marriage.

1.7 *Man and woman are created with and for each other.* God created man and woman to be together. We are made with one another (Genesis 1.27) and for one another (Genesis 2.20b-23). We are created for intimacy --- to love one another as Christ loved us (John 13.34). Our being in the image and likeness of God includes this dimension of living in relationships, just as God is trinity, three persons in a community of love.

1.8 *Sexual desire and love are God-given.* The Song of Songs bears witness to the desire of a man for a woman and a woman for a man. Though the Song makes no reference to marriage or to children as the fruit of a couple's love, it speaks eloquently of sexual, emotional and spiritual love and longing, discerned, deferred and fulfilled. The Song of Songs' unabashed celebration of sexual desire enables us to affirm wholeheartedly the goodness of sexual love as part of God's good creation.

1.9 *Marriage is a primary context for intimate human community.* Because women and men are created for intimacy, God gives us the grace to realise that potential for intimacy, for love and faithfulness, for creativity and fruitfulness, in the particular intimate relationships to which we commit ourselves. Most people marry and share a home. In marriage, many have children and care for them together. Some share a rule of life within the home. These are some of the ways in which people may live out the divine gift of intimacy.

1.10 The commitments and joys of marriage are of the order of creation, a gift given by God to all of the human family, regardless of cultures, times and traditions. Married couples are part of wider community networks of relationships and responsibilities. In different cultures and religious traditions, couples and communities construct marriage in different ways.

1.11 *Christians honour married couples.* Married people have a recognised and honoured place in Christian communities. Intentional eucharistic communities of the baptized – parishes, congregations, dioceses – are concrete relational places where our belonging to God and to each other is lived out, and in which married people find a Christian context for their particular vocation. Alongside married couples, other Christians commit themselves to other intentional communities: monastic and covenantal communities, missionary and ministry partnerships. Marriage creates an important form of intentional, ongoing Christian community.

1.12 *Christians honour single people.* For Christians, marriage is not the only recognised and honoured state of life. Singleness is honoured in the New Testament. Jesus affirms those Christians

who forego marriage and children for the sake of the kingdom (Matt 19.12). Paul says that for the unmarried and widows "it is well for them to remain unmarried as I am"(1 Cor. 7.8). He also points out that unmarried men and women do not have their interests divided between the affairs of the world and how to please their wife or husband, but can devote themselves to pleasing the Lord (1 Cor. 7.32-34).

1.13 Some Christians are called to life of dedicated celibacy; others are single, not always by choice. All share in the communion of God's people and in the intimacy and community of the Trinity. All are called to love one another through the communities of faith and worship to which they belong. Likewise, the Christian community is called to welcome and value the contributions of those who are single.

1.14 *The Gospel makes a difference to marriage.* The Gospel message turns the world upside down. This is true when we look at the 'world' of marriage, too. In any society, cultural constructions about gender, power and marriage may permit or encourage sexism, exploitation or abuse. By contrast, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ require and, by the Holy Spirit, make possible a Christian construction of marriage that is genuinely life-giving. The marriage of Christians will be marked by Christ-like sacrificial generosity and forgiveness, by radical hospitality and by love that is faithful to the end. The union of husband and wife is "a mystery" which Ephesians applies to the relationship between Christ and the church (Eph 5.32).

1.15 *Living as a Christian wife or husband.* Among the many relationships which make up the life of a married person, her or his marriage relationship is primary. It is privileged above all other human loyalties. But it is also lived out in the context of the Christian community and the surrounding cultures. Within the dynamism of all relationships of a Christian husband or wife, married life brings with it challenge and change.

1.16 When marriage creates an ongoing, intentional Christian community, the source of its power is the same as that which energises every form of Christian community: the paschal mystery. Partners in marriage are constantly being brought from darkness to light, from death to life (Romans 6.4) Mutual bearing with one another, faithfulness, forgiveness, openness to ongoing conversion, reconciliation and new life are made possible by the grace of Christ crucified and risen. It is as baptized persons, a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5.17), forgiven and reconciled with God, that couples come to marriage, bringing with them the graced possibility of having their marriage reflect the intimate, life-giving love that is the community of the Holy Trinity.

1.17 *Marriage is vulnerable to human frailty and sin.* Human frailty and sin are also very present realities in marriage. There will be dark times and failures in married life. Renewal of life is a divine gift always being offered, but human brokenness may create situations where a marriage itself is in fact altogether broken. Renewal of life may then mean a more radical discontinuity with the former marriage. Discernment of God's will at these points is often a very difficult and painful journey. It is not God's will for anyone to submit to on-going pain, violence, injustice, abuse and estrangement in the name of holding onto something called "Christian marriage." Rather, in seeking wholeness with

openness to God's love, persons whose marriages are broken may be led in different ways into new life.

1.18 From a Christian perspective the longing that a couple experiences for one another is an expression of a deeper longing for union with God in Christ. The fulfillment of that longing in the union of husband and wife thus offers a participation in the promised restoration of creation to the Creator in the marriage supper of the Lamb.

1.19 *Fruitfulness in marriage* For Christians, a fruitful marriage will be one in which the partners share in the loving creativity of God. This may include the gift of children – procreativity (Ps 128.3). A fruitful marriage will also include many forms of generativity: creativity, companionship, hospitality, service, as the grace of God bears fruit as the couple abides in Christ, the true vine (John 15.4). Like the communion of the Trinity itself, the love of Christ in the couple overflows inevitably into the world around them.

## **2. Marriage: Gift, Sacramentality and Blessing**

2.1 Marriage is a gift of God in and for creation and thus belongs to the whole human family. In the Jewish and Christian traditions husband and wife give themselves to each other and become one flesh, united in love.

*Marriage is a gift of God and a sign of God's grace. In the life-long union of marriage, we can know the love of God, who made us in the divine image, man and woman.*

*Marriage finds its origin in God's own being. God is Love, and so wife and husband, giving themselves to one another in love throughout their lives, reflect the very being of God.*

*(Marriage Liturgy, Scotland 2007, 8)*

In the creation narratives of Genesis, especially in Genesis 2.4b-25, we are reminded that God declares that it is not good for the *adam* to be alone (Genesis 2.18a) and decides that the *adam* requires “a helper as his partner” (Genesis 2.18b). This ‘helper’ is not an inferior nor a servant but rather one whom the *adam* can recognize as ‘bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh’ (Genesis 2.23), a true partner to share in caring for the garden (Genesis 2.16b). A Christian perspective on marriage is grounded in the generosity of God's grace which invites a faithful and joyful response to this gift of God.

2.2 We acknowledge that marriage is a human relationship that predates Christian history and worship. At the same time, we affirm that marriage is a privileged opportunity for wife and husband to enjoy that intimacy and creativity that the Christian tradition finds expressed in the life of the Triune God. The Christian faith also acknowledges the reality of sin and how it resists and then distorts this gift. It is as baptized persons, forgiven and reconciled with God through Christ, that Christians come to marriage. The couple bring with them the possibility of having their relationship reflect the intimate, life-giving love that animates and emanates from the community of the Holy Trinity. Marriage also has the potential to embody the self-giving love of Christ for the



Church (Ephesians 5.25). Consequently, Christians who marry do so in the context of Christian discipleship, baptismal call and eucharistic community.

2.3 Although the Anglican tradition does not recognize marriage as a dominical sacrament as baptism and eucharist are, we affirm that the grace of God is present and active in marriage. God is the source of all love and, in marriage, the bride and groom, surrounded and supported by their friends and families, participate in that love as they freely give themselves to each other in life-long fidelity.

2.4 Historical Anglican liturgical practice has tended to ground its understanding of marriage as a ritual expression of Ephesians 5.

*<sup>25</sup> Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. . . . <sup>31</sup> 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' <sup>32</sup> This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church.*

In Cranmer's revision of the nuptial blessing of the Sarum rite we read:

*O God, who hast consecrated the state of Matrimony  
to such an excellent mystery,  
that in it is signified and represented  
the spiritual marriage betwixt Christ and his Church.*

The opening Exhortation of the marriage rite of the 1662 Prayer Book describes marriage as "signifying unto us the mystical union betwixt Christ and his Church." For Cranmer, inspired by the writer to the Ephesians, marriage is undoubtedly a 'mystery', but he stops short of leaping from the Greek *mysterion* to the Latin *sacramentum*. Many Anglicans have been happy to talk of the sacramental nature of marriage, based upon the Ephesians text, without giving it the more specific and more restrictive nomenclature of 'sacrament'. One Anglican perspective grounds the sacramentality of marriage in a doctrine of creation. Another understands marriage as sacramental by virtue of the baptismal status of the couple and their participation in the mystery of love that exists between Christ and the church. The ARCIC report, *Life in Christ*, states that Anglicans "emphasize a sacramentality of marriage that transcends the boundaries of the Church" and then states that Anglicans and Roman Catholics share a common belief that

*(m)arriage, in the order of creation, is both sign and reality of God's faithful love, and thus it has a naturally sacramental dimension. Since it also points to the saving love of God, embodied in Christ's love for the Church (cf. Eph 5.25), it is open to a still deeper sacramentality within the life and communion of Christ's own Body.*

If the Ephesians text is understood as foundational for an Anglican understanding of marriage, then it provides an explicitly christological model which presupposes that the couple cannot experience this deeper sacramental life within the body of Christ unless they are members of it.

2.5 Marriage, as celebrated by the church, is a gift offered by God to a couple who wish to experience its transformative power by entering into a life-long committed relationship with each other. Understood in this way, the liturgical elements such as declarations, vows and exchange of symbols are the couple's thankful response to this gift through the sacrificial giving of themselves, and their solemn commitment to treasure this gift in each other. Likewise, the prayers of thanksgiving and blessing are the church's recognition that the gift has been offered and received, and its sealing of that gift by the invocation of the Spirit and, where appropriate, the celebration of the eucharist.

2.6 If marriage is God's gift, it would be appropriate, towards the end of the rite, for the couple themselves to give thanks for the life-transforming gift which they have received. The Kenyan rite (*Our Modern Services*, 149) includes a prayer of commitment between the marriage and the nuptial blessing. Something similar, with an emphasis on commitment arising out of thanksgiving, may well be appropriate. At a eucharist, it could replace or follow the prayer after communion. In whatever context it is used, the congregation could respond with a prayer of commitment and support for the couple before the presiding celebrant concludes the service with the final blessing.

2.7 The nuptial blessing gives an opportunity for a rich and prayerful expression of our theology of marriage. In the nuptial blessing we address our prayer to the Father, through the Son and in the Holy Spirit, remembering God's creating and saving acts. We offer our petition that God's grace and power might be made manifest in the life and witness of the married couple. Such a prayer would contain elements such as (i) thanksgiving for the creation of the world, the creation of man and woman, the goodness of desire to be together and the gift of marriage; (ii) thanksgiving for the redemption of the world and the mystical relationship between Christ and the church in which the couple participate as they grow in grace; and (iii) thanksgiving for drawing together in love and for faithfulness in their married life. This naturally leads to some form of a trinitarian blessing for the couple in their married life.

2.8 Whether it is thought to convey a specific grace or character to the couple or it is thought to be a recognition of what God has already done or is doing in and for the couple, the nuptial blessing celebrates the role that the couple has been called to play within the reign of God.

### **3. Marriage: Community**

3.1 People approach the church desiring to marry or to have their civil marriage blessed, from a variety of circumstances and for a range of reasons. Some are participants in their local congregation; others may make the approach after a long absence or as their first direct experience with the church. In some cases it is the two individuals approaching the church; in some it is the families which are primary.

3.2 The families often differ from each other, even in their faith commitments or lack of faith. Marriage brings these families together even in more individualistic cultures, and may be a moment of grace experienced as reconciliation between or within families. Different cultural settings, however, order the commitment to one's prior family and to the new household created by marriage, in different ways. The Biblical language about leaving one's family and cleaving to one's spouse points to the potential cost of holding together these commitments, in the life of any particular couple.

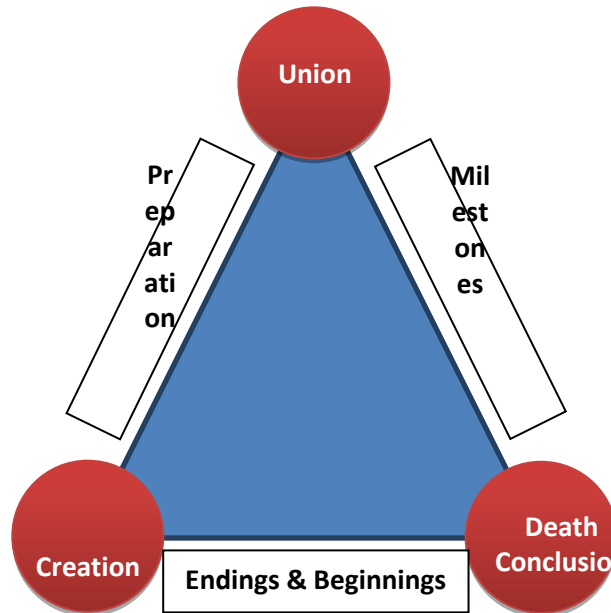
3.3 A couple approaching the church in this way, from their own experiences of the mysteries of their own love, ask for God's blessing for their married life together. They are asking that their marriage be an occasion of divine presence, transcendence, mystery and power. They are opening themselves to God, as well as to each other. Even where the couple has little or no active Christian faith or knowledge, they may still long for the involvement of the divine in their mutual commitment. Couples who participate actively in their local church, may seek to align their commitment to one another with their overall faith commitment, and to celebrate this with their Christian community. Where the union of families is a major feature of the cultural understanding of marriage, all these reasons may still be active in the wider family context.

3.4 Marriage provides an occasion when the couple, their families, and the broader community may engage and be engaged more deeply within the church. Across the Anglican Communion the way the church responds to a couple seeking marriage varies. Some churches require one or both parties to be baptized. Some require the reading of banns. Whatever the local practice, this is a moment when a door opens between the church and the couple, in their family and social context. A congregation has the opportunity to focus its attention (for the first time, or more deeply) on the couple, which may include praying for them during their time of preparation. The couple, along with their families and friends, may also be drawn more deeply into participation in the community of faith and worship. Provinces may wish to consider how to encourage congregations to open these doors as fully as possible.

3.5 The marriage liturgy itself offers a further moment of encounter. The church offers Christ's radical hospitality, in witnessing a profound moment in the life of the couple and in welcoming the participation of their families and community. The liturgy, in word and action, communicates the good news and speaks the truth of the gospel in the midst of that community. Marriage between a couple who are consciously growing in Christian discipleship inaugurates a new, intentional Christian common life in their household which itself witnesses to the power of Christ crucified and risen. Where one or both do not actively profess Christian faith, their marriage in the church witnesses to God's love for all humanity and communicates an assurance of God's blessing on their mutual commitment. Not only the couple, but those who witness their marriage may expect to find their relationships strengthened and their loyalties confirmed by this encounter with divine grace.

## *Rites Related to Marriage*

### *Part Two: Ritual Matters: Elements and Movements in the Nuptial Continuum*



#### **4. Ritual Structure and the Nuptial Continuum**

4.1 Popular perceptions of marriage most often focus upon the celebration of the *wedding*; not only is the service there in the spotlight, but also the reception and all that goes with the celebration. This perception is governed to a degree by a primary focus on the 'happy couple' and little else. This is undoubtedly a modern and north-western view of marriage and even the requirements which precede marriage and follow it suggest a broader perspective. In those places where the calling of banns still survives it reminds us that marriage is rooted in the wider community. Banns were called so that the village, town or local community could respond if a particular marriage was inappropriate or even illegal.

4.2 Marriage within a Christian context remains an institution in which the primary focus is on the gift of God. This gift overlaps at least four separate groupings or communities. These include the couple, the local community, kindred of those who are to be wed, and the Church, the *ecclesia*, within whose embrace the rite will be blessed. The influence of these separate communities and their impact on the structure of the rituals and liturgies will range widely. It could lead to a number of separate and sequential ceremonies involving the couple, their individual families and communities and the legal system under which the marriage is conducted. Such ceremonies may be spread over a number of days, be located in a variety of different places and be led by different people.

4.3 This broader perspective also implies a pattern of unfolding relationships. In earlier times, for example, *betrothal* was a far more defined element within communal life. It remains the case that engagement and the public and private announcement of a marriage are a clear part of this rite of passage.

4.4 This is followed by a period (which may be long or short) of preparation for the marriage. Partly this will be informal and practical and partly more clearly related to the rite of marriage itself and the manner in which it is to be lived out within the community; for some couples preparation for marriage may include baptism and confirmation for either.

4.5 Then follows the marriage rite itself with all that surrounds it in terms of feasting and celebration. The marriage service may be brief and unelaborated or it may be richly embellished with its own ritual. In some cultures the rite may include a sequence of rituals that are followed at different places over a number of days. The reception has its own rituals: speeches, reading messages of support, cutting of a cake, a first dance, and sending off the bride and groom.

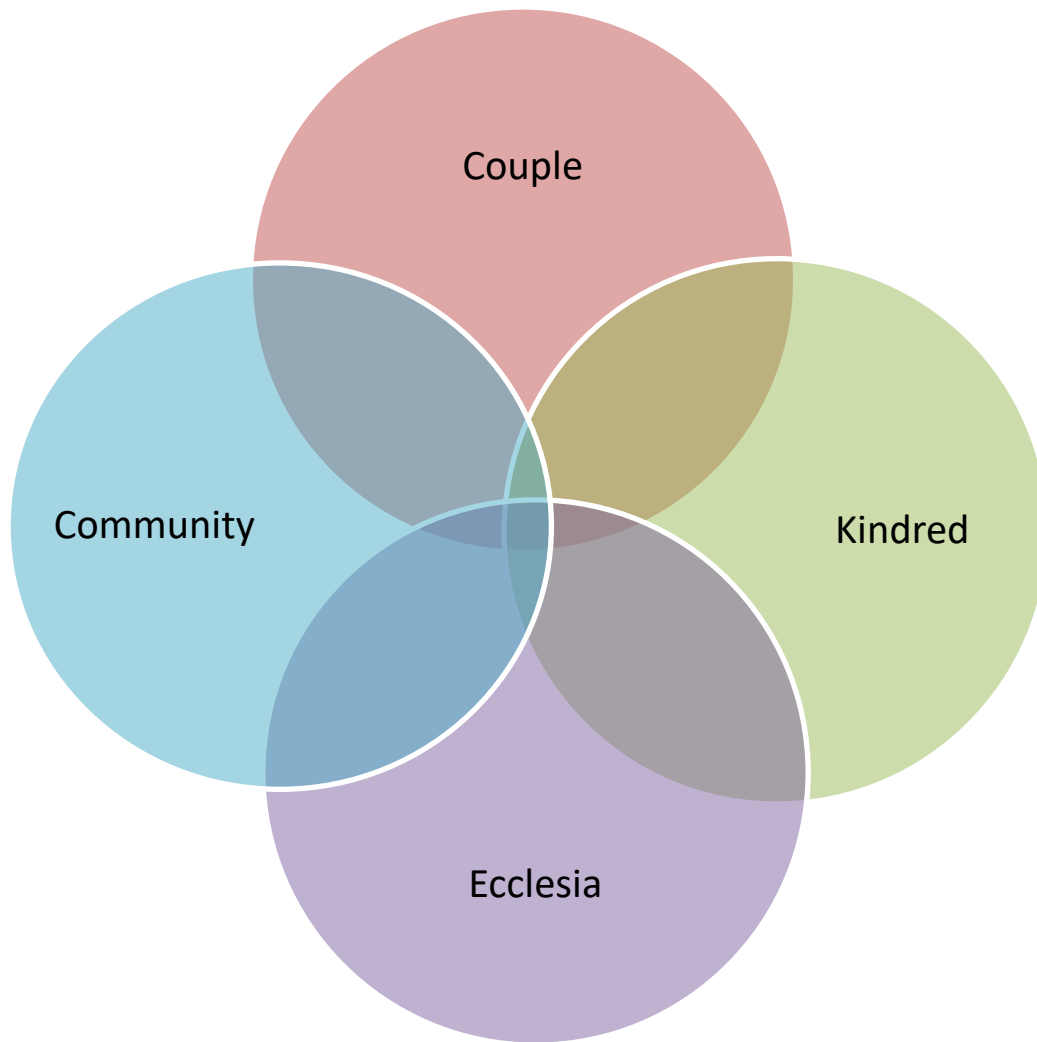
4.6 It is appropriate for the marriage of Christians to be celebrated within the context of the celebration of the Eucharist.

4.7 The marriage (or *wedding*) is but the beginning of a lifetime's journey if it is to prove a fruitful partnership. There will be significant milestones along the journey. These will include the celebration of important anniversaries – whether named as 'silver', 'ruby' or 'golden' as in European tradition, or other symbolic nomenclature. -- These celebrations are often opportunities for thanksgiving and prayers. Alongside these, the reaffirmation of marriage vows both privately or in the context of a community (family and friends, community of faith) have increased in popularity.

4.8 Finally, and rather more solemnly, comes the end of a marriage. This may be through the death of a partner, separation, or divorce. There are ways of marking these events through thanksgiving for a good life together, and could include prayers of lament or penitence.

4.9 The nuptial continuum is thus a very significant aspect in the life experience of many people. Its importance is increased through its part in prospering healthy family life and the nurture of children. At its best marriage is one sacramental dimension of the Christian life connecting the stories of the couple, their kindred, the wider community and the mystery of God's gift of unitive love. For Christians, marriage is a vocation which embodies the mystery of creation and redemption celebrated by the Church in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

4.10 To be consistent within this document, the rituals and elements of liturgies that are developed must begin from the clear perspective that they are developed for the celebration of the marriage of Christians. Where the Church is approached to participate in or officiate at the weddings of persons who are not able or willing to acknowledge that perspective, the services that are developed must be seen as adaptations of these rituals and liturgies



## 5. Betrothal for marriage

5.1 Each couple comes to marriage in a unique way, while following patterns of courtship shaped by particular cultures. Betrothal marks out their public commitment to live together as 'one flesh', in marriage. It marks them out as 'unavailable' to others, and is a significant point in the process of specific preparation for married life. For some, the coming together of a man and woman will have been arranged by their respective families, and announced to the couple. For most today, however, the couple will have made the decision to become engaged, ideally to the delighted approval of friends and family.

5.2 However it takes place, betrothal is a deeply symbolic event, and liturgical resources can assist the couple, kinfolk, church and wider communities as they prepare for the formation of a new household. As in the first place a personal and private matter, prayers for the couple to use themselves may be appropriate. Other resources will have a more public focus, such as the blessing

of the engagement ring, a rite of commitment, or a blessing of the couple at an engagement celebration.

5.3 The private dimension of betrothal is particular to each couple – the acceptance of a proposal of marriage, for example. The informality of such occasions means that Christian couples should be trusted to offer such prayers together as they find helpful to their commitment. The provision of prayers for family use can be helpful, however, especially in situations when the marriage has been arranged by the parents or family, arranged, or when permission needs to be sought from kin or clan. Such prayers can also provide models for intending couples to consider.

5.4 The public announcement of betrothal can also be informal – for example, a notice in the newspaper. A public celebration where friends and family rejoice with the couple and can recognize their new status offers several liturgical possibilities. A short rite of commitment and prayer, whether on its own in church, as part of a regular service in church, or in the context of an engagement party, can both support the couple, and also provide a witness to Christian faith and joy (and reduce the likelihood of boorish behaviour). Where the couple is already sharing home life, such a rite can enable the couple and their communities of kin, faith and friends to acknowledge the new step along their path together in life, and could be the focal point of a blessing of the home.

5.5 Some couples will have a former partner still living, and some may have received God's gift of children. It is essential that marriage preparation take these realities into account: betrothal offers the opportunity for liturgical rites of penitence and forgiveness to be offered. Likewise, opportunity can be taken to offer baptism where the woman, man or children have not taken this step.

5.6 In sum, the following particular liturgical resources are recommended to be made available:

- prayers for use by a couple together;
- prayers for use in the context of the couple's families;
- prayers for the couple for use by their friends, families and the church;
- a form for the blessing of the engagement ring or equivalent symbol;  
a brief rite of commitment, able to be used on its own or as part of a service, for example:
  - welcome / greeting, and declaration of the couple's intention to marry
  - [recognition of the past, possible act of penitence]
  - scripture and homily, with the possibility of testimony by the couple
  - blessing of the engagement ring or equivalent symbol
  - joint prayer by the couple
  - prayers for the couple, and for others knowing joy, stressed or hurt in engagement
  - blessing of the couple for their journey towards marriage

NB: promises and vows should be avoided, as these confuse the rite with the marriage service

## **6. Preparation for marriage**

6.1 The time of preparation for marriage provides opportunities for premarital counselling and exploration of the understanding of marriage itself. While use could be made of secular organisations, ecumenical partnerships and of specialists for particular aspects of the counselling, it is important to put the whole course in the context of marriage as a gift of God for which we give thanks, the Christian approach to relationships and within the church.

6.2 A key element in all preparation is to encourage the couple to reflect on the individual journeys that have brought them to this point in their lives, and provide the means that will help them to deal with any unresolved issues. It is also important to help them to recognise their role in their respective families and to explore the family and community ties that have impacted on their own and their partner's lives.

6.3 As they reflect on these issues within the context of the church and the Christian faith, this might lead to discussions regarding the appropriateness of baptism and confirmation for one or both partners to be married, as well as baptism for any children already born of the relationship.

6.4 The liturgical elements that would need to be developed for this phase would include some that might be appropriate for private use with the couple and others that would be better used in the public services in the church. For newcomers, there might be an element of introduction and welcome to the local congregation. In some situations this phase would include the calling of Banns. Where this is not a legal requirement, it might still be appropriate for some formal announcement in the services of the church that a particular couple are to be married and calling for prayer and support for them.

## **7. Marriage after Divorce**

7.1 Where the Church is prepared to celebrate the marriage of couples where one or both partners have been married previously, and the spouse of the former marriage is still alive, any process that is developed for the sanctioning of such marriages should be focussed on the particular pastoral implications of such a situation, and especially the obligations towards the former spouse and any children born of that marriage.

## **8. The Marriage Service**

8.1 In common with other rites, it is appropriate for the Marriage Service to follow the basic structure of the Eucharist, which is the primary pattern of Anglican public worship, involving Gathering, the Proclamation of the Word, Prayers, Meal and Sending. Within this basic framework, some elements may, for legal reasons, be mandatory, while others will remain optional, with a



variety of texts provided which are appropriate for particular contexts and situations. (cf *Anglican Liturgical Identity*, IALC/JLS 65, especially p. 8)

8.2 This rite is for the solemnisation of matrimony. It is not intended for use following a religious or civil marriage ceremony which has previously taken place elsewhere. It would be appropriate to develop additional services to cover the pastoral situations that do arise such that the Church can provide services for:

- The Blessing of a Civil Marriage;
- Thanksgiving for Marriage;
- Reaffirmation of Marriage Vows

8.3 The following is a basic structure for the service:

#### Gathering

Entrance  
Greeting  
Preface (Exhortation)  
The Presentation of the Couple  
Declarations  
Collect  
Legal Impediment  
Prayers of Penitence

#### Proclamation of the Word

Readings from Scripture  
Homily  
Presentation of a Bible to the couple  
Presentation of other symbols to the couple

#### The Joining

Vows  
Giving of ring(s)  
Proclamation of the Marriage  
Nuptial Blessing  
The Registration  
The Prayers

#### Meal

The Celebration of the Eucharist

#### The Sending

Prayers  
Blessing, Commissioning  
Dismissal

8.4 *The Gathering Rite.* The rite begins with the gathering of the community.

*The Entrance:* The bride may enter the church accompanied by her father, another family member or a friend, or the bride and groom may enter the church together. A rite of welcome may be used at the door before the procession into the church.

*Welcome:* The Officiating minister welcomes the congregation and locates the ceremony within an explicitly Christian setting.

*Preface (Exhortation):* Summarises the Church's understanding of marriage and sets out the elements of the rite.

*The Presentation of the Couple:* Both the groom and the bride may be presented to the officiating minister as an indication of the support of both families for the union. This should happen before the declarations or before the vows. The families of the bride and groom may express their support of the marriage after the declarations.

*Declarations:* The bride and groom give their consent to be married and, in response, the congregation declares their support of that decision.

*Collect:* Gathers together the prayers of the community for the couple.

*Legal Impediment:* Where it is necessary for the minister to ascertain whether there is any legal impediment to the marriage, this should take place before the declaration of consent.

*Prayers of Penitence:* When prayers of penitence are appropriate, these may be included within the Gathering Rite.

8.5 *The Proclamation of the Word:* The Liturgy of the Word consists of appropriate biblical readings and a homily. If marriage is celebrated within the context of the Eucharist, a gospel reading must be included. If non-biblical readings are used, these must not detract from the proclamation of the Word. To symbolise the marriage of Christians as a response to the call of God in Christ Jesus, a Bible may be given to the couple.

8.6 *The Joining:*

- Vows
- Giving of ring(s)
- Proclamation of the Marriage
- Nuptial Blessing

At the heart of the marriage service is the joining of the couple in the presence of God, their kindred, the community and the Church. In love they make the most solemn promises to each other: mutual support, life-long fidelity and exclusivity.

The couple seal their vows with the joining of hands and, in some contexts, with the giving and receiving of rings or other symbolic gifts or tokens. The presiding minister may bind the hands of the couple with a stole, and say "those whom God has joined together, let no one put asunder." They are declared to be husband and wife and are then blessed.

It may be appropriate for the couple, kindred, community or church to offer other symbols or tokens which celebrate their joining in marriage at this time.

8.7 *The Registration:* Where the officiating minister is also the Registrar of the Marriage for the State, it would be appropriate for this to be done in the presence of the gathered congregation. This might follow immediately after the blessing of the couple. Alternatively, it could be done at the end of the service.

8.8 *The Prayers:* Prayers are offered for the couple, their families and friends and the local community. Specific Prayers for the gift of children and for their home can be added. The remembrance of departed family and friends may be also appropriate. If the Eucharist is not celebrated, the Prayers include the Lord's Prayer.

8.9.1 *The Meal:* It is appropriate for the marriage of Christians to be celebrated within the context of the Eucharist. Having shared the Peace with the congregation, the couple may present the gifts of bread and wine. Some prayer books provide proper prayers (collect, prayer over the gifts, after communion) for the liturgy. Where appropriate, members of the wedding party, family of the couple, or the couple themselves, may take part in the distribution of the elements. The Nuptial Blessing may be given after the Lord's Prayer instead of immediately following the Proclamation of the Marriage.

8.9.2 *Inter-Faith/Inter-Church:* In the case of a marriage between a Christian and a person of another faith tradition, or in some inter-Church marriages, local pastoral and canonical guidelines set particular parameters for the appropriate celebration of the eucharist.

8.9.3 Where it is not possible for both bride and groom to receive communion together, it would seem inappropriate for this to be part of the ceremony. The celebration of the eucharist should follow the normal practice of the community within which it is celebrated, and include an invitation to the whole congregation to share in the sacrament.

8.10 *The Sending Out:* The service concludes with the blessing, the presentation of the couple to the community as husband and wife, and the dismissal of the congregation after which the bride and groom leave the church together, followed by their family and friends.

## **9. Milestones within Marriage**

9.1 When a couple marries they agree to engage the future together, with hope. Marriage is above all things a commitment to a shared future which is graced by God with the possibility and potential and which will know pain and trial. Traditionally the Church has marked these courageous beginnings with liturgical rites for the marriage service without providing an additional liturgical voice for the delights and demands that characterize this 'honourable estate.'

9.2 As a 'natural sacrament' the estate of marriage is subject to the passage of time and as a result the nature of the marriage relationship will inevitably change. This change and development may be marked by rites offered by the Church at significant milestones. Some of these rites might be structured to be used by the couple or the immediate family, or in such a way that they can form part of the regular worship of the Christian community to which the couple belong. They will reflect the joy and sorrows common to married life and may sometimes include aspects that enable couples to express conciliation or reconciliation.

9.3 Identifying the Common Milestones: Common milestones can be distinguished as those pertaining to the core relationship between husband and wife, those that pertain to the development of the immediate family, as well as those that will mark the end of the marriage.

9.4 Some milestones will be celebrated within the context of other liturgical moments, such as the baptism of children, and the funeral services of a spouse. While the focus will be on that other service, the impact on the relationship should not be missed.

9.5 Liturgical Principles for celebrating milestones: We recognize that because marriage mirrors both God's own creativity and God's own self offering, there is a need to provide liturgical resources which recognize and address the joys and labours of marriage. To put it another way, when a couple vow before God and this company that they will have and hold one another from this day forward, the Church's response to and encouragement of that future ought to lie in prayers for what lies ahead.

9.6 Liturgical elements for marking the milestones in a marriage would be divided into two groups. There will be those that provide appropriate material, prayers, readings, material for private celebrations for those immediately involved. Then there will be material that could be incorporated into regular services to mark the more public celebrations of the whole community. If the couple have [grand] children, provision could be made for their involvement by inviting them to offer prayers of thanksgiving and strengthening for their parents.

9.7 Milestones pertaining to the core relationship: A marriage will be marked by its own special anniversaries, milestones where personal and public celebration is appropriate. Common milestones include the annual celebration of wedding anniversaries, and especially those recording silver, gold, ruby and diamond anniversaries. While the annual celebrations could be marked by suitable prayers provided for the couple to use privately at home, the more significant may be

marked by a suitably worded rite in the presence of the worshipping community. This latter could include prayers for the couple, prayers for married life in general and an opportunity for the reaffirmation of marriage vows by the couple.

9.7.1 The retirement of one or both of the partners would also be an important milestone for the relationship.

9.7.2 Occasionally either the husband or wife will not be baptized but either may seek this sacrament at the time of the milestone rite. In that case it is appropriate for the baptism to take place at the same time. Similarly if one of the couple's children seeks baptism at this time it may be included in the service.

9.7.3 It is important to note however that this rite should not resemble the marriage service itself or seek to re-enact the marriage service in any way.

9.7.4 Living sacrificially places great demands upon a married couple. For that reason we believe that prayers might be helpfully provided for use when within a marriage a process of counselling or conciliation is being embarked upon. Such a process might well result in an act of reconciliation between an estranged couple. This would be particularly helpful in the case of an infidelity or some other regret within the marriage.

9.8 Milestones pertaining to children of the relationship: Marriage and parenthood are, in the experience of many, inseparable, and that the various demands of parenthood speak of the sacrificial love which is central to the distinctiveness of marriage between Christians, and that there are times of considerable need and distress for which prayers ought to be provided by the Provinces.

9.8.1 Marriage by God's grace bears God's image, the image of a God who delights to create and recreate. Therefore prayers might be provided for those occasions when married couples first seek to:

- begin a family;
- journey through pregnancy together (possibly addressing the pastoral issues surrounding fertility);
- as well as prayers for when a pregnancy does not result in the birth of a child.

All of these experiences can impact significantly upon a marriage.

9.8.2 Where a couple are blessed with a child a rite of thanksgiving for the birth of a child should be provided where provinces do not already have one.

9.8.3 The first pregnancy is an important milestone for every family, and the birth of subsequent children will need to be celebrated in a way that will mark the value of each child to the family and the community. Where the celebrations of the birth of children is celebrated in a public way within

the faith community, care should be taken with the pastoral support of couples unable to have children and who feel the pain of such situations. For example, in the case of the leaving home of a child or more painfully still the considerable impact upon a marriage that the death of a child can have. Prayers are of course provided for the death of a child but not prayers for the specific impact upon the marriage of the parents.

9.8.4 Other milestones could include the final child leaving home as well as the marriages of children and the arrival of grandchildren.

## **10. The End of Marriage**

10.1 At the end of the Nuptial Continuum we come to the end of marriage. We approach this aspect of our task well aware that differences in opinion, practice and cultural expectations in parts of the Communion. Nevertheless, our goal is not to provoke but to inspire further thought and work in ways appropriate to particular situations.

10.2 *Separation and Divorce:* Whilst acknowledging that all marriages in Christian contexts are ideally “til death”, it is an inescapable fact that some marriages do reach an end point other than the death of one or both parties.

10.3 There are cultures within our Communion within which separation and divorce are deemed unacceptable. In those places the challenge for the local Church is to find constructive ways to offer help to those in unhappy and / or abusive relationships as well as situations where one partner has been deserted. Such assistance will almost inevitably have to be offered in the private rather than public sphere, and may include prayers and opportunities for confession and forgiveness.

10.4 In those places where separation and divorce are an option, care will still need to be taken to avoid any appearance of the Church encouraging the ignoring of marriage vows. A marriage should only reach its conclusion when the relationship upon which it is founded has truly ended. An important role for the Church is assisting couples to avoid this point being reached.

10.5 When it is however, and where this results in divorce the Church may offer a liturgical opportunity to mark the end of the marriage. This may include elements of:

- Penitence and forgiveness;
- Prayers acknowledging the end of the relationship;
- ‘release from marriage vows’;
- prayers for the partners now moving into separate directions;
- prayers for the children, particularly those who remain in parental care.

10.6 *Annulment:* In those places where annulment is offered through the Church, prayers and liturgical actions similar to those surrounding divorce may be appropriate. Attention needs to be paid here to the questions raised by annulment as a concept – when is a marriage invalid and what makes it so? And what implications does such a judgement have for the rite involved? It is

incumbent on those responsible, in consultation with the bishop, to work within the legal system of the state in which they operate to ensure that the legal as well as the canonical requirements are met.

10.7 *The Long Goodbye:* The loss of a partner to dementia or other serious debilitating cognitive or physical illness can represent a slow and painful end to a marriage. Far from being a quick finish, this is most often a 'long goodbye' comprising a series of continual farewells. Prayers and symbols acknowledging what is happening are a helpful and appropriate offering from the Church. It is important that these are seen to be part of a wider pastoral concern for both partners and the wider family.

10.8 *Death:* Marriage is not 'forever'. When one or both of the parties to the marriage die so does the marriage. In such circumstances the Church's ministry and liturgies surrounding death are important, and included within those (and possibly separate to them also) should be particular prayers acknowledging the death of the partner and the impact on those who survive.

## *Rites Relating to Marriage*

### *Part Three: Culture, Context and Symbols*

#### **11. Introduction**

11.1 The following pages are intended to guide further theological discussion on the complex of relationships between culture, context, symbol and Christian theological understanding of marriage. They also include some questions for further reflection, and a few contextual vignettes, the reading of which might prompt one to reflect more deeply on one's own context. The 1989 IALC document *Liturgical Inculturation in the Anglican Communion* may be a helpful tool to read alongside this Part of the present document.

11.2 In the name of Christian practice, some local symbols and cultural understandings relating to marriage have either been expelled from the liturgy (under a judgment that they are 'non-Christian'). Other symbols and practices have been included in the marriage liturgy, as though they were Christian symbols as a matter of course, sometimes with more, sometimes with less, critical thought. This is the case in situations of colonialism from which many dynamics still linger, and in situations of cultural domination and subjugation. Further, so-called 'globalization' in recent years has the complicating effect of promoting a dominant 'global' culture, which is in many respects simply a hegemony of a narrow set of values, and is a new form of cultural colonialism.

11.3 There ought to be no assumption that one cultural context 'contains' the gospel inherently within its own symbols and practices, whilst another cultural context, not sharing the same cultural values, is inherently defective. In all times and places discernment begins by listening carefully to seek understanding of the dynamics within a culture and context and to bring insights from this discernment into conscious dialogue with received tradition and revelation.

11.4 Within the history of European Christendom, sets of values around marriage were brought into theology and liturgy over time. Matters from property rights, the legal status of women, understandings of sexuality and reproduction, and the relationship between church and state, have all shaped Anglican rites historically. The indigenization of liturgy and theology around the world has meant that in all contexts such assumptions are challenged.

11.5 Questions:

- What symbols do you expect to see in a marriage liturgy in your context? Of what cultural values do these speak? Of what theological messages do these speak?
- Have you had an experience of a marriage liturgy in a culture foreign to you? What did you learn from the use of symbols in that context?
- Think of a context where several cultures are present in the families and communities of the couple. What principles might help to guide the integration of multiple cultures within the liturgy?



## **12. Culture of the Gospel challenging the culture of the world**

12.1 Marriage as an institution exists across the world and does not 'belong' to the Christian faith. When Christians participate in marriage, they do so sharing in some common understandings about marriage - the assumption of its lifelong commitment, for example, or its nature as an exclusive partnership - with the culture and context around them.

12.2 The wedding is the public sign of the couple's commitment to one another and the community's commitment to the couple. It is a public event which has significance across the whole community. Its celebration takes place within the locale and historical narrative of the community. It is contained within the traditions of honouring, feasting and celebration that are recognized within the community.

12.3 There is an unresolved tension between the culture of 'the world', the community and the church. In some places the social institution of marriage is understood to be in crisis; in other places this is not the case. For Christians entering into marriage, there needs to be a self consciousness about the discipleship commitments that the persons as well as the couple together take on in their life together.

12.4 Questions:

- In your own context, where does Christian theology challenge dominant cultural norms and values relating to marriage?
- How are these challenges expressed liturgically?

## **13. Evangelism**

13.1 Each occasion of the celebration and blessing of a marriage is an opportunity for the proclamation of the gospel. The wedding celebration is as much about the celebration of the love that each member of the couple has toward each other as it is about their commitment to partnership discipleship and to the work and joy of supporting each other in their Christian discipleship.

13.2 In some parts of the Anglican Communion, there may be a difference between a wedding service using a Christian rite and the marriage of Christians, either of which may happen in a church building or within a Christian ceremony. In our different cultural contexts, the rite may be offered only to Christian couples; however, in some places the rite may be offered to those seeking after something that they understand in real but unspecific ways to be holy, or to those whose Christian faith is nominal or even non-existent. In some of our cultures, some or many of those who marry in church are not participants in the Christian community that gathers in that place.

13.3 It is to be hoped that the Christian marriage rite may bring blessing and redemption to the couple, the community and the church. The liturgy needs to be flexible enough to accommodate

celebration, consolation, transformation, and to express the hope of new creation. This can be done through the use of a variety of symbols. For example:

- the lighting from two candles of one nuptial candle, symbolizing the transformation of new creation as the two become one flesh;
- the presentation of a Bible to the couple providing an evangelical witness.
- the enclosure of the church sanctuary itself, speaking of many important Christian symbols.

13.5 If the couple marry in a setting outside the church building, where such is permitted by canons of the Church, there may be an additional freedom to explore cultural symbols and even to recreate a set of meaningful signs and symbolic actions evocative of the evangelical meaning of the liturgy. The pastoral challenges involved for the presiding clergy involve discernment of how the context of the liturgy will speak of the sacred, and how, for example, to imbue the context with a profound sense of the holy. It might be useful for clergy and others to make intentional use of natural and other items present (flowers, natural landscape, decorations) to be an evangelical expression of presence and love of God. It may also be beneficial, without being didactic, to make accessible theological comment on the movements of the service and the ritual actions involved.

13.6 Questions:

- What does evangelism look like in the context of a marriage liturgy?
- How does the marriage liturgy in your context proclaim the good news in ways that can be heard by those immersed in wider cultural values?
- How can 'set' symbols found inside a church be drawn out in meaningful and intentional ways to augment the evangelical nature of the wedding?

## 14. Symbols

14.1 Symbols shape and evoke meaning, speaking of the culture of the community, which includes the secular and sacred in a vast range of forms. This meaning may be unreflected upon, or highly valued in the symbol.

14.2 Some equate Christianity and ancient church liturgies with the *right* way to celebrate a sacramental rite, and do so from the lens of how they have received these liturgical, cultural and legal traditions from a past of Christendom or colonialism. For example, some -- whether in the Arctic or in the South Atlantic may not feel properly married if the service was not done in a church.

14.3 In other more secular contexts of the north Atlantic, for example, many couples still approach a church for a wedding. It is clear that, underneath various pastoral concerns (my mother wanted me to be married here) are at times a deep and at times difficult to express desire on the part of the couple to recognize and to celebrate the holiness of that in which they are about to engage. They may have little connection to the body of Christ in the Church, but there is something within what they experience in the solemnity and grace of their relationship that leads them to connect in some way with the church.

14.4 How is the pastor to work with couples who present themselves in this way? With the healthy balance of attentive listening and faithful discernment that can help to move things on, step by step. From these pastoral conversations can emerge conversations about the cultural contexts, and use of symbolic items and actions that may or may not have been second nature to the couple.

14.5 Symbols should not confuse the integrity of the liturgy or the Gospel. Symbolic items or gestures need to be discerned. It may be that symbols of a prevailing culture may need to be resisted, especially when they are more akin to a secular rite which identifies individual or group identity. Symbols should illuminate the Gospel and must not hinder the development of Christian faith. At times it may be highly appropriate ritually to reinvent a symbol or ritual action, to give sign of reinterpreting it within the context of the Gospel and the life of discipleship.

14.6 Some of the symbols used around the Anglican Communion include:

- the presentation of flowers to the couple or to one of the betrothed, sometimes in the form of garlands;
- the 'drumming in' of the wedding party, or other processional actions;
- candle or candles, unity or paschal ;
- items by which to recognise bereavement;
- mats on the floor set aside for special prayers, and for the couple;
- readings from the Bible;
- prayers and readings from other Christian traditions or secular culture;
- special dress respectively for the bride and for the groom, according to local practice;
- rings that are either exchanged or given only to the bride;
- bangles for the wrist, necklaces, beaded ropes and other jewellery given to either bride or groom or exchanged;
- feasts provided by extended family and community, over the time of the wedding which may include days or weeks beforehand and afterwards;
- wine, *sake* and other drinks, both for enjoyment by the guests and also occasionally used for ceremonial purposes within the reception or in the liturgy itself;
- wedding cake or other ceremonial food placed as centrepiece, symbolising the celebration, the love of the couple, and the gathering of friends and family, for enjoyment;
- gifts from couple to community, from community to couple, from church to couple, between couple;
- dowry and other money gifts which may be done quietly ahead of time, or with some ceremony at the wedding or reception;
- lasso chord, or a wrapping in a stole at the point of the vows during the ceremony, to symbolise what God has joined together;
- the use of a veil over the face of the bride which can symbolise virginity or innocence or the purity of her coming to this time of vow-making;

- lifting of veil done by a father figure as a way of presenting the bride to the groom, or by the groom as an expression of the delight of betrothal, or by the bride herself as an expression of her will to move into this time of direct exchange of vows;
- exchange of kiss if appropriate. by the couple either at the greeting upon the lifting of the veil, or as sign and symbol of new married life;
- dance, within the liturgy as symbol of the delight of the celebration; afterwards as continuation of celebration;
- music, both Christian and secular, discerned well according to the contexts of liturgy and afterwards celebration;
- washing of the bride or washing of the groom, as a preparation for their new life together and as a renewal of baptismal vows;
- anointing at a variety of times during the betrothal, preparation for marriage and wedding ceremony. It is both blessing and bonding and an anointing for future ministry and can be seen as a way of sending the couple forth in their baptismal vocation.

#### 14.7 Questions:

- what are the symbols we take for granted as *Christian symbols* within a marriage ceremony?
- what experiences have we had of symbols or symbolic actions within a marriage rite that have felt problematic? What are the questions we have about these experiences? What are the messages that these send to us toward theological reflection on the complex relationships between gospel and culture?
- How can we work, as liturgical organisers and presiders to help the community to discern the use of symbol actions and items so that they may faithfully give voice to the celebrating community, whether these be Christians or not?  
How do we take the local story/context seriously, while remaining within the catholicity of the Church?

## 15. Pastoral Context

15.1 Provinces and local Churches across the Anglican Communion are deepening their engagement with and reflection on local pastoral contexts. These initiatives are to be encouraged as part of the life of discipleship and the discernment of how we live in and respond to our local contexts evangelically, critically and appropriately.

15.2 The open, respectful and mutual cross-contextual sharing of insights and challenges is beneficial to our deepening understanding of Anglican theology and life, and can deepen and enrich further reflection on local contextual realities.

15.3 Our Anglican tradition has presumed marriage to be of a man and woman who are previously unmarried, are not cohabiting, and will be partners for life. There is a whole range of

pastoral contexts in which the church is approached for services of marriage, and is asked to respond. These may include, and are not limited to:

- young couples;
- co-habitants;
- widow and widowers;
- divorcees;
- inter-faith and inter-church couples;
- couples from different racial, ethnic, class or other contexts which may be viewed by the local culture as a 'divide';
- couples with children, their own or from a previous relationship;
- extended families;
- same gender couples;
- marriage of couples previously separated or divorced;
- arranged marriages;
- polygamous marriages;
- older couples.

15.4 In each Province of the Anglican Communion and in each civil jurisdiction, some of these contexts will be unfamiliar, unacceptable, or illegal in either church or state or both.

15.5 Some in the Anglican Communion are discerning that much of what is held to be true of Christian marriage between a man and a woman is also found and given expression in faithful, committed, monogamous, lifelong relationships between two men or two women, whether it is called a marriage or something else. This provides an opportunity for continuing conversation within the Communion, and listening to the experiences of gay and lesbian disciples of Christ.

15.6 Questions: In your own ecclesial, socio-political and cultural context, you might wish to think about:

- How do we discern the inclusion and wise use of cultural symbol and practice within the liturgy?
- How does the Church engage with the “process” of marriage, from betrothal through the experiences and rites of passage in a marriage, to the end of marriage?
- What are the contextually specific practices (or absence thereof) of awareness and care on the part of the Church to the betrothed?
- What are the key symbols and ritual actions at work in the culture around and within your local church with respect to betrothal and marriage? Do they uphold, deepen or enrich Christian understandings of the marriage of Christians? Is there anything in them that gets in the way or is contrary to Gospel practice? How might you negotiate, amend, redirect or change these practices and symbols, if necessary? What deeper riches do those symbols and actions lend to the Gospel message that perhaps have not been yet explored in the marriage rite in your context?

- Are the nature and concept of vows in your cultural, socio-political and legal context consistent and compatible with the Gospel?
- If in your context there are two separate rites - one for the community and culture, and then a church rite: how do you both distinguish and connect the rites?
- The pastoral context for marriage begins with the story of the couple, within the story of the church and in the context of the story of the community in which they live. Each has their own story; it is vital to bring out the narrative of all three. Some of the story is told through symbols. In different contexts, the variety of these symbols may be visible in vibrant ways, or present in more quiet ways. As you develop the particularities of the marriage service, how might you balance the presence of personal story (in symbol, action, choice of lections) amongst the couple? How might you work in ways for the story of the community - that which is important to be told in this moment - into the rite?

***The Solemnization of Matrimony:  
some theological perspectives towards liturgical revision***

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*Presentation to the International Anglican Liturgical Consultation  
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'Liturgy for marriage' has traditionally focused on what happens 'in church' at a wedding ceremony. This paper makes little attempt to survey liturgical developments around the Anglican Communion: Gillian Varcoe's chapter on 'Marriage' in the Oxford Guide to the Book of Common Prayer does this admirably.<sup>2</sup> She also makes the important point that "marriage and the customs surrounding it are essentially domestic". Given the establishment of the Church of England, and the Christendom ethos which carried over to the colonial churches derived from it, much Anglican theological and pastoral reflection has presumed that marriage – and sexuality – is an area of human life which the churches should control. Recent changes in the western world have challenged this assumption, which was not in place for many centuries of the Church. Further, the experience of other parts of the Communion has contributed significant insights to the interaction of marriage and the variety of human societies and cultures.

In the light of these changes, this paper seeks to 'go back to basics', re-reading in a contemporary context the scriptural and theological foundations on which this Consultation will seek to build. To orient the discussion, a sketch of this context is necessary, drawing on my Australian experience.<sup>3</sup>

**Background: human relationships in today's world**

Considerable change in marriage relationships has taken place in the west over recent decades, in the wake of a revolution in sexual mores. A variety of living arrangements are accepted as valid, reflecting differing understandings of the roles of women and men. Greater openness exists to casual sexual encounters: short-term relationships among young adults are common, while among older people 'serial monogamy' is widely accepted.

Marriage as an institution continues to be questioned, but it also remains popular and desired. Within the churches, while the bitterness of 'mixed marriages' has largely subsided, ecumenical issues

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<sup>1</sup> Much of this paper arises from work done for ARCIC's *Life in Christ: Morals in Communion* (Church House / CTS, 1994), and my *A Pastoral Handbook for Anglicans* (Acorn, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> Charles Hefling and Cynthia Shattuck (edd) *The Oxford Guide to the Book of Common Prayer* (OUP, 2006) 509-517. Kenneth Stevenson, *Nuptial Blessing. A Study of Christian Marriage Rites* (SPCK/Alcuin, 1982) remains a classic exposition of the liturgical history of Christian rites, with some interesting views on contemporary issues.

<sup>3</sup> It is important to acknowledge the personal background I bring to this paper. I was married some 40 years ago (using the 1662 rite) to Peta Sherlock, my parish priest since 1992. We have two adult sons: one is married with children, the other has shared a household for some 15 years with an Anglican priest (under the discipline of the Anglican Church of Australia). I have only officiated at one wedding, but Peta has prepared for marriage hundreds of couples from a wide variety of socio-cultural backgrounds, and presided at their weddings.

remain; at congregational level, mixed responses are made to the changes in social mores, not only over divorce and re-marriage, but differences over 'headship' and 'egalitarian' approaches. 'Traditional values' continue to be endorsed and lived by many, and the contribution which a sound marriage makes to society is valued. Stable, loving and loyal long-term relationships undergird the nurture of children, and their growth to maturity as well-balanced, outward-looking men and women with a healthy sense of personal identity. Conversely, marriages in which there is violence, abuse or mere tolerance between partners do considerable damage to the families and community they touch.

In Australia, civil celebrants conduct more weddings than clergy. The age of first marriage has risen sharply,<sup>4</sup> and de facto marriages are now common. "People were living together in the 70s as a trial for marriage ... Now they're living together as a substitute for marriage".<sup>5</sup> Relationship is viewed as of greater significance than the social recognition marriage gives, yet failure in one marriage does not deter people from entering into further marriages. Problems arise from unrealistic expectations of marriage, and its privatization, encouraging as a couple to expect to fulfill each other's needs, in isolation from their families and communities.

Increases in life expectancy have also brought changes. In 1918, "till death us do part" was vowed in Europe with the likelihood of 20 years or so of life together, long enough to hopefully see grandchildren; today marriage longevity can extend to five decades or more, the majority being lived without children. Does this shift involve making a promise that is different in kind, not just degree?<sup>6</sup> Many adults experience two, three or more marriages in their lifetime. Children often grow up in 'separated' or 'blended' families; former 'in-laws' are unsure of how to regard one another when their children are divorced. How do these realities affect liturgy for marriage?

For couples with little church connection - and for some committed Christian couples - the questions today are not so much "what church should we be married in?", or "who should we ask to marry us in the garden?", or "who can we avoid inviting to the reception?", but "Get married? Why on earth should we? Our bond is spiritual - why bring God into it?"

And alongside this varied situation among heterosexual people there runs the question of gay relationships, in sharp debate across the Anglican Communion, and the pastoral responses made to men with more than one wife.

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<sup>4</sup> Luke Slattery, *The Weekend Australian*, September 25-26, 1999 cites these Australian Bureau of Statistics figures:

			Men over 30	Women over 30
All marriages	1978	28%	20%	
	1998	50%	37%	
First marriages	1978	13%	6%	
	1998	34%	21%	

<sup>5</sup> Professor Peter Saunders, *Australian Institute of Family Studies*. Institute research concludes that in 1978 22% of couples lived together before marriage; in 1998 the proportion was 68%.

<sup>6</sup> A challenging theological response to this situation is given by Jacques Pohier, *God - in Fragments* (trans. John Bowden, SCM, 1985) 194ff.



## Christian responses

We thus live in a world very different from that of 1549, when the Solemnization of Holy Matrimony was first authorized in English, a difference is reflected in many Anglican wedding rites, such as those in A Prayer Book for Australia (1995).

A wide range of questions face us:

- In societies in which ‘church weddings’ are counter-cultural, what opportunities exist for the renewal of the rites?
- What is the theological status of de facto relationships: what form of wedding ceremony (if any) is essential for a marriage to be valid?
- In what sense(s) is a marriage sacramental – and how does this relate to the wedding?
- What does blessing a couple wedded in a secular ceremony add to their marriage?
- To what extent (if any) should wedding rites be adapted when used for those with a previous or present partner still living?
- What liturgical rites (if any) should be used when a person with more than one spouse seeks to join Christ’s church?
- Under what circumstances (if any) may an Anglican minister officiate at a wedding where neither of the couple is baptized, but both desire an Anglican rite?
- Can a relationship between two Christians of the same gender be regarded in any sense as marriage? If it can be accepted as such, in what manner does a wedding rite need to be adapted, and of what is the marriage sacramental? If otherwise, are other formal relationships possible, and can any form of blessing be given to the couple?

Questions also arise about traditional wedding rites. Should ‘giving away’ of the bride be allowed (or forbidden), and in what form? Under what circumstances may weddings be conducted outside church buildings? What words of the rite must remain unchanged? What is required of weddings taken under Anglican auspices, where other than Anglican clergy officiate? Are rings, banns, or confetti, etc. essential, desirable, optional or unhelpful? All these questions, and others beside, revolve around the particular question raised when any couple approaches the church about a wedding: is holy matrimony the appropriate state of life in which they are called to live?

In shaping liturgical responses to such questions, we face two callings: one the one hand, to hold to the ideals taught in the scriptures and reflected in our formularies, and on the other hand, to recognize the realities found in Anglican congregations today. Not a few worshippers live with marital stress or domestic abuse; some are polygamous, divorced, or re-married; others live in de facto or same-sex relationships – as with any sexual matter, all are situations which churches often find it difficult to live with. This paper thus begins with theological reflection and liturgical responses to the pastoral opportunities we face.

## What is marriage? Scriptural perspectives

Wedding customs and household relations vary widely across cultures. The substantial consensus about marriage which prevailed across western societies is now under question. What constitutes a marriage can no longer be assumed, as the recent adoption of legislation in the USA and Australia to define it shows. Theologically and legally, considerable energy has been spent regarding what marriage is not, and when a marriage ends, but less discussion as to what marriage is. The Book of Common Prayer (1662) gives reasons “as to why matrimony was ordained” – procreation, sexual control and companionship – but these are reasons, causes or purposes, rather than definitions.

Genesis 2.18-24 is widely seen as the scriptural basis for marriage. The classical ‘conditions’ for a valid marriage derive from the concluding verse: ‘leaving’ kin (so founding a new household),<sup>7</sup> ‘cleaving’ of the partners (their free, informed choice), and their ‘becoming one flesh’ (sexual union as the unitive bond of marriage).<sup>8</sup> Yet no wedding rite is mentioned, and the context is the creation of the human race as a whole, more than the story of its first pair.

Jesus offered teaching about marriage only in response to (trick) questioning about divorce (Mark 10:6-8 and //s). Significantly, he moves directly from Genesis 1:27 - “God made them male and female, in the image of God”, the divine intention “from the beginning”- to Genesis 2:24, avoiding the intervening text which is sometimes read to hold the woman as ‘under’ the man. Marriage is based in the fruitful partnership of male and female, expressing one aspect of what it means to be “made in the image of God”. This notion is more than individual: we are made in the image of God as a race of likes-yet-unlike, male-and-female, to be ‘fruitful’ (Genesis 1:29-31) as co-creators with God. Marriage thus belongs to the order of creation, “in the time of man’s innocence” as BCP puts it: humankind is to mirror the creative faithfulness of God, in whose image we are made.<sup>9</sup>

Genesis 2 then explicates this ‘image’, from the ground up (literally): we are ‘earthlings’ (ha’adam) from ‘earth’ (‘adamah), then ‘living’ beings (2:7), having a task to ‘tend’ and ‘name’ other creatures (2:8-9, 15). Verses 15-18 do not refer to ‘one male human’, so much as ‘humanity as a whole’ (ha’adam) - and it is “not good that humanity should be solitary” (2:18). Companionship is sought but not found with the animals, so ha’adam is diversified: the outcome – ‘woman’ (‘ishshah) and ‘man’ (‘ish) (2:23) – is acknowledged as truly ‘one flesh’. Genesis 2:24, the text on which scriptural

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<sup>7</sup> Genesis 2:24 also contests patriarchal notions of kinship structures: the man, not the woman, is described as ‘leaving’ the familial household to ‘cleave’ to the other.

<sup>8</sup> Augustine of Hippo developed a more precisely sacramental understanding. He argued that there were two ‘goods’ in marriage common to all humanity, ‘offspring’ and ‘fidelity’. A third ‘good’ was available to those married in the church, a ‘sacramental’ good (based on the Latin rendering of *mysterion* in Ephesians 5:32 as *sacramentum*). Those having this latter ‘good’ could not have their marriage dissolved, since the sacramental union could not be undone: other marriages could be dissolved, but ought not to be: see further below.

<sup>9</sup> The cultures in which Genesis is set were permeated by fertility religions, in which sex is both celebrated as the symbol of life, and also feared because of the uncontrollable passions it arouses and releases. Sexual relations between the gods and human beings formed an element in the mythology of both Canaan and the Graeco-Roman worlds. In the scriptures (in narrative, legal and wisdom texts) sexuality is not only ‘demythologised’ and honoured as expressing a foundational element in what it means to be human, but also represented as dangerous: see for example Stevenson, *Nuptial Blessing*, 3-5.

teaching on marriage is grounded, thus concludes a closely-textured discussion of what it means to be made in the image of God, and should be read in such a context.

Whatever the scriptural ideal, marriage as we receive it is marred, as is recognised in Genesis 3. The relationship between the man and woman is broken: they hide themselves from one another with clothing (3:7), and blame rather than trust characterises their mutual attitudes (3:12). Pain, rule and toil now shape their creative functions (3:15-19). This disorder is possibly reflected in the prevalence of polygamy and concubinage in the First Testament, in which examples of monogamous marriage are rare (as anyone seeking to draft a collect based on one will know): Isaac and Rebekah are the only such named couple. Further, marriage can reflect the interests of just one partner, be abused in sinful power struggles, or become an instrument of social control or oppression (cf. the many examples in 1 & 2 Samuel). When pursued as an end in itself, it can become an idol, dominating a person's life, transcending what God demands. Marriage thus calls for our 'penultimate' rather than our 'ultimate' allegiance, which belongs to God alone.

Jesus showed respect for marriage, and his first 'sign' in John was performed at a wedding feast, but called his disciples into a wider 'household' ('oikoumene), that of the 'reign of God'.<sup>10</sup> So, responding to a (ridiculous) case brought by Sadducees to trap him, Jesus taught that "in the resurrection in heaven they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels" (Mark 12:25 and //s). Thus, according to the traditions about Jesus passed on in the early Christian communities, marriage (and kinship) are to be honoured, but as 'penultimate' realities: ultimate honour is only to be given to God (cf. Luke 2:41ff, Mark 3:31ff).

Pauline teaching on marriage likewise arises from questions raised in the churches. Consistent with Jesus' teaching, he holds that marriage, though important in this age, is not of eternal significance. Paul speaks of our Christian 'calling' as being 'in Christ': mindful of "the impending crisis", he urges the Corinthian Christians to remain "in the state in which you were called", giving no encouragement for the unmarried to seek it, except to avoid immorality (1 Cor 7.17ff). Marriage is a possible state of living for a Christian, but not seen as necessary or ideal (cf. slavery).<sup>11</sup> Positively, in Ephesians, on the basis of Genesis 1.27-28, the union in Christ of man and woman is viewed as displaying that between Christ and the Church. Christ's cleansing love brings the Church, as his bride, to the eschatological perfection of the people of God – a 'great mystery' (Ephesians 5:21-33).

According to the scriptures, then, marriage is hard to tie down precisely – and they give us no models for a wedding! Marriage belongs to the 'order of creation' (using traditional language), and in Christ points to the 'order of redemption', reflecting the 'great mystery' of the intimate relation between Christ and the Church.

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<sup>10</sup> The closest terms to the English 'family' in Hebrew (*mishpah* - clan) and Greek ('*oikoumene* - household) are much wider than the immediate kinship group denoted to by 'family' in common use, but refer to 'extended' families, including both blood-relations and others.

<sup>11</sup> This teaching is given along with similar practical advice about slavery, which cannot be regarded as legitimated by the scriptures: cf. Ephesians 5:21-6:9; Colossians 3:18-4:1; I Peter 2:13-3:7; I Timothy 5:1-6:2.

## Some corollaries (with liturgical consequences)

Given the widespread assumption that ‘normal’ life means being married, it is important to stress that, according to the scriptures, every person is fully human, married or not. The description of humanity being “made in the image of God” as male and female, and the command to be fruitful, apply to the race as a whole, not to the married alone. For many people, more years are lived outside marriage than in it: unbalanced emphasis on marriage in the regular life of a church can breed false views as to what constitutes worthwhile and productive human life, and harm those who are not married.

Further, the goodness of close mono-gendered relationships (man / man, woman / woman) is not excluded by scriptural teaching, nor are hetero-gendered ones (woman / man). Friendship between different people is regarded highly in the scriptures (cf 2 Samuel 1.26; Ruth 1.15ff; and especially John 15.14ff). One corollary of Genesis 1-2 is that sexual intimacy is given its appropriate context in the one-flesh covenantal relationship of one man and one woman. Close friendships are not marriage: there can be personal communion without sexual intercourse, and sexual union without personal relationship. Gender and sexuality are broader and deeper than explicitly sexual activity, and appropriate prayer, thanksgiving and blessing can and should be offered for these aspects of living, whatever attitude is taken to a church-authorized blessing being given to a same-sex couple.<sup>12</sup>

Conversely, while humanity is told to “be fruitful and multiply”, children are not mentioned in Genesis 2: they are a consequence of the ‘one-flesh’ relationship, but not constitutive of it. Children are seen as an added gift of the Lord (Psalm 127.3). Fruitfulness is to touch every aspect of the couple’s life together, but regarding childless couples as living an ‘incomplete’ marriage undermines its nature, and may harm their relationship. Differences on ‘family planning’ exist between and within the churches, notably between Roman Catholics and others, which the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission summed up as follows: “Anglicans understand the good of procreation to be a norm governing the married relationship as a whole. Roman Catholic teaching, on the other hand, requires that each and every act of intercourse should be ‘open to procreation’.”<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, a considered decision by a Christian couple not to be open to the gift of children would seem to

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<sup>12</sup> Pohier, *Fragments* 175ff gives a delightful exposition of Thomas Aquinas’ positive evaluation of pleasure in sexual intimacy.

<sup>13</sup> *Life in Christ: Morals, Communion and the Church* (Church House / Catholic Truth Society, 1994) #80. This continues:

Both our traditions agree that [the moral integrity of the act of sexual intercourse] involves the two basic ‘goods’ of marriage, loving union and procreation. Moral integrity requires that husband and wife respect both these goods together. For Anglicans it is sufficient that this respect should characterise the married relationship as a whole; whereas for Roman Catholics it must characterise each act of sexual intercourse. Anglicans understand the moral principle to be that procreation should not arbitrarily be excluded from the continuing relationship; whereas Roman Catholics hold that there is an unbreakable connexion, willed by God, between the two ‘goods’ of marriage and the corresponding meanings of marital intercourse, and that therefore they may not be sundered by any direct and deliberate act.

It is important to note that ARCIC concludes that such a difference does not lie in the area of “fundamental moral values” or “fundamental teaching concerning the mystery of human life and the sanctity of the human person”, but “on their implementation in practical judgements”. Continued breach of communion between Anglican and Roman Catholics on these grounds alone is therefore not justifiable.

constitute denial (in ARCIC's words) "of one of the divinely intended 'goods' of marriage ... and a contradiction of the nature of marriage itself. On this [Anglicans and Roman Catholics] agree."<sup>14</sup>

Also, the instruction given to Christian husbands and wives in the letters of the New Testament is asymmetrical, traditionally reflected in the bride promising to 'obey' her husband.<sup>15</sup> Modern rites avoid this, but the question of how the biological, social and theological asymmetry between woman and man is recognized in wedding rites remains. Thus both Orders for Marriage in APBA presuppose a mutual relationship between wife and husband, but express this in different ways.<sup>16</sup> Second Order does so symmetrically, using identical wording is used for the Consent, Vows and (optional) ring-giving. First Order included some asymmetry: in the Vows only the woman gives 'honour' to the man, while the man is required to 'honour' the woman in the (non-optional) ring-giving.

Each of these corollaries has liturgical implications for not only wedding rites, but the ways in which human relationships are celebrated, prayed about and lamented in corporate worship.

### **What makes a marriage Christian?**

According to the scriptures, then, marriage is the one-flesh, life-long covenantal relationship of a man and woman in an exclusive commitment, as the foundation of a new kinship unit.<sup>17</sup> It is difficult to define, but remains a 'great mystery', whose oneness reflect the unity between Christ and the Church, grounded in our humanity as 'male-and-female' in the image of God. Distorted by sin as an institution, marriage is not of ultimate importance, but is to be honoured among all. This perspective is grounded in the belief that all humanity is made in the image of God, and so applies generally, whether the married couple are Jewish, Christian, agnostic, Muslim, animists or any mix. Marriage between Christians, however, is often spoken of as 'Christian marriage', which blurs this reality. Marriage 'in Christ' is in the first place authentic marriage, and presumes that the couple are committed to a life-long, exclusive, one-flesh relationship. But other factors are also involved.

First, while marriage is a state of life in which a Christian may live, it is to be entered 'soberly, having in mind those purposes for which [it] was ordained', as BCP puts it. In principle, a Christian enters marriage in Christ as an act of costly obedience to what s/he understands to be God's will and gift for them. Marriage in Christ forms a partnership between "joint heirs of the grace of life" (1 Peter 3:7), characterised by common prayer and witness, and a willingness to bear the life-long costs which such commitment entails. Sexual relations are not seen as 'unspiritual', but form an important dimension

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<sup>14</sup> *Life in Christ* #78. The text continues, "We are likewise at one in opposing what has been called a 'contraceptive mentality', that is, a selfish preference for immediate satisfaction over the more demanding good of having and raising a family."

<sup>15</sup> See Eph 5.21ff; Col 3.18f; 1 Peter 3.1-8. 1 Corinthians 7, on the other hand, is wholly symmetrical in its teaching.

<sup>16</sup> Varcoe 513-4 cites this as "a clear example of the historical tendency of marriage liturgies to be responsive to cultural change, and of the conflict between the demands of modern cultures and those within which the Christian tradition was formed".

<sup>17</sup> This is not inconsistent with the definition in Australian law of marriage as "the union of a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life" [Section 43(a) of the *Family Law Act*, 1975, and Section 46(1) of the *Marriage Act* 1961].

of marriage in Christ, shaped by mutual concern for one another, without abuse or 'rule' of each other (1 Cor 7:3-7). The New Testament is realistic about marriage as Christians experience it, recognising that those in which one partner only is a believer are of special concern (1 Cor 7:12-16, 1 Peter 3:1-6). And marriage in Christ may be ended, if only as a last resort (1 Cor 7:10-11), though there is disagreement as to whether a divorced Christian is free to marry another.

Secondly, as already noted, marriage in Christ is a sign of the unity between Christ and the Church, the eschatological "bride without spot or wrinkle" (Eph 5:31-33). In affirming this truth, it is important to note that the woman and man in a marriage are not identified with the Church and Christ, which would mean that the wife is subservient and spoiled, so that her husband's task is to purify her. The analogy in the text is between their lived oneness and the unity between Christ and the Church, not the relationship between them. Further, marriage in Christ does not exist for its own sake, but as a sign in this age of God's new creation (cf Rev 19:6-9). A 'covenant' between two human beings, it is also a sign of the 'new covenant' to which they belong in Christ, an anticipation of the coming "marriage supper of the Lamb" to which all humankind is invited. Marriage in Christ thus points outwards and forwards, as well as inwards and backwards. It should make visible the love of God in Christ in creation, redemption and consummation.

Thirdly, marriage in Christ is a communal matter, lived out within the people of God and among the wider human community. Such a couple is called to develop and enable their gifts mutually, in the service of God, a 'revolutionary cell' of the reign of God. As the Church receives the Spirit's gifts for the work of ministry, so does a marriage between Christians, seen as the church in microcosm (ecclesiola). 'Church' weddings thus invoke God's blessing upon the couple – symbolised in some Christian traditions by them being 'crowned' – so that they may be fruitful in God's service, one aspect being the responsibility of raising children (as given by God) in the Lord.

Seen in this way, marriage in Christ can be situated in a trinitarian framework: it is to be lived in obedience to God, signify oneness and transformation in Christ, and embody the fruitful ministry of the Spirit. Marriage in Christ entails a life-long, covenantal commitment "for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health", which nevertheless points beyond itself to a higher allegiance to the reign of God.

### **Some corollaries (with liturgical consequences)**

The element of costly obedience implies careful preparation both for the marriage and for the betrothal and wedding rites. The consent and vows highlight the willingness to follow God's way, and express the couple's joint commitment to their new covenant relationship. The Christological element is expressed primarily in the ecclesial context of the wedding, God's people assembled in the presence of Christ, whose union with his 'body' is reflected in marriage. This implies that such weddings take place where the church usually meets, and in the context of the holy communion, with prayers for the married couple's fruitful service for God together. The communal element is expressed by the presence of family and friends: every wedding is more than a two-person affair,

with others present as onlookers. A wedding 'in Christ' is a congregational act of worship, offering praise and prayer to God for the divine gift of marriage, and its distinctive element of sexual union.

The broad shape of Christian liturgy for weddings has and does vary, but overall can be seen in terms of covenant: the making of a solemn agreement between a man and woman before God, a sign of the new covenant made in Christ. The couple come from different families, to become a new household: the nuptial covenant marks a turning point in a journey intended to be a life-long, fruitful pilgrimage, made as part of the wider communities of church and society. Their representatives are witnesses of the marriage covenant, and join in celebrating it. Each of these elements has liturgical implications not only for wedding rites, but for the ways in which human relationships are celebrated, prayed about and lamented in corporate worship. More particular is the question of how any sacramentality in marriage is marked liturgically.

### **The sacramentality of marriage – and weddings**

In the West, marriage came to be numbered amongst the seven sacraments, and so viewed as genuine only within the Faith. Divorce could be granted a *mensa et thoro* ('from bed and board'), i.e. legally recognized permanent separation: *divorce a vinculo* ('from the bond') was not possible. The 'Pauline Privilege' of allowing divorce if one partner was unbaptized (cf 1 Corinthians 7.12-15) came to be known as the 'Petrine Privilege', granted by the Pope as a dispensation. Other grounds were not allowed, though a sophisticated system of annulment procedures developed. The 'vocations' of married or celibate life were believed to have their own particular grace attached, giving a (mutually distinct) 'character' to the soul. A person with the 'character' of celibacy (through orders, or by vow) could not receive the 'character' of marriage, and vice versa. Despite many changes in sacramental theology, such an understanding continues to play a major role in contemporary Roman Catholic thought.

Article 25 teaches that marriage is not a 'sacrament of the Gospel', since it was not ordained by Christ. More substantially, marriage does not signify the gospel of Christ crucified and risen (as do the 'gospel sacraments', baptism and eucharist). On the other hand, marriage was blessed by Christ's presence at Cana, and approved in his teaching. For Christians, marriage signifies the love and faithfulness of God in Christ, and the intimate relationship between Christ and the Church. These are consequences of the Gospel, pointing to profoundly spiritual dimensions of marriage. Marriage in Christ may thus properly be termed 'sacramental', having a deep sacramental significance. In what sense is this true of other marriages?

It is striking that the Book of Common Prayer presents marriage not only as "instituted by God in the time of man's innocency", in the order of creation, but also as a "holy estate [which] Christ adorned and beautified by his presence and first miracle that he wrought at Cana in Galilee". The Anglican theological tradition thus came to regard marriage itself as blessed by Christ, carrying a sacramental signification, rather than only marriages contracted between Christians. This reflects the reality that (in the words of ARCIC) "for many years in England after the Reformation,

marriages could be solemnized only in church. When civil marriage became possible, Anglicans recognized such marriages, too, as sacramental and graced by God.”<sup>18</sup> Anglicans thus tend to emphasize the breadth of God’s grace in creation, while the Roman Catholic tradition tends to emphasize the depth of God’s grace in Christ. These emphases should be seen as complementary, and ideally they belong together; they reflect differing understandings of the conditions under which the sacramentality of a marriage is fulfilled.

In this light, a lived marriage is to be distinguished from the wedding ceremony by which its beginning is marked. It is not the ceremony in isolation, but the life-long one-flesh covenant relationship of a woman and man which points to the unity of Christ and the Church. The sacramentality of marriage is a lived reality, much more than being merely ceremonial. A Christian rite for a wedding will express a Christian understanding of marriage, but no form for this is given in scripture or early tradition, and church rites have varied considerably over the centuries.

Further, it is the couple who enter the marriage covenant, and so are the proper ‘ministers’ of the marriage. Only when abuses arose did it become necessary (in the West) for a priest to be present, to ensure that the marriage was entered freely and publicly witnessed. As time went on, the priest also came to give the ‘nuptial blessing’, traditionally offered by a leading member of one of the families (as is probably reflected in the BCP rubric specifying ‘minister’ rather than ‘priest’). Today the ordained minister normally presides not so much for these reasons, but because a Christian wedding takes place as an act of divine worship, in the context of Christ’s people. The one who presides in the people of God is a sign of Christ’s presence among his people, and so is a ‘co-minister’ of the marriage along with the couple.<sup>19</sup> This minister’s presence is a sign that the couple’s promises are made “in the presence of God”, being fitting rather than being necessary to the sacramentality of the marriage being entered.

NB: In popular culture, a wedding involves saying ‘I do’. No mainstream Christian rite includes this, but rather ‘I will’ (*volo*) as the promise, and each of the couple is asked, not “do you love?” but “will you love?” Those with experience in marriage preparation find that couples often appreciate this emphasis on love as an act of will rather than an emotion. Marriage forms the context in which a couple learns what it means to love, rather than the wedding being culmination of a love already shared.

### **Christian liturgy related to marriage: some sketches**

A number of liturgical suggestions have been made above: to conclude this paper, some brief notes are offered by way of encouraging further reflection. As is noted several times, experience from

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<sup>18</sup> *Life in Christ* # 62. Earlier in this paragraph it is explained that “the Roman Catholic tradition ... affirms that Christian marriage is a sacrament in the order of redemption, the natural sign of the human covenant having been raised by Christ to become a sign of the irrevocable covenant between himself and his Church ... When solemnised between two baptized persons, marriage is an effectual sign of redeeming grace.”

<sup>19</sup> A suggestion of Michael Lawley, *Secular Marriage, Christian Sacrament* (Twenty-Third Publications, 1985) 77-79.



across the Anglican Communion, and from other Christian churches, will illuminate these and other aspects of liturgy related to marriage.

### *Engagement / betrothal*

While the wedding is the major liturgical focus, some pre-wedding public events on a couple's journey can be celebrated liturgically. The first is usually engagement or betrothal – in terms of ritual theory, the 'separation' of the man and women from others; the wedding marks the 'liminal' or transitional moment, leading into their 're-incorporation' into society as a couple. (In some societies this is also related to a dowry payment.) The custom of reading banns is another opportunity: marking such stages liturgically can offer the couple spiritual support, and alert the church to what God is doing in its members. It is likely that other pre-wedding customs are practiced around the Communion which can be shared.

### *Liturgical shape*

The shape for wedding liturgy in BCP reflects a covenantal understanding of marriage, as seen in its assumption that Holy Communion normally follows, which also means that no scripture readings are provided! Modern revisions have rectified the latter issue, but the overall shape of a wedding rite varies, and does not appear to have settled.<sup>20</sup> In APBA, two services are offered, originating initially in differences over the distinctive participation of husband and wife in their marriage. First Order follows an 'office' structure, with the Consent and Wedding taking place at the beginning: the 'nuptial blessing' then leads in to the Ministry of the Word and the Prayers, which conclude the service. Second Order adopts a 'eucharistic' structure (whether communion is included or not), with the Consent and Wedding placed between the Ministry of the Word and the Prayers. Examples from elsewhere in the Communion will help offer more particular guidance on the 'shape' of a wedding.

### *Weddings and Holy Communion*

The BCP holds that "It is convenient that the new-married persons should receive the holy Communion at the time of their Marriage, or at the first opportunity after their Marriage". The covenant into which they have entered is then placed in the context of the 'new covenant' made in Christ's Body and Blood. Many weddings, however, are conducted between couples who are not regular communicants, of different Christian traditions, or unbaptized; not uncommonly, communicants are a minority amongst family and friends. It is therefore a pastoral judgment as to how the wedding relates to holy communion: where this does happen, the sacrament should be administered to all who, being eligible to do so, wish to receive, using authorized words of invitation.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> See Varcoe, 511ff.

<sup>21</sup> The words recommended for use in the Anglican Church of Australia, based on a General Synod resolution, are as follows:

### *Who should / can preside?*

The ministers of marriage are the couple: as noted above, the presider can be seen as a 'co-minister' of the wedding. S/he would normally be the person who has worked with the couple in preparing them for marriage, typically the parish priest, school or college chaplain. Some Anglicans have held that the sacramental dimension of marriage requires a priest to preside at a wedding, but this is not strictly the case unless it takes place in the context of the Holy Communion. As noted above, the nuptial blessing has traditionally been given by a community rather than ecclesial representative, and the Anglican affirmation that all marriages receive God's blessing in creation and through the incarnation support this. Thus deacons may well be better placed to preside at weddings where neither of the couple are regular worshippers, or baptized, for example. Again, practice around the Communion in different social contexts may well illuminate this issue.

### *Customs and symbols*

A good number of symbolic customs are part of a wedding – the processions in and out, the joining of hands, and the giving and receiving of rings are evident in Anglican rites. Others include 'giving away' of the bride, crowning of the couple (in Orthodox tradition), lifting the bride's veil, the kiss, applause, signing the marriage certificate, decorations of flowers and ribbons, showering the couple with confetti, rice or rose petals etc. The reading of banns, the number and roles of attendants (eg the 'best man' having care of the rings), how bride and groom dress (and at what cost), what they eat (in Orthodox custom, almonds as a sign of fertility), the form of a 'wedding breakfast' (again, and at what cost), a 'honeymoon' and the like are further issues.

Whatever undergirds the Christian and human significance and the earthy reality of marriage is worth considering. Conversely, tawdry customs which cheapen marriage or wedding ceremonies should be forgone.

### *Weddings where a former partner is still alive*

For a person with previous partner(s) (married or de facto) still living, the discipline of the Anglican Church where re-marriage is allowed requires written approval to be obtained from the bishop. When such approval is given, the question arises as to whether there should be some recognition in the wedding service. Anglican provinces seem not to be agreed about this: a South African rite (which I cannot now find) required a public statement to be made near the beginning of the service, while in other places (eg Australia) no changes are made. The ministry of penitence and reconciliation regarding past histories may well be needed, and should be offered, but the 'no changes' position is that it is the marriage being entered which matters: any act of penitence should take place some time before the wedding.

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All who are communicant members of a Christian church holding the apostolic faith are invited to receive holy communion on this occasion. If you do not intend to receive communion, I invite you to spend this time in prayer for N and M.

### *Weddings where one or both partners are unbaptized*

Growing numbers of requests are made for weddings where one of the couple belongs to a non-Christian faith, or are not baptized. As noted, Anglican tradition holds that marriage belongs to the whole human family, and marriages which cross cultural and religious boundaries can be seen as bridges between different races and communities – they join more than the couple. Particular difficulties and tensions are likely in such marriages, however, due to contrasting perspectives coming to the surface in the closeness of married life: good preparation will be realistic about these. Any other faith community involved may find difficulty in receiving the Anglican partner into their fellowship, or taking part in a wedding conducted under Christian auspices.

In Australia, authorized Anglican wedding rites can be varied (if the bishop allows) by allowing the non-Christian partner to omit the words ‘according to God’s word’ and ‘in the presence of God’ in the Consent and Vow respectively.<sup>22</sup> The couple must be willing for the service to held as an act of Christian worship, however, to have prayers offered on their behalf, and to receive nuptial blessing.

A related issue is whether an Anglican wedding can be conducted for a couple where neither is baptized: a Provisional Canon of the Australian General Synod is currently going around the dioceses, and (somewhat to the surprise of many) is receiving assents. The reasons are largely pastoral – many clergy do not believe it is right to enquire about baptism for a couple who, in a very secular social context, have been brave enough to approach the church for their wedding – but also theological, given the position of BCP that the ‘state’ of matrimony is blessed through creation and incarnation. It is not expected that the wedding rite will be changed for such couples, however.

### *Ministry to those experiencing marriage breakdown*

Liturgical rites can support marriage in a number of ways: regular prayer for married couples, annual ‘renewal of promise’ services, for example. Support for those for whom marriage is hell will involve personal prayer, and suitable rites used with confidentiality: this is a very difficult matter for many congregations, who are likely to take sides, and/or feel that their own marriages come under scrutiny or pressure.

Some Provinces have available rites such as Recognition of the End of a Marriage, and Release from a Marriage now over, which aim to help a divorced person have their changed marital status acknowledged, and make a new start in their life.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> The House of Clergy of the 2010 General Synod of the Anglican Church of Australia just failed to reach the necessary 2/3 majority to remove the requirement that both of the couple be baptized – the House of Laity did reach the 2/3 vote.

<sup>23</sup> Australian examples of both can be found in *A Pastoral Handbook*, and in recent work from the Liturgy Commission (see [www.anglican.org.au](http://www.anglican.org.au), Liturgical Resources) though they are not authorized by General Synod, and their use depends on the permission of a diocesan bishop, not all of whom will give approval.

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## Appendix: Marriage and Canon Law in Anglican tradition

The Reformation rejected the medieval understanding of marriage and clerical celibacy. In England, the marriages of Henry VIII gave a sharply political edge, as succession to the throne – and therefore the ecclesial relationships and character of the Church of England – became interwoven with the question of what constituted a valid marriage. More particularly, Reformation tendencies are evidenced in the changes made to marriage liturgy by the English Reformers, and the advocacy of the marriage of priests by its leaders (including Archbishop Cranmer).<sup>24</sup> Thus the Book of Common Prayer contains no reference to marriage being a sacrament. The ring was retained, though regarded by some Puritans as a relic of such an understanding, but its more likely significance was to indicate the relationship between husband and wife (as owner and ‘chattel’ in law). In Scotland, Puritan resistance to seeing weddings (and funerals) as having ‘cultic’ significance saw ‘civic’ wedding customs accepted (cf the ‘Bethnal Green’ custom). Though the Reformers did not agree precisely on divorce, all objected to the sophistry surrounding annulment, and allowed divorce at least for adultery.

Henry VIII appointed a Commission to reform Canon Law, continued under Edward VI. Its report came before Parliament just before Mary came to the throne (1553), and was not proceeded with. The proposed revision included granting grounds for divorce such as adultery, malicious desertion, attempts against the partner’s life, and cruelty. Though this never became law, divorce and remarriage were disturbingly frequent between Edward VI and James I, and the 1603 Canons were framed against such a background (and possibly James’ experience of Scottish custom). These exclude divorce and remarriage wholly (though legal separation is recognised): it was possible to obtain a divorce on the grounds of adultery by Act of Parliament (a costly procedure), and such Acts were recognized by the Church. The Church of England thus found itself in a unique position: it had no ‘let out’ from marriage (as Rome, the East and Protestants did), yet it did not accept marriage as a sacrament, and allowed (and encouraged) clerical marriage. This position was further exacerbated by the ‘established’ nature of the Church of England: until 1857 English people could be legally married only under its auspices. Such was the position brought to the various colonies derived from English settlement.

Considerable changes to the civil laws touching marriage have come about in the past 150 years, in both England and elsewhere. In the USA, weddings have been frequently entered by civil licence, sometimes followed by a church blessing. In the African churches, the question of polygamy has continued to receive a variety of responses. In Australia, legal power concerning all marital matters now belongs with the Federal government: the Family Law Act (1973, revised 1975) allows ‘no fault’ divorce, on the sole ground of twelve months’ separation. The grounds for divorce are not open to church inspection (e.g. to determine the ‘guilty party’). After a decade of debate, the Australian Anglican General Synod passed Canons in 1981 and 1985 which allow for the wedding under Anglican auspices of a person whose former partner is still alive, by permission of the bishop. This Canon has not been adopted by every diocese, however. In England, a July 2002 decision of the

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<sup>24</sup> See especially Muriel Porter, *Sex, Marriage and the Church. Patterns of Change* (HarperCollins Dove, 1996) chapter 5.

General Synod revoked earlier motions which had exhorted Anglican clergy not to officiate at weddings where a former partner was still alive, while not changing Canon B30, the canonical definition of marriage.

## ***Mystērion, Sacramenta and the Marriage of Christians***

**Richard Geoffrey Leggett**

*A presentation to the International Anglican Liturgical Consultation  
Auckland, 2009*

### **A personal preface**

About a year ago I became a regular reader of the obituaries published in the *Globe and Mail*, one of Canada's two national newspapers, and the *Vancouver Sun*, one of Vancouver's two daily newspapers. I am not entirely sure why my eyes were drawn to these accounts of people, a few known to me, most unknown. Perhaps one reason may be the simple fact that I have become more aware of my own mortality as I move closer to the age of sixty than fifty.

One of the things that interests me about obituaries is the way that the life narrative of the deceased is recounted. Some narratives are quite simple, containing the dates of birth and death, the names of surviving family and friends, information regarding the time and location of the memorial service. Other narratives are panegyrics, filled with excessive praise and extravagant claims regarding the deceased. I often feel that these narratives reveal a certain amount of guilt on the part of the survivors as if a glowing obituary can compensate for years or a life-time of neglect.

The narratives I find most compelling, however, are those that tell a genuinely human story. The successes and failures, the joys and the sorrows, the dreams and the disappointments are lovingly but honestly described. Such narratives express the feelings that Huub Oosterhuis captured in a prayer that has been adapted for use in the funeral liturgy of *The Book of Alternative Services*.

We pray that nothing good in this *man's/woman's* life will be lost, but will be of benefit to the world; that all that was important to *him/her* will be respected by those who follow; and that everything in which *he/she* was great will continue to mean much to us now that *he/she* is dead.<sup>25</sup>

Whether the obituary is simple or excessive, succinct or honest, I am reminded as I read them that our lives are truly stories within a larger narrative of human history. In the ritual of writing an obituary I dare to claim that this person mattered and that the shape of the present world is, in some small measure, the result of this person's life. They participated in a great drama that continues to play itself out, day after day, year after year, decade after decade, century after century, millennium after millennium.

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<sup>25</sup> *The Book of Alternative Services* 1985, 602.



Trapped as I am in a web of stories, let me begin my exploration of the marriage of Christians as an expression of the great narrative that undergirds all of existence.

### **I) Towards a Theology of Marriage as an Expression of *Mystērion***

When Graham Cotter turned his hand to provide a guide to Canadian Anglican clergy and laity regarding marriage, it is telling that he chose to entitle the book, *Marrying in the Church: A Pastoral Guide*, rather than calling it a guide to *Christian* marriage.<sup>26</sup> A rationale for the title is implicit in the four meanings he gives to the word “marriage”: (a) a union or status in which two persons are bound together by legal ties which may include religious ones; (b) a contract; (c) an institution of human society and (d) a ceremony.<sup>27</sup> None of the four meanings he gives describes a distinctly Christian or, for that matter, religious institution.

A review of Christian history will show that for a significant period in the early Church, marriage was understood as an institution of society into which Christians entered just as their non-Christian peers did.

Attempts to study the history of Christian marriage in the earliest periods of the Church’s life are immediately stymied by the lack of evidence for anything that could be called specifically Christian. This lack, however, indicates rather clearly that apart from the fact that the two persons involved were Christian, there was nothing noticeably different about Christian marriages, about the way they originated, the way they were lived, or (in some instances) in the way they were terminated.<sup>28</sup>

In this period Christians followed the patterns of the culture in which they lived, although, as Christians, their marriages might be touched by “what it meant for them to be related to one another ‘in the Lord.’”<sup>29</sup>

When our Lutheran partners in full communion in Canada and the United States undertook a revision of their liturgical rites, including those for the pastoral offices, they re-affirmed this reality of marriage as a social institution into which some Christians are called.

Classic Lutheran theology has long understood the union of a man and a woman in marriage as an order of creation and a gift from God. In such a view, one does not speak of a Christian marriage. Rather, one speaks of a marriage between Christians.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Cotter 1983.

<sup>27</sup> Cotter 1983, 42-43.

<sup>28</sup> Cooke 1987, 34.

<sup>29</sup> Cooke 1987, 34-35.

<sup>30</sup> *Renewing Worship* 2002, xi.

In my remarks I shall focus on the marriage of Christians rather than Christian marriage as a socially and culturally localized ritual expression of *mystērion*.

## 2) *Mystērion as the Narrative of the Kosmos*

I start with the following assertion: the *kosmos*, all that is, seen and unseen, is the embodiment of a narrative, a story, begun by, continued by and being brought to its perfection by the Holy One, the Source of all Being. There are various thematic understandings of the narrative of the *kosmos*.

One thematic expression of this narrative, told by believers and non-believers alike, is what I might call the 'scientific' theme. In this story the *kosmos* came into existence by the direct activity of a divine being or by forces still not fully understood. Regardless of the agency of creation, the narrative is based upon some common convictions. One conviction is that the *kosmos* is governed by certain principles that human beings, as the creatures standing at the apex of all living creatures and endowed with curiosity, imagination and reason, seek to understand. Whether there is a creator or not, the future is in the hands of human beings. In some versions of this story, the future is a spiral of progress, while others postulate a spiral of decay.

A different thematic expression is what I might call the 'creation-fall' theme. Let me illustrate this narrative with a quotation from one of the eucharistic prayers of the Anglican Church of Canada.

At your command all things came to be: the vast expanse of interstellar space, galaxies, suns, the planets in their courses, and this fragile earth, our island home; by your will they were created and have their being. . . . From the primal elements you brought forth the human race, and blessed us with memory, reason, and skill; you made us the stewards of creation. . . . But we turn against you, and betray your trust; and we turn against one another. Again and again you call us to return. Through the prophets and sages you reveal your righteous law. In the fullness of time you sent your Son, born of a woman, to be our Saviour. He was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities. By his death he opened to us the way of freedom and peace.<sup>31</sup>

God's involvement in the *kosmos* takes the form of frequent or infrequent interventions, moments or events when God seeks to restore some balance to the wayward *kosmos*. In some forms of this thematic articulation, the *kosmos* is under the control of those forces which deny God, even counterfeit God's creative acts.

And war broke out in heaven; Michael and his angels fought against the dragon. The dragon and his angels fought back, but they were defeated, and there was no longer

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<sup>31</sup> *The Book of Alternative Services* 1985, 201.

any place for them in heaven. The great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world --- he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, proclaiming, . . . "Rejoice then, you heavens and those who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, for the devil has come down to you with great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!"<sup>32</sup>

There will come the final and climactic intervention when God, at the end of time, will defeat this evil once and for all, restoring the *kosmos* to its rightful relationship with God. In the meantime, the *kosmos* is so deeply tainted by evil that any right-thinking believer will be cautious, sceptical, even suspicious of the ability of the *kosmos* to reveal or to be an agent of God's purposes.

The thematic expression of the narrative of the *kosmos* that shapes my comments on that social and cultural institution we call 'marriage' builds upon the two themes I have just sketched. This expression I describe as the '*mystērion*' understanding of the *kosmos* we inhabit through the windfall gift of God. At this juncture I turn to comments regarding *mystērion* from the American theologians Robert Browning and Roy Reed.

- i) *Mystērion* refers to "the secret purposes of God revealed and worked out in the world through the mission of Jesus as the Christ."<sup>33</sup>
- ii) *Mystērion* is a term used primarily in the letters of Paul and appears only once in the synoptic gospels (Mark 4.10-12 with parallels in Matthew 13.10-13 and Luke 8.9-10): "When he was alone, those who were around him along with the twelve asked him about the parables. And he said to them, "To you have been given the secret (*mystērion*) of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes in parables." (Mark 4.10-11).<sup>34</sup>
- iii) The *mystērion* of the kingdom of God is revealed in Jesus of Nazareth as the messenger and agent of that kingdom.<sup>35</sup>
- iv) "To say 'to you have been given the *mystērion* of the kingdom of God,' is to say that *mystērion*, because God's mystery is the Christ, is more than an idea or even a message; it is a presence. To share a sacrament is to share a presence. The sacramental sign, a symbol, is always the sign of a presence and this presence is the abiding reality."<sup>36</sup>
- v) This presence, this participation in the *mystērion* is shared as a relationship within human community.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Revelation 12.7-10, 12. All scriptural quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

<sup>33</sup> Browning & Reed 1985, 28.

<sup>34</sup> Browning & Reed 1985, 29.

<sup>35</sup> Browning & Reed 1985, 29.

<sup>36</sup> Browning & Reed 1985, 29.

<sup>37</sup> Browning & Reed 1985, 29.

vi) “(*Mystērion*) is . . . the mystery of divine participation in our nature.”<sup>38</sup>

In her short book on a theology of liturgical music, the Roman Catholic theologian Kathleen Harmon writes of three ways of understanding the paschal mystery, one of which is particularly germane here.

A third way of describing the paschal mystery . . . is as the dialectic tension we experience between the “already” of redemption completed in Christ and the “not yet” of salvation still being worked out within and among us. This description opens a way for us to see the paschal mystery not only as the experience of Christ but also as the defining pattern of *our own* identity and living. The tension between the “not yet” and the “already” of salvation marks daily Christian experience; it also defines the deep structure of Christian liturgy.<sup>39</sup>

She then sets this mystery into the context of the whole story of the *kosmos*, past, present and future.

The paschal mystery, then, includes the entire saving mystery of Christ --- his life, mission, passion, death, resurrection, ascension, sending of the Spirit, and promised return at the end of time --- and *our* participation in that mystery. The paschal mystery is not only a past event related to the historical Christ; it is also a present event unfolding in our lives today and in the life of the church as a whole. We have a part to play in the plan.<sup>40</sup>

It is this third approach which I believe to be congenial with an Anglican understanding of Christian faith. F. D. Maurice, an influential Anglican theologian of the mid-nineteenth century, defended sacramental forms of worship in his *The Kingdom of Christ*.

Maurice bases his arguments on the basis of both creation and redemption. God has created the universe; therefore, the physical is a means of encounter with the divine. There is no gap between the physical and the divine. Each leads to the other, so we find God in the material world and this, in turn, reeks of divinity.<sup>41</sup>

White argues further that Maurice’s belief that we find God in the material world has another consequence that speaks to our present situation.

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<sup>38</sup> Browning & Reed 1985, 29.

<sup>39</sup> Harmon 2008, 1-2.

<sup>40</sup> Harmon 2008, 3.

<sup>41</sup> White 1999, 27.

An important consequence of Maurice's sacramental thinking was that he realized the consequences of sacraments for social justice. If the material world reflects the face of God, then so does one's neighbor. Sacraments, since they are material, relate us not just to God but to our fellow humans. Our unity with one another, celebrated in the sacraments, also unites us with all our fellow creatures. Sacraments lead us to work for justice because the kingdom of Christ does not stop at church doors but leads to all the world outside.<sup>42</sup>

In the *mystērion* narrative, *revelation* rather than *intervention* is the primary mode of God's activity in the *kosmos*. We need only recall how often New Testament texts speak of 'seeing but not seeing' or 'hearing but not hearing'. How often in John's gospel, for example, is blindness a metaphor for not perceiving what God is doing through the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth.

From time to time I have turned to the transfiguration narratives to illustrate my point. We sometimes forget that these narratives are not about *transformation*, i.e., that Jesus becomes and changes into the Beloved of God, but about *transfiguration*, i.e., the revelation or unveiling of who Jesus really is, whether he is about to climb the mountain or at its summit or returning to lower ground.

The mount of transfiguration is a 'thin place' where the apostles see Jesus' fundamental identity. Likewise a *mystērion* view of the *kosmos* does not seek signs of divine intervention or does it divide the *kosmos* into sacred and secular realms. A *mystērion* view of the *kosmos* embraces the words of the psalmist: "The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world."<sup>43</sup> God is neither alien nor resident alien in the *kosmos*; God is as native to the *kosmos* as we are. Browning and Reed describe the contribution of Karl Rahner to this discussion as follows.

(All) of nature and history reveal the cosmic grace of God to which the individual sacraments are witnesses and expressions. God's grace is bringing wholeness and salvation at the roots of human existence. Sanctifying grace and divine life are present everywhere. Grace permeates the world. The sacraments are symbolic manifestations of the liturgy of the world. "The world is constantly and ceaselessly possessed by grace from its innermost roots, from the innermost personal center of the spiritual subject. It is constantly and ceaselessly sustained and moved by God's self-bestowal even prior to the question (admittedly always crucial) of how creaturely freedom reacts to this "engracing".<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> White 1999, 27-28.

<sup>43</sup> Psalm 19.1-4.

<sup>44</sup> Karl Rahner as described in Browning & Reed 1985, 11.

The *kosmos* we inhabit and that inhabits us is a tapestry made up of three strands, woven to the pattern of God's *mystērion* through the agency of the Word and the Spirit.

- i) The *kosmos* is an embodied narrative of *creation*. It is of the very nature of God to bring into being, whether *ex nihilo* or from the very stuff of the *kosmos*, new things.
- ii) The *kosmos* is an embodied narrative of *redemption*. This redemptive narrative is expressed in *metanoia*, the experience of 'seeing with new eyes', that leads to *sōtēria* or 'saving wholeness or healing'.
- iii) The *kosmos* is an embodied narrative of *final perfection*. This is to say that God is working through the Word and in the Spirit to bring about *teleiōsis*, 'the fulfilment of one's true end or purpose (*telos*)'.

Perhaps the best liturgical illustration of this *mystērion* narrative of the *kosmos* is found in a prayer used throughout the Anglican Communion from the Gelasian sacramentary of the eighth century C.E.:<sup>45</sup>

O God of unchangeable power and eternal light, look favourably on your whole Church, that wonderful and sacred mystery. By the effectual working of your providence, carry out in tranquillity the plan of salvation. Let the whole world see and know that things which were cast down are being raised up, and things which had grown old are being made new, and that all things are being brought to their perfection by him through whom all things were made, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.<sup>46</sup>

### 3) ***Sacramenta* as 'Localized' Expressions of *Mystērion***

I begin with a confession: I am a long-time and chronic 'Trekkie', that group of fifty- to sixty-year-old North Americans who continue to find meaning and enjoyment in the *Star Trek* science fiction world created by Gene Roddenberry. Recently I happened upon one of my all-time favourite episodes of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. Captain Picard and the courageous crew of the *Enterprise* encounter a species whose language confounds the much-vaunted 'universal translator'. This translator provides words and even phrases as spoken by the aliens, but these words and phrases remain incomprehensible to the crew of the *Enterprise*. In a dramatic and life-threatening effort to bridge the communication gap, the captain of the alien vessel kidnaps Picard and transports him to the surface of a planet where a hostile and invisible beast stalks the two captains. Just before the encounter that will cost the alien captain his life, Picard makes a break-through that prevents a tragic confrontation between the two peoples.

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<sup>45</sup> Hatchett 1980, 248.

<sup>46</sup> *The Book of Alternative Services* 1985, 328-329.

Picard has realized that the aliens use short phrases that allude to stories from their history and mythology to communicate their thoughts and feelings. Imagine if we said, “Mary at the cross” to express deep sorrow or “Lazarus after Jesus arrived” to express the power of resurrection. If another person does not know the stories, then the words are meaningless and there can be no communication, no communion, between us. Without shared stories we become the ‘solitudes’ that Canadians know so well from our experience of the differing narratives from the founding cultures of our country: aboriginal, then French, then English and now, immigrant.

Whatever goes on in sacraments happens to an assembly of people. . . . This demands, not a private language, but shared meaning, a common language of word and action. . . . The participants celebrate the sacrament within shared conventions of meanings that they hold in common.<sup>47</sup>

Let me suggest that, if the *kosmos* is an embodied narrative of God’s *mystērion*, then one of our tasks is to describe how the culturally and socially conditioned phenomena we call ‘sacraments’ aid our understanding of the meta-narrative that the Gelasian collect names as ‘the plan of salvation’. One of my colleagues, Harry Maier, tells his students that it is his vocation as a professor of New Testament to make the familiar strange. For that reason I shall use the terms *sacramentum* and *sacramenta* for precisely the same reason. Often the use of Latin or Greek terms puts us just enough off balance to look at things a little differently.

In this presentation I cannot give a thorough treatment of the range of the historical and theological approaches taken in the Christian tradition towards *sacramenta*. I will restrict myself to three.

One approach to describing the relationship between *mystērion* and *sacramenta* is to understand *sacramenta* as *symbols* of the *mystērion*. Clergy and laity sometimes underestimate the power of symbol. Too often have I heard a presbyter or a deacon or a bishop or a lay leader mutter, “It’s *only* symbolic.” When I hear those words, I know that I may be in the presence of someone who is losing or who has already lost a sense of wonder, an openness to surprise and an ability to let objects and actions speak. Aidan Kavanagh writes that

One who is convinced that symbol and reality are mutually exclusive should avoid the liturgy. Such a one should also avoid poetry, concerts and the theatre, language, loving another person, and most other attempts at communicating with one’s kind. Symbol is reality at its most intense degree of being expressed. One resorts to symbol when reality swamps all other forms of discourse. This happens regularly when one approaches God with others, as in the liturgy. Symbol is thus as native to liturgy as metaphor is to language. One learns to live with symbol and metaphor or gives up the ability to speak or to worship communally.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> White 1983, 2000, 31.

<sup>48</sup> Kavanagh 1982, 103.

Symbols, you see, *participate* in the reality they signify.<sup>49</sup> They do not encompass that reality, but they permit us to have communion, *koinōnia*, in the truth to which they point. Their power is derivative of their source. *Sacramenta* only have efficacy to the degree to which they participate in the *mystērion* to which they point, but they remain, nevertheless, potent signs.

Related to this symbolic understanding of the relationship of *sacramenta* to *mystērion* is to describe *sacramenta* as *ritually-enacted parables*.

Paul Ricoeur analyzes a typical thematic of the parables as ‘first, encountering the Event, then changing one’s heart, then doing accordingly.’ He does not see these movements (Event, Reversal, Decision), necessarily, in every parable, but observes that ‘each of them develops and, so to say, dramatizes one or the other of these three critical themes.’ Another New Testament scholar, John Dominic Crossan, speaks of essentially the same three themes in his exposition of parables, only he calls them, *Advent, Reversal, and Action*. By advent he means exactly the event of the kingdom encountered, the finding of the treasure, or the sowing of the seed. Reversal is the change of heart, the bold new direction, or the completely changed situation; it is the good Samaritan, the prodigal son; it is the publican praying while the Pharisee boasts. Action is behaving, out of the insight of event-advent and the changed heart of reversal; it is risking with the talents you have; it is the Samaritan’s real help for the wounded traveler; it is finishing the tower you set out to build.<sup>50</sup>

If, as I have suggested above, the *mystērion* is the meta-narrative of God and the *kosmos*, then the *sacramenta* function as ritual enactments of key events in that meta-narrative. We encounter the kingdom, are led to discern a bold new direction and then take action that may seem to some as risky but indispensable to those who participate in the parable.

To celebrate --- truly to animate --- a sacrament among a people we have first of all to grasp its essence. This will not be given to us as a concept, even if we can express it in a few words --- ‘unto you is given the mystery of the kingdom of God’ --- but as a vision. This discernment is sometimes hard for us to come to because the sacrament appears to us as a text. Hidden from us often in the text are both the *nature* of the sacrament itself and the *parable*, the involving dramatic action which can allow the sacrament to transcend text and become life.<sup>51</sup>

Finally, *sacramenta* are *dependable sign-acts*: “We wash, eat and drink, apologize and hear words of pardon, make vows --- not simply to hear and understand but to role-play our commitment of life to

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<sup>49</sup> Hooker’s theology of the sacraments depends a great deal on this concept of *participation*.

<sup>50</sup> Browning & Reed 1985, 48.

<sup>51</sup> Browning & Reed 1985, 55.



the startling new time Jesus called the kingdom of God.”<sup>52</sup> The *sacramenta* are not abstract concepts but actions in which we experience as well as proclaim the plan of salvation made known to us in Jesus of Nazareth. The ritual scholar, Ronald Grimes, makes this point provocatively in an article from 1979.

What would happen if we defended the faith ritologically instead of theologically? --- if we said, for instance, that my Christian brother *is* whoever breaks bread with me instead of my Christian brother is the who *ought* to assent to this creed and when he does, he may eat with me? What would be gained and lost if we valued symbolic actions more than symbolic words, and thus defined ‘Christian’ descriptively and gesturally rather than confessionally and theologically?<sup>53</sup>

Furthermore, *sacramenta* in the Christian tradition emerge from human experience as that experience is expressed in three dimensions familiar to the Anglican approach to the faith.

Some of the ‘localized’ expressions of the *mystērion* in the Christian tradition arise from stories and events from the New Testament. We wash in the waters of new life and eat from the table of the kingdom, because that is what Jesus and his followers did. In doing these actions we do not simply role-play as if we were actors in some historic re-creation of past events in a theme park; by doing these things we participate in the *mystērion* which these actions, past, present and future, symbolize.

Some of the ‘localized’ expressions of the *mystērion* in the Christian tradition arise from our humanness. We find life partners and commit ourselves to them. We become estranged from one another or from our community and must find our way back into right relationship with one another. We experience the realities of infirmity and aging and find ways to alleviate them, whether physically or spiritually. We come to the end of life and care for our dead and for the grieving.

Some of the ‘localized’ expressions of the *mystērion* in the Christian tradition arise from the practices we inherit from previous generations. For example, the fact that the three-fold ministry of bishops, presbyters and deacons was retained by the Church of England during the heady days of the Reformation became, as a result of the upheavals of the English Civil War and Commonwealth, an identifying mark of the Anglican way of being Christian.

How we determine whether a particular *sacramentum* is appropriate to Christian faith and praxis is an on-going task for the Christian community. The old debates as to how many *sacramenta* there are may not be as vital to us as this question: What are the criteria by means of which we recognize a given ritual activity as a legitimate expression of the *mystērion*?

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<sup>52</sup> Browning & Reed 1985, 54.

<sup>53</sup> Ronald L. Grimes, “Modes of Ritual Necessity,” *Worship* 53 (1979): 141 quoted in Browning & Reed 1985, 54.

James White, the late American Methodist liturgist, writes that there are three inter-related criteria by which we determine the legitimacy of liturgical developments:

- i) worship must be shaped to fit the needs of actual people in a specific time and place.<sup>54</sup>
- ii) what we do must reflect Christian faith.<sup>55</sup>
- iii) we cannot make decisions independently from the worship experiences of millions of Christians around the world over the course of twenty centuries.<sup>56</sup>

James Empereur, an American Jesuit liturgist, provides similar yet distinctive criteria in his *Models of Liturgical Theology*.

(In) our judging of the legitimacy of the developments in the history of liturgy, three criteria especially seem to be demanded: (1) one must look at the origins of these developments, and measure them against the primitive liturgical experiences of the church to the degree that one can be in touch with those experiences; (2) the developments must be studied in their historical contexts to see if non-theological and non-liturgical reasons were the primary motivating factors; and (3) the development must be judged as (a) meaningful, that is responding to immediate and real needs of the worshippers; (b) as having meaning, that is, it must have internal coherence; and (c) as being true, that is, it must fit into a larger context, such as the meaning of Christian Community, worship of a Trinitarian God, and the like.<sup>57</sup>

Furthermore, whether a *sacramentum* is a legitimate expression of or development in our understanding of the 'plan of salvation' depends upon our understanding of how worship and culture interact. Here I turn to that very helpful 1996 document of the Lutheran World Federation, "The Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture: Contemporary Challenges and Opportunities".

Christian worship relates dynamically to culture in at least four ways. First, it is *transcultural*, the same substance for everyone everywhere, beyond culture. Second, it is *contextual*, varying according to the local situation (both nature and culture). Third, it is *counter-cultural*, challenging what is contrary to the Gospel in a given culture. Fourth, it is *cross-cultural*, making possible sharing between different local cultures.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> White 1983, 2000, 141.

<sup>55</sup> White 1983, 2000, 142.

<sup>56</sup> White 1983, 2000, 143.

<sup>57</sup> Empereur 1987, 7.

<sup>58</sup> Nairobi 1996, 1.3.

The *transcultural* dimension of Christian faith is rooted in “the resurrected Christ whom we worship, and through whom by the power of the Holy Spirit we know the grace of the Triune God, transcends and indeed is beyond all cultures. In the mystery of his resurrection is the source of the transcultural nature of Christian worship.”<sup>59</sup> However, this transcultural nature of Christian worship and, I suggest, *sacramenta*, cannot ignore the specific cultural contexts into which the Christian faith is incarnated.

Jesus whom we worship was born into a specific culture of the world. In the mystery of his incarnation are the model and the mandate for the contextualization of Christian worship. God can be and is encountered in the local cultures of our world. A given culture's values and patterns, insofar as they are consonant with the values of the Gospel, can be used to express the meaning and purpose of Christian worship. Contextualization is a necessary task for the Church's mission in the world, so that the Gospel can be ever more deeply rooted in diverse local cultures.<sup>60</sup>

The contextual nature of Christian worship and its localized expressions I have called *sacramenta* is subject to a counter- and cross-cultural critique.

Some components of every culture in the world are sinful, dehumanizing, and contradictory to the values of the Gospel. From the perspective of the Gospel, they need critique and transformation. Contextualization of Christian faith and worship necessarily involves challenging all types of oppression and social injustice wherever they exist in earthly cultures.<sup>61</sup>

The sharing of hymns and art and other elements of worship across cultural barriers helps enrich the whole Church and strengthen the sense of the *communio* of the Church. This sharing can be ecumenical as well as cross-cultural, as a witness to the unity of the Church and the oneness of Baptism.<sup>62</sup>

I hope that you will forgive me for what has been a lengthy preamble to a discussion of marriage. However, I believe that the current debates in the Anglican Communion regarding marriage and who are appropriate participants in this culturally and socially conditioned institution are, in part, the result of differing visions as to how *sacramenta* give witness to the *mystērion*. These differing visions are the result of many factors, but one factor is that we do not share a common view of the *kosmos* and God's relationship with that *kosmos*.

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<sup>59</sup> Nairobi 1996, 2.1.

<sup>60</sup> Nairobi 1996, 3.1.

<sup>61</sup> Nairobi 1996, 4.1.

<sup>62</sup> Nairobi 1996, 5.1.

#### 4) Marriage as an Expression of the 'Plan of Salvation'

In an earlier essay written as a theological introduction to Canon XXI, 'On Marriage in the Church', of the Anglican Church of Canada I attempted to offer a theology of Christians in marriage based upon the baptismal covenant that figures prominently in the life of my province of the Communion.<sup>63</sup> Although my goal in this presentation is to make some additional observations regarding the marriage of Christians, I shall begin with the concluding two paragraphs of my earlier essay as a way of setting the stage.

So, what is distinctive about a theology of Christians in marriage. First and foremost, it is that we are talking about *Christians* in marriage. What is distinctive about our marriages is that we enter into them understanding these relationships to be *an embodiment of our baptismal vocations*. As embodiments of our baptismal vocation they are distinguishable from the marriages of our non-Christian neighbours only to the degree that our relationships become windows into the new creation that God in Christ has revealed to the world. If these windows are opaque or shuttered, then it matters not whether the marriage was performed according to the rite of a Christian community or not. If these windows do not cast light on the quality of life that God calls all human beings to live, whether married or not, then it does not matter whether the participants in the marriage are church-going or not. As Saint Francis is supposed to have said, "Proclaim the gospel. When necessary, use words!"

Second, Christians will understand their marriages to be vehicles for personal and communal transformation. All true friendships grow and develop, and the partners in the life-long covenanted relationship of marriage will commit themselves to a life-long process of spiritual maturation that will be a sign of God's on-going work of sanctification. But because our marriages are a social and public institution, Christians will understand that our marriages are means of transforming the communities in which we live. Our marriages will resist evil in all its forms and will seek to reconcile those who are estranged. Our marriages will proclaim the good news of God in Christ. Our marriages will reach out to our neighbours, regardless of who those neighbours are, because all neighbours come to us as Christ. Our marriages will work for justice and peace among all persons, so that all human beings may become fully alive and show forth the glory of God.<sup>64</sup>

As a socially and culturally conditioned institution in which Christians participate, marriage has the potential to be a dependable expression of the *mysterion* that is revealed not only in the life, death and resurrection of Christ, but in all of God's activity since the moment the *kosmos* took its first

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<sup>63</sup> Leggett 2007, 9-19.

<sup>64</sup> Leggett 2007, 18-19.

figurative breath. As I have stated earlier, I believe that the plan of salvation is a narrative that is played out in three ways: creation, redemption and final perfection.

### *Marriage as enacted parable of creation*

It is not uncommon for Christians, when discussing marriage, to turn to the creation narratives of Genesis 1 and 2. We believe that marriage, in some fashion, finds a scriptural home in these mythological accounts of the beginnings of the human race.

It is generally acknowledged by scholars of the Hebrew Bible that Genesis 1.1-2.3 is an account of the creation of the world arising from the so-called 'Priestly' source, perhaps the editorial product of the sixth century BCE.<sup>65</sup> The second account of creation, Genesis 2.4b-25, is attributed to the so-called 'Yahwist' source, perhaps a product of the tenth century BCE.<sup>66</sup>

In Genesis 1 the creation of male and female comes at a majestic moment in the six-day creation narrative.

<sup>26</sup> Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." <sup>27</sup> So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.<sup>67</sup>

God directs the newly-created couple to be "fruitful and multiply", to "fill the earth and subdue it" and to have "dominion" over every living creature.<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, God gives the couple every plant and tree yielding seed as food.<sup>69</sup>

Genesis 2 begins in a different fashion. God takes the "dust of the earth" (*adamah* in Hebrew), forms the '*adam*' ('earth creature') and breathes the breath of life into this creature of earth.<sup>70</sup> Rather than reproduce, subdue and have dominion, God charges the '*adam*' "to till and keep" the garden.<sup>71</sup> Rather than have access to all plants and trees bearing seeds, God forbids the '*adam*' to eat

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<sup>65</sup> *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 6 Hebrew Bible.

<sup>66</sup> *NOAB* 2001, 6 Hebrew Bible.

<sup>67</sup> Genesis 1.26-27.

<sup>68</sup> Genesis 1.28.

<sup>69</sup> Genesis 1.29.

<sup>70</sup> Genesis 2.7.

<sup>71</sup> Genesis 2.15.

of “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil”.<sup>72</sup> Then comes, in my opinion, one of the more striking passage in all of the Torah, the effect of which is lost, I believe, somewhat in translation.

<sup>18</sup> Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the *'adam* should be alone; I will make him a *'ezer kenegdo*.”<sup>73</sup>

*'Ezer kenegdo* is translated in the New Revised Standard Version as “a helper as his partner”. Walter Deller, a Canadian biblical scholar who most recently was Principal of the College of Emmanuel and St Chad in Saskatoon and a member of the Primate’s Theological Commission of the Anglican Church of Canada, comments on this Hebrew phrase as follows.

Furthermore, the divine intention is that humans will have a partner who is an [*'ezer kenegdo*], a ‘helper who is like its *neged*’. *Neged* in Hebrew has shades of meaning. The helper could be ‘like its opposite’ or ‘as someone who will oppose it’. Within that range of meanings, however, sex or gender is not a consideration --- *the 'ezer kenegdo is any helper who could fulfil the role of oppositional partnership*. This reading is sustained, in my view, by the rest of the narrative in Genesis 2 where sexuality and procreation never appear as a purpose for the earth creature and its eventual partner. This stands in stark contrast to Genesis 1.28 where it is presented as the first and (almost) sole purpose of the humans.<sup>74</sup>

In a private conversation, Dr Rebecca Wright of the School of Theology of the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee pointed out to me that *'ezer*, frequently translated as ‘helper’, is used repeatedly in the Psalms to refer to God. Such use suggests that the one who serves as another’s *'ezer* is not subordinate to the one being helped. The view that an *'ezer* is subordinate has been used to justify an implicit male hierarchy in the marriage relationship.

Deller suggests that there are three ways of understanding the relationship between the creation narratives in Genesis 1 and Genesis 2.

i) Genesis 2 is *complementary* to Genesis 1. Genesis 2 builds upon the sexually-differentiated normative world laid out in Genesis 1. This mode of reading, in Deller’s opinion, blurs or reads over the strong differences and distinctions between the two accounts.<sup>75</sup>

ii) Genesis 2 can be read as a *critique* of Genesis 1. Rather than dominate and forcibly subjugate the earth, humans are to serve and guard the creation. Rather than unlimited consumption of the ‘green things of the earth’, limits are placed upon what can be consumed. Rather than human

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<sup>72</sup> Genesis 2.16.

<sup>73</sup> Genesis 2.18.

<sup>74</sup> Deller 2007, 18.

<sup>75</sup> Deller 2007, 19.

beings as purely sexual beings meant to reproduce and fill the earth, human beings are meant for suitable partnership and relationship, “not as designated by God but as recognized and named for the self by the individual.”<sup>76</sup>

To be completely human is to find the one other human who can make us speak in poetry and puns, whose nakedness makes us know innocence and naivety and shamelessness. But fundamentally, the corrective of this creation story is to insist that entering into relationship . . . is the overwhelming end and purpose of human beings.<sup>77</sup>

iii) The third way of reading the two texts is to note a principal of Hebrew narrative “that what comes later is more important than, or more climactic or significant than what comes earlier”.<sup>78</sup> Reading the texts in this fashion suggests that Genesis 2 with its emphasis on *relationship* as the primary reason for the creation of an *‘ezer kenegdo* for the *‘adam* supersedes Genesis 1 with its emphasis on male-female sexuality and reproduction. “Our purpose is to live in relationship with our own unique *‘ezer kenegdo*. God trusts us to know and recognize that person, whomever s/he may be.”<sup>79</sup>

If we understand marriage in the light of Genesis 2 rather than Genesis 1, then the marriage of Christians participates in the *mystērion* of creation by embodying genuine companionship and mutual collaboration in the tending of that portion of the *kosmos* given into our care. The marriage of Christians is a localized narrative of the great narrative of creation.

#### *Marriage as enacted parable of reconciliation*

Over the past several weeks, the semi-continuous readings from the Hebrew Bible of the Revised Common Lectionary have told the story of David’s rise to become king of Israel and his descent into the misuse of the authority entrusted to him by God. Let me outline the narrative of 2 Samuel 11.1 to 12.25.

- David commits adultery with Bathsheba (2 Sam 11.1-13).
- David has Uriah killed (2 Sam 11.14-27).
- Nathan confronts David who then repents (2 Sam 12.1-15a).
- The child of David and Bathsheba dies (2 Sam 12.15b-23).
- Bathsheba conceives again and gives birth to Solomon (2 Sam 12.23-25).

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<sup>76</sup> Deller 2007, 19.

<sup>77</sup> Deller 2007, 20.

<sup>78</sup> Deller 2007, 20.

<sup>79</sup> Deller 2007, 20.

Now at first glance this might seem to be too dramatic a tale to be used as an illustration of how marriage participates in the *mystērion* of redemption.

Let me point out, however, how this tale embodies Crossan's description of how parables consist of advent, reversal and action. When Nathan confronts David with the reality of what he has done (advent of the kingdom), David acknowledges his guilt and repents before God (reversal). He suffers the death of his infant child. But, rather than persisting in grief, David turns to Bathsheba and she conceives another child (action). The child that is born, Solomon, will become David's heir who rules with wisdom and builds the first temple.

Christians who enter the covenant of marriage come from a religious tradition that understands the necessity of forgiveness if old hurts and new wrongs are ever to be laid aside in order for the new creation to be revealed in and through us and our relationships. The first of the blessing prayers of *The Book of Alternative Services* gives thanks to God for making "the way of the cross to be the way of life," while the initial petition of the prayers for the couple asks that the couple's life together "be a sacrament of our love to this broken world, so that unity may overcome estrangement, forgiveness heal guild, and joy overcome despair".<sup>80</sup>

Married life relies upon *metanoia*, the conversion of heart, mind and soul when confronted with one's own sin, intentional and unintentional. Cynthia Crysedale writes that

... an adequate theology of marriage must take account of sin. Married, covenanted love is not exempt from hurt and injustice. Thus the religious dimension of marriage involves redemption and reconciliation. Without grace, without the gift of healing and renewal and forgiveness, no potential encounter of transformation will reach its fulfillment. Indeed, it would become a stifling idolatry.<sup>81</sup>

*Metanoia* opens the door to *sōtēria*, that experience of healing and wholeness crucial to human emotional and spiritual maturity. If the marriage of Christians cannot embody this dynamic described in the baptismal rites of the American and Canadian churches as falling into sin, repenting and returning to the Lord, then our witness to the reconciling love of God remains abstract and potentially impotent.

Although Anglicans are not of one mind regarding the remarriage of divorced Christians, I dare to suggest that such marriages have the potential to be powerful parables of redemption. While I am deeply aware of the cultural and social factors that mitigate in some provinces against the authorization of such marriages, I can speak both as a presbyter who has officiated at such marriages and as a husband in such a marriage that more often than not such marriages give proof

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<sup>80</sup> *The Book of Alternative Services* 1985, 533, 534, 546, 548.

<sup>81</sup> Crysedale 1996, 96.



to the God who raises up persons who were cast down and makes new relationships that had grown old.

### *Marriage as enacted parable of final perfection*

From the very beginnings of the Christian movement we have faced the challenge of relating the Christian faith to the cultures in which the faith has been incarnated. Certainly the Christian understanding of one social institution has undergone significant development since the earliest Christian generations: marriage. For example, imagine the reaction of the first Greco-Roman Christian converts to the following passage from the letter to the Ephesians.

<sup>25</sup> Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, <sup>26</sup> in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, <sup>27</sup> so as to present the church to himself in splendour, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind --- yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish. <sup>28</sup> In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. <sup>29</sup> for no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, <sup>30</sup> because we are members of his body. <sup>31</sup> “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” <sup>32</sup> This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church. <sup>33</sup> Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband.<sup>82</sup> (Ephesians 5.25-33)

I am fully aware of how this text has been used to subordinate women to men in the marriage covenant, but our debates about the role of women in society may have caused us to miss what would have been understood as revolutionary in the latter half of the first century C.E. --- “Husbands, love your wives” --- with these words the writer sent half of his readers into an internal funk. First-century husbands might have loved their wives, I am sure that some did, but wives were first and foremost means to ends: children, securing of family property, improving and maintaining a man’s place in society. It was the odd man in middle- and upper-class society who stayed married to a wife who had not borne children or whose status did not improve her husband’s; a sensible man quickly divorced her and moved on.

Our misuse of Ephesians 5.21-33 has failed to take into account the context in which the text appears. By this I mean that we have not taken into consideration Ephesians 4.1-16. Since the Reformation, this text has played a significant role in our understanding of the place of the ordained ministry in the life of the Christian community. But if we were to read this text with new eyes, that is to say, eyes that read the text in the context of marriage, what would we learn? We would learn that our marriages are means by which we participate in *teleiōsis*, the process by means of which we achieve our *telos*, our purpose as creatures made in the image and likeness of God. Such

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<sup>82</sup> Ephesians 5.25-33 (New Revised Standard Version).

creatures are to speak the truth in love so that we may “grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ”.<sup>83</sup>

Let me illustrate this point by turning to one author’s discussion of spiritual health. L. William Countryman describes spiritual health as being characterized by centredness, faith, generosity of spirit, a sense of oneself, discipline, integrity and honesty, hospitality, compassion, vulnerability and openness and continued growth in faith, hope and love.<sup>84</sup> If one were to replace “spiritual health” with “marriage”, one would be likely to concur that these qualities are those we expect in marriages that reflect the Christian gospel.

## Summary

In summary I reiterate my primary assertions presented in this paper. First, we are all participants in the *mystērion*, the plan of salvation, woven into the fabric of the *kosmos* by God before the beginning of time. That plan of salvation consists of three strands: creation, redemption and final perfection. Second, *sacramenta*, whether understood as symbols, enacted parables or dependable sign-acts, are not *interventions* into the fabric of the *kosmos* but *revelations* or *transfigurations* that reveal the plan of salvation already at work. *Sacramenta* confront us with the advent of the kingdom that initiates a change of heart or a bold new direction or a completely changed situation that leads to our action to embody and to enact God’s plan in the places for which we have responsibility. Finally, marriage, a socially and culturally conditioned human institution, participates in the creative, redemptive and fulfilling dimensions of God’s plan of salvation. As such the marriage of Christians participates in *leitourgia*, a public work voluntarily undertaken for the common good.

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<sup>83</sup> Ephesians 4.15 (New Revised Standard Version).

<sup>84</sup> Countryman 1996, 9-10.

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***Moana Liturgy:***  
***Towards an Oceanic Theology of Marriage***  
**Winston Halapua**

*A presentation to the International Anglican Liturgical Consultation Auckland 2009.*

It is a humbling experience to be given the honour to stand in this land of Aotearoa New Zealand in the presence of leaders and scholars of our International Anglican Liturgical Consultation. My brief, as Bishop George Connor suggested, is to present a short paper on the marriage service from a *Tikanga* Polynesia perspective. I affirm that a marriage service from Polynesia does not stand alone from a wider context, from theology and from an Oceanic world view. I have chosen some key considerations from our part of the world as a pathway to widen conversation about the marriage service from an Oceanic perspective.

**An Embracing Community**

In the Kingdom of Tonga our ancient form of greetings is *sio'oto 'ofa* meaning 'my love for you - my life embraces you' (story of Bishop George Connor's contribution). As is our custom in various cultures, the response is to reciprocate the goodwill by greeting the person back. I greet you again in my Tongan language. *Sio'oto 'ofa*. Response! Within a second, we all speak Tongan! The meaning of *sio'oto 'ofa* is profound and we do well to reflect on what we truly mean and what we want to convey. *Bula* meaning 'life' is the common greeting in Fiji. *Talofa* the greeting in Samoa similarly conveys the idea of life giving embrace. In the everyday life and exchanges of people from Oceania is the spirit of embrace. In our encounter with each other, our expressions convey that the privilege that I experience in life is to be shared with you.

This underlying way of life-that we embrace in love is the background to a marriage ceremony. When the community gathers there is a gathering which embraces the couple, which shares and celebrates both life and love. The marriage is in the context of an embracing community, of deep connections to those gone before, to creation and to the God of overflowing love.

**The Sharing of Gifts**

In the Oceanic way of life, the marriage ceremony is surrounded by deeply rooted traditions. Women play a large and important part in the traditional practices surrounding marriage. Women have been the key guardians (*fahu*) of the wellbeing of the community from time immemorial. This was because men were often absent. The male role was at sea exploring, finding food and new wealth from afar. In their short or long absences, children were born, elders died, the plantations, gardens and animals need to be tended. The activities of the community did not wait for the return of the men. The women have been guardians of the household, the community and the environment. They have been the makers and conveyers of gifts which are given at time of birth, marriage and death. At the time of marriage the giving of gifts speaks powerfully of a way of life of the community.

Even today when a girl is born, a mother nursing a new born child will begin dreaming of the future and thinking of the preparation for the day of her child's marriage. Far in advance there will be a time of making the fine mats and *tapa* (bark cloth) ready for the marriage day. There will be the finding and cutting of a particular flax which produces fine material for weaving. There will be the careful preparation of the flax in the sea at the right time of the year and according to the tides. There will be the weaving of many fingers - as women in the community come together to help one another. Their weaving will be accompanied by stories of happenings and the sharing of hopes. Woven into the fine mats like prayers are the aspirations of the women of the community. A haunting common sound in Tonga is the beating of the *ike* (a small wooden hammer). It is almost like a pre-echo of the *lali* (wooden drum) or the conch which calls people to Church and which will announce a marriage in the community. The *ike* pounds the mulberry bark into ribbons which will be stuck together to make *tapa* by women in the community. This is painstaking, lengthy work. *Tapa* is made by groups of women surrounded by their children and supported by other members of the community - both male and female, young and old.

On the marriage day, if traditional dress is chosen, the best of the community is worn by the bride and the groom. On the floor of the Church and on the walls there will be the decoration of fine mats and *tapa*. The best of all the weaving and of all the *tapa* placed where the couple will stand to make their vows. The best is given to God and a sign of this is that after the ceremony, the household will present these special mats and *tapa* to the priest. The laying of the mats and *tapa* is a statement of the acknowledgement of God in the midst of the marriage. Surrounding the marriage are the years of aspiration of the community, the use of the environment in the preparation of gifts, the work of the people. The liturgy-“the work of the people” of the marriage service is preceded by the work of the people over many years.

In Oceania the presence of the gifts of the people in the marriage ceremony represent “silent and deep liturgy”. They speak of the participation of the community and of the environment - of the ancestors, of the deep love that has carried the community for many years, of struggle and hope. The couple are in the midst of community and a community which has roots in the past - a community which has worked for this day. At best, the laying of mats and *tapa* is deeply honouring of the occasion. There is no superficiality. There is a sacramental movement. There is a deep and silent expression of worship and commitment.

### **Moana - Embracing Love**

*Moana* is the ancient and common Oceanic word for ocean. The *Moana* for Oceanic people is home. It was the home for our ancestors, it is home for people now and for the future generations. *Moana* in the world view of Oceanic people is intertwined with our concept of land. Land in many part of Oceania is *fonua* in Tonga and Samoa and *vanua* in Fiji. In Aotearoa New Zealand, land is *whenua*. The two concepts express an integrated rhythm and a way of life which is intertwined and interdependent. *Fonua* is the word for the womb, and it embraces motherhood and home.

*Moana* is home and is large and deep. Our home, we see today, is in the context of the five Oceans, the Pacific Ocean, the Atlantic Ocean, the Arctic Ocean, the Antarctic and the Indian Ocean, which constitute nearly eighty percent of the entire space of this planet earth. Many living species from the whale to the tiniest plankton find their space and nourishment within the waters of the *Moana*. *Moana* is home for most living species in this planet earth. The waves and currents of the *moana* faithfully embrace almost all nations of this earth. The daily rhythm of interaction between the sun, moon, the forces of gravity, the atmosphere and the *moana* gift life to creatures, great and small. As a concept, a spirituality and a way of life, *Moana* for Oceanic people means life, embrace, reciprocity and flowing grace. There are many, many islands in Oceania and the *Moana* provides a link between them. The *Moana* represents a world view of a way of life which celebrates the dynamic interconnectedness.

In Oceania there is the beginning in Oceania of the exploration of what is called *Moana* Theology. This theology uses the Ocean as a way of understanding our relationship to creation, to one another and to God. It uses *Moana* as a metaphor for God and the overflowing life-giving embrace of the Creator God, the God who came in Jesus to give life in abundance and the life-giving Spirit. *Moana* Theology may potentially contribute powerfully to liturgies in Oceania including that of marriage.

### **Cana of Galilee – a Story which connects to Oceanic Communities**

The Gospel story of the wedding in Cana recorded in John's Gospel is a story which has deep resonances for Oceanic communities. In the story we see the wedding in the context of a feasting, celebrating community. This is a village story in which the best falls short. Oceanic people understand the role of Mary behind the scenes aware of the need for hospitality to be generous. Through the Oceanic lens, Mary acts as a *fahu* - an older sister who is guardian of the community event. She is the one who points to Jesus who brings overflowing life to the marriage. The story for Oceanic people speaks of the One whose presence in a dynamic life giving way blesses the celebrating community and transforms the event. It is a story of the divine embrace of a community and a couple by the overflowing love of God in Jesus. (see Methodology diagram)

### **Current Marriage Services in Polynesia**

We as *Tikanga* Polynesia are still developing translations of the forms of marriage services provided in English into the diverse languages of our people. Language is linked to our ancestors, identity, whole way of life, spirituality, stories and hopes. The challenge is for us to develop our own liturgies which emerge from our environment, our deep experiences and our encounter with a life giving God.

## ***Marriage rites in Tanzania***

**Mdimi Mhogolo**

*Presentation to the International Anglican Liturgical Consultation  
Canterbury, England, August 1-6, 2012*

### **1. Introduction.**

It is unfortunate that when Christianity was introduced to Tanzania, it never appreciated the forms and symbols of Tanzanian marriage rites so as to accommodate them in forming marriage rites for Christians. Instead Christianity introduced all forms and symbols for marriage rites from the West, which until now are strange and alien to the Tanzanian mind and the way Tanzanians see reality. To this day all Christian marriage rites are still foreign and alien. It is therefore good and encouraging to revisit our cultural roots to rediscover the Tanzanian understanding of marriage.

### **2. The Meaning.**

In our context, marriage was a union of two families and not just the union of the couple concerned. It was a process filled with symbols around a sacramental understanding of the world. In the process of the giving and the receiving of the gift [the bride -to- be] moments of memorable actions and events made the process from one event to another until the two families became one. Marriage was regarded as a community building block that caused individual families to grow into communities of extended families, clans and eventually to ethnicity.

The celebrations of marriage were community-based affairs that involved all the people in one given community. The events, symbols and actions taken during the process made people regard the couple as socially and duly married, and that the two families were also recognised as extended. It was a human affair, sanctioned by God, but left to human beings to determine the details of the rites and ceremonies.

### **3. The Shape of the Process.**

In the 120 ethnic groupings in Tanzania, there were many variations of the actions and symbols that made marriage take place, but the shape and main events remained the same.

#### **3.1. 'Booked for marriage'**

The process of marriage kicked off in a simple action of 'marking' or 'booking' a girl for marriage. To express the communal meaning and participation of the wider family, the 'booking gift' was given by the bridegroom to the grandmother [bibi] of the girl. The 'Bibi' would pass on the gift to the girl's parents or she would keep it for herself. Other tokens would have been given to the girl,



but had no value in themselves. The faithfulness of keeping the 'booking' was observed by the whole receiving family. The booking lasted only for a very short time – giving way to the next negotiation and agreement event.

### **3.2. Negotiations and Agreement**

This event formed the basis for the two families to either come together or remain at a distance from each other. The whole exercise considered the worth of the gift – the girl. The girl gift was precious for both families and the negotiations of the exchange of material goods gave the opportunity for the two families to start knowing each other, and set the way the gift would be treated by the receiving family. If the girl's family accepted the other family, every effort was made to proceed to the next event.

### **3.3. The Entrance to a new life by the ceremonial washing and anointing of the Bride and Bridegroom.**

The sacramental use of water and oil was important for the washing away of one form of existence [singleness] to a new existence [married life] by anointing. It was this event that effected a change of mind, heart and body for the couple from the old types of living to the new, from childhood to adulthood. Being an adult meant being married. [If a person was not married, though she/he had advanced in age, he/she would still be regarded as a child]. The couple were inducted into a life of togetherness. The couple were washed by the 'bibis' or they washed themselves in front of the 'Bibis' in the inner chambers of the Bride's home. By agreeing to go into this ceremony, the couple affirmed their willingness to live together in the extended families. The perfumed oil that the bridegroom provided for the anointing of the bride accompanied with a new black wedding dress for the new married life. Other symbols would have been given and received by the couple [beads and shells] but they were of less ceremonial importance.

After the anointing of the couple had been done, the couple was brought to a sitting room to hear words of wisdom from both parents, that the two families were now one and that the couple were to live in peace, love, friendship and harmony as an expression of the union of the families

### **3.4. The Reception of the Bride to the Bridegroom's family.**

Then followed a journey to the Bridegroom family home where more symbolic actions of reception of the bride to the new family were performed with the bride. A small delegation from the bride's family accompanied the bride to witness the reception events and the consummation of the couple. If all went well with the consummation, more gifts were given to the bride and after the bride's family had been notified that all had gone well, the family would come over to the bridegroom's home for feasting and more celebrations. The reception events welcomed the new member into the extended family, and made her as one of the family. The way she would be received signalled the way she would integrate into the new family. The welcoming events also signified how the two families could come close to each other.

### **3.5. The Seal.**

The marriage process did not end until a first child was born. The child sealed the marriage of the couple and the two families. The child was named after one of the founding family names and he/she became a living symbol of the two families being one and guaranteed the continuity of the community.

### **3.6. Celebrations and feasting.**

In all events, community celebrations, liturgical music and dancing accompanied the events. Vigils of music and dancing by the whole communities celebrated the events around the negotiation and agreement, the washing and anointing of the couple, the reception of the bride to the bridegroom's family and the coming of the bride's family to greet the bridegroom's family. Music and liturgical dancing accompanied by feasting and merry making were provided by the families during the events that took place.

The marriage arrangement was a process that set the couple apart as being married. The sacramental actions done to the couple were the ones that placed them in a new life of marriage. The couple did not have to say anything to each other or to anyone. They were just the recipients of the consecrating actions. The only activity they could perform together was the washing and the anointing. They were only two pieces that made the two families one. The washing away of the old life to the anointing into the new life started a life of exploration of friendship, love and loyalty to each other in the context of the community of the extended family.

## **4. Changes wrought by Christianity and Colonization.**

The introduction of Christianity in Tanzania changed the way marriage has been celebrated by Christians in the country. Together with the colonial legal influence during and after independence, the Tanzanian Marriage Act of 1971 reflects not only a Western understanding of marriage, but also a typical 1661 Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England meaning of marriage.

According to the Tanzanian Marriage Act, people over 18 years old can get married without the consent of their parents. Marriage is no longer regarded as communal and extended, but as an individual human right of the couple. A marriage gift constitutes nothing legal nor does the washing/anointing mean anything positive if celebrated. Marriage is an act of the State controlled by the government Marriage Act of 1971. If registered by the government Marriage Registrar, priests become government agents in officiating marriages according to the Marriage Act. The Marriage Act recognises marriage rites of Christians as contains sufficient evidence for legal marriages to take place.

The marriage rites of the Anglican Church of Tanzania adopted the 1662 Book of Common Prayer marriage rite. The couple are the ones that make the marriage by making promises to each other,

the exchange of vows, the holding of hands and the exchange of rings. The officiating priest pronounces the couple as married only if the couple has made all those promises, vows and acts. Feasting and celebrations no longer are family oriented but are controlled by marriage committees of friends and uncoordinated family members. These committees give no added value to the meaning of marriage. We desperately need to rediscover the rich communal nature of the Tanzanian traditional marriage process.

# ***The Marriage of Christians or a Christian Marriage Rite?***

## ***Theological and liturgical implications for Anglicans***

**Simon Jones**

*Presentation to the International Anglican Liturgical Consultation*

*Canterbury, 2011*

### **Introduction**

There's a sense in which I shouldn't be here at all. I don't say that because, as some of my colleagues at Merton have pointed out in recent weeks, there's a certain irony in someone who is unmarried speaking on the subject of marriage (although, as I've been quick to remind them, ignorance of a subject never normally stops most Oxford dons from pontificating!); nor because, although I officiate at a number of weddings each year,<sup>[1]</sup> the study of marriage rites has not been a particular academic interest until now; but rather, and much more importantly, because it should really be Kenneth Stevenson giving this paper. When the Steering Committee invited me to speak, Eileen was honest enough to say that it was only because of Kenneth's untimely death that the invitation was coming my way. The prospect of filling Kenneth's shoes was a daunting one, but it is also a huge privilege, and so I dedicate this paper to him from whom, during the 12 years that I knew him, I received so much support and encouragement, and from whose writings on the topic of our Consultation I have gained many valuable insights.

Let's begin with part of a video clip from a Church of England website.<sup>[2]</sup>

'You can marry in a Church', so proclaims the headline on one of the pages of the Church of England's relatively new website [www.YourChurchWedding.org](http://www.YourChurchWedding.org), a point underlined by that video clip which can also be found on YouTube.<sup>[3]</sup> 'You're welcome to marry in the Church of England whatever your beliefs, whether or not you are christened and regardless of whether you go to church or not. It's your church, and we welcome you!'

Reading the small-print is always important and, in this case, the inclusivity of the welcome receives some qualification when it is acknowledged that 'a complication will only arise if one of you has been married before, or, if one of you is a foreign national, but there may still be a way forward'. Potential complications aside, in this very public space the Church of England is making a bold and somewhat uncharacteristically unambiguous statement about its understanding of marriage which, for me, raises interesting and challenging questions about the theology of marriage, and the liturgical rites which express it, which as members of this Consultation we might find it helpful to consider as we continue our conversation this week.

## Baptism and the Marriage of Christians

In the theology section of our Auckland document, we said that:

It is more helpful theologically to begin our reflections by speaking of the *marriage of Christians* rather than of 'Christian marriage'. It is as baptized persons, forgiven and reconciled with God through Christ, that we come to marriage, bringing with us the graced possibility of having our relationships reflect the intimate, life-giving love that is the community of the Holy Trinity.

And, indeed, the paper which Richard Leggett gave in Auckland focussed specifically on 'the marriage of Christians rather than Christian marriage'[\[4\]](#) in which he expressed a theology of such marriage as 'an embodiment of . . . baptismal vocations'.[\[5\]](#)

The 'marriage of Christians' is undoubtedly one place from which we can begin and, as Richard's paper convincingly demonstrated, there is much to be gained from doing so, but, for many of us, isn't that a somewhat unrealistic starting point? I am aware that the Church of England may, at present, be one of very few Anglican Provinces which permits couples to marry when neither party is baptized (and, by implication, are not just what we might call 'cultural Christians' or agnostics, but are sometimes atheists or adherents of other faiths).[\[6\]](#) My rather uninformed impression, which you can correct later, is that, in most Provinces, the basic qualification is that either the bride or the groom needs to be baptized in order for the couple to be married in church.[\[7\]](#) But even where that's the requirement, the marriage rites that most of us use, and the theology which underlies them, are predicated on the assumption that a Christian marriage service is a rite for the marriage of Christians, the marriage of two people who are united with one another, with Christ and his church, through their common baptism. Talk of marriage as sacrament or sacramental and, in the west, the deeply engrained belief that the man and woman are the ministers of the rite, are both related to this.

If that's true, what happens when the reality of the situation does not live up to the rite's theological and liturgical expectations? Where the requirement is for only one party to be baptized, isn't the temptation to deceive ourselves with a liturgical sleight of hand, suspending reality while we upgrade the unbaptized partner for the duration of the service? We do this for good pastoral and missiological reasons, certainly, but also to enable the rite to bear the weight of a particular theology of marriage based upon the not unreasonable assumption that a Christian marriage rite is for the marriage of Christians.[\[8\]](#) And, if that's the case when only one party is baptized, don't we also do the same with both partners when neither is?

In the example with which I began, the Church of England is not just permitting, in exceptional circumstances, those who are not Christians to be married in church; it is positively, explicitly and

unashamedly encouraging it. In other Provinces, marriages are frequently solemnized between a man and a woman, one of whom is baptized and the other not. The issue of the relationship between baptism and marriage, though ignored or, more likely, assumed by most of our liturgical rites, has such fundamental implications for the work of this Consultation that I would like to devote much of what I say this morning to it, while picking up several related liturgical topics on the way.<sup>[9]</sup>

In considering this relationship, I make no apology for spending some time comparing the positions of the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches for, given the paucity of serious theological writing on marriage within the Anglican tradition, we have undeniably been influenced by Catholic theology on this subject, sometimes unconsciously, sometimes uncritically. It's interesting to note that, compared with the rites of Christian Initiation and the Eucharist, the influence of the theological and liturgical traditions of the East upon the revision of Anglican marriage services has, with few exceptions, been barely discernible.

### **Anglican and Roman Catholic Approaches**

The final report of the Anglican – Roman Catholic *Commission on the Theology of Marriage and its Application to Mixed Marriages*, published in 1975, listed the following as the first two of its three fundamental principles:

- i. That Holy Baptism itself confers Christian status and is the indestructible bond of union between all Christians and Christ, and so of Christians with one another. This baptismal union remains firm despite all ecclesiastical division.
- ii. That in Christian marriage the man and the woman themselves make the covenant whereby they enter into marriage as instituted and ordained by God; this new unity, the unity of marriage, is sacramental in virtue of their Christian baptism and is the work of God in Christ.<sup>[10]</sup>

Unsurprisingly, there is a very obvious degree of correspondence between these two theological principles and the Roman Catholic Church's liturgical provision for marriage. There are three different rites: first, the nuptial mass, which is envisaged as normative. In this rite the reception of Holy Communion is described as 'the source of love (which) lifts us up into communion with our Lord and one another'.<sup>[11]</sup> Second, there is a rite of marriage outside mass, intended for use at the celebration of a 'mixed marriage' of a Roman Catholic and a baptized Christian of another denomination. And, finally, there is a rite for use when a Catholic marries someone who is not baptized. Comparing these three, it is very clear that, for those who find themselves marrying according to the third rite, the unbaptized status of the non-Catholic partner disqualifies the couple from entering an explicitly sacramental union. These words, with which the priest addresses the couple at the beginning of the first two rites, are omitted in the third:

(Christ) has already consecrated you in baptism and now he enriches and strengthens you by a special sacrament so that you may assume the duties of marriage in mutual and lasting fidelity.[\[12\]](#)

Without baptism there is no 'special sacrament' of marriage. Thus it is the baptismal identity of the couple contracting the marriage and not their both being in full communion with the See of Peter, which enables them to confect the sacrament (to use the technical term which Kenneth Stevenson thought had 'overtones suggesting the mixing of a cocktail'![\[13\]](#)), ministering sacramental grace to each other.

But what of Anglicans? According to the ARCIC report, *Life in Christ*, Anglicans have moved away from the shared position articulated in the 1975 statement so that we and Roman Catholics no longer agree on this point:

Anglicans, while affirming the special significance of marriage within the Body of Christ, emphasize a sacramentality of marriage that transcends the boundaries of the Church. For many years in England after the Reformation, marriages could be solemnized only in church. When civil marriages became possible, Anglicans recognized such marriages, too, as sacramental and graced by God, since the state of matrimony had itself been sanctified by Christ by his presence at the marriage at Cana of Galilee (cf. BCP Introduction to the Solemnization of Holy Matrimony, 1662).[\[14\]](#)

But is that true? When have Anglicans made any official resolution to recognize civil marriages as sacramental? Where is there any authoritative teaching or theological writing on this subject? The absence of a reference to any such source, save to the preface to the 1662 marriage service, is somewhat alarming. We will return to Cana presently, but my suggestion here is that this may be stretching *lexorandi lexcredendi* a little too far!

For Roman Catholics the situation is clear. Civil ceremonies are not canonically valid and, in a large number of countries, such as France, where it is common for couples to marry civilly before coming to church for a religious ceremony, the latter is the convalidation of the former; without it the marriage would not exist in the eyes of the church. Furthermore, Catholic teaching makes it clear that every canonical marriage is a sacramental marriage. Civil marriages which are not convalidated are not sacramental.[\[15\]](#)

But again I ask, what of Anglicans? This may not seem like the most obvious moment to throw a theological hot potato into the discussion, but the position which a number of Anglican Provinces hold towards the remarriage of divorcees is, perhaps, instructive in this connection. If civil marriages are, as ARCIC tells us, 'sacramental and graced by God' why do some Anglicans require divorcees to marry civilly rather than in church? Does such policy and practice call into question the sacramental efficacy of the civil ceremony which makes it preferable for divorcees to marry there rather than in church? If that's not the case, then the two class system seems difficult to justify, and

its illogicality is further reinforced if a couple not permitted to marry according to an Anglican rite are invited to an Anglican church for a blessing after their civil marriage. If liturgists are permitted to comment on this contentious issue, we could perhaps note that, if mutual consent and blessing are the two fundamental components of the marriage service, what Stevenson identifies as the 'deep structures' of the rite,<sup>[16]</sup> its liturgical and theological integrity is called into question if, in the case of certain couples, the church is prepared to perform one part of it but not the other.

Let's leave divorce there, and return to the more fundamental question of the relationship between baptism and the marriage of Christians. Encouraged by ARCIC and Charles Sherlock's paper, our Auckland document, having preferred to talk of the marriage of Christians rather than Christian marriage, also affirmed that

Since marriage is a human reality that predates Christian history and Christian worship, we affirm the sacramental character of all marriages, whether the participants are Christians or not (John 2). All marriages provide the partners with the opportunity to enjoy that intimacy and creativity that the Christian tradition finds expressed in the life of the Trinity.

I want to return to the Trinity later, but what of the adorning and beautifying presence of Christ at a wedding in Cana of Galilee? Is this a sufficient biblical and theological foundation stone on which to build an argument for the sacramental character of all marriages? I would say not.

Traditionally, of course, the sacramental nature of marriage has rested not on this text, but on Ephesians 5:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her . . . No one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, because we are members of his body. 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'. This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church.<sup>[17]</sup>

The Sarum rite contained no fewer than eight nuptial blessings between the marriage and the mass, but the text which is described as the 'sacramental blessing',<sup>[18]</sup> located between the Lord's Prayer and the Peace, makes explicit use of the Ephesians text:

*God, you have consecrated the bond of marriage  
with such an excellent mystery  
as to prefigure in the covenant of marriage  
the sacrament of Christ and his Church.*<sup>[19]</sup>

The theological and liturgical significance of this text cannot be underestimated. As Stevenson points out, in Sarum, as in the Uses of Hereford and York, if the bride is a widow, the consequence of her having been married previously is that this sentence is omitted from the nuptial blessing. This privileges the Ephesians text. Since it can only be used for first marriages, it is invested with greater significance than rest of the blessing formula, and its omission is in contrast to the practice



of other medieval rites, which required that the whole blessing be omitted in the case of second marriages.[\[20\]](#)

When we turn to the Prayer Book tradition, the influence of Sarum upon Cranmer is clear, as is his reforming agenda. Cranmer's revision of the 'sacramental blessing' reads:

*O God, who hast consecrated the state of Matrimony  
to such an excellent mystery,  
that in it is signified and represented  
the spiritual marriage and unity betwixt Christ and his Church.*

This is not the only place that we find reference to Ephesians 5 in Cranmer's service. The preface describes marriage as 'signifying unto us the mystical union betwixt Christ and his Church' and Ephesians 5.25-end is the first of the passages of scripture included in the homily to be read if no sermon is preached.[\[21\]](#)

For Cranmer, inspired by the writer to the Ephesians, marriage is undoubtedly a 'mystery', but he stops short of following the Vulgate and Sarum in making the not inconsiderable linguistic and theological leap from Greek *mysterion* to Latin *sacramentum*. That said, many Anglicans have been happy to talk of the sacramental nature of marriage, based on the Ephesians text, without giving it the more specific and, some might say, restrictive nomenclature of 'sacrament'.

In the ARCIC report, *Life in Christ*, in the section before it states that Anglicans 'emphasize a sacramentality of marriage that transcends the boundaries of the Church', it maintains that Anglicans and Roman Catholics share a common belief that

Marriage, in the order of creation, is both sign and reality of God's faithful love, and thus it has a naturally sacramental dimension. Since it also points to the saving love of God, embodied in Christ's love for the Church (cfEph 5.25), it is open to a still deeper sacramentality within the life and communion of Christ's own Body.

Compared with the John 2 justification for the sacramentality of all marriages, the Ephesians text provides a much more explicitly christological model which, to my mind, requires the baptismal status of both partners as a necessary pre-condition. Pastorally, we may not like this, as it can sound exclusive and even discriminatory. But surely it is not possible for a couple to experience this deeper sacramental life within the body of Christ unless they are first members of that body.[\[22\]](#)

Phillip Tovey rightly expresses concern at the 'serious omission' of the Ephesian text in some modern Anglican revisions.[\[23\]](#) Given its significant theological and liturgical place within the Anglican and broader western tradition (not to mention its use in the east), it should not lightly be jettisoned. Indeed, despite the fact that many may be unhappy about the teaching of other parts of this passage which refer to male headship and wifely obedience, this Consultation may wish to

consider whether it is so fundamental to our theological understanding of marriage, that we should recommend that it continue to have an honoured place within our marriage rites and, in particular, in prayers of blessing for the marriage of Christians.

Returning again to our Auckland document, what can be said of its contention, which John 2 is said to lend weight to, that, since marriage existed before Christ, it is universally sacramental? Helen Oppenheimer argues for the universalist position when she says that marriage goes back to the origins of human existence.[\[24\]](#) As a gift of God in creation, the true character of marriage goes 'back to the beginning'. It existed before Christ, and the role of Jesus' teaching on the subject is to restore and illuminate it.[\[25\]](#)

It is one thing to talk about marriage as a divine gift through which humanity is enabled to participate in God's creative and redeeming love for the world. It is quite another to talk about the 'true character of marriage' going 'back to the beginning'. This somewhat romantic notion runs the risk of not taking seriously the variety of reasons for which marriage developed at different times and in different places: to form alliances between families, clans and tribes, to protect bloodlines, and to grant rights to property, to name but three; all of these and other factors which, in varying combinations, led to the institution of marriage which, in some places was monogamous, and in others polygamous.

I do not mention this to argue against the sacramental character of all marriages although, by now, I'm sure you realise that I have my doubts! It may well be right for our Consultation to make this assertion but, if we do, it needs a firmer theological foundation than we have given it thus far, and also needs to take seriously the insights of anthropological study into the origins of marriage as a social institution and the relationship between consanguinal and affinal kinship.

My hunch is that, consciously or not, when we make a statement like 'we affirm the sacramental character of all marriages' our hearts and minds are being driven by the twin engines of a modified / reformed western theology of marriage as a sacrament conferred by the bride and the groom, and a desire for inclusivity. And it's to these two aspects of the discussion that I now want to turn.

### **Bride and Groom as Ministers of Marriage**

The question of who is the minister of marriage, the priest or the couple, is one that has historically divided the east and the west. In the Roman Catholic Church, influenced by Roman law, the theology of marriage has made extensive use of the language of contract, so that the bride and groom enter the contract by their mutual consent and are the ministers of the sacrament to one another. In contrast, the eastern traditions hold that the priest is the minister of marriage. For Meyendorff,

As he is also the minister of the Eucharist, the Orthodox Church implicitly integrates marriage into the *eternal* Mystery, where the boundaries between heaven and earth are broken and where human decision and action acquire an eternal dimension.[\[26\]](#)

Before considering the Anglican position, it's worth asking whether the issue is as clear cut as is commonly suggested. I do not think so. In Slavonic editions of the Byzantine rite, the bride and groom each give their verbal consent to the other[27] and, even in the non-Slavonic versions, in the service of betrothal, the couple themselves exchange rings which the priest has blessed.[28] Marriage in the east is, by no means, all the priest's doing. And, in the west, if we take the 1614 *Rituale Romanum* as an example, after the couple have given their consent the priest then 'orders them to join their right hands, saying:

*I join you in matrimony,[29]  
in the name of the Father +  
and of the Son  
and of the Holy Spirit.'*[30]

He then sprinkles them with holy water. Stevenson is therefore surely right to observe:

Whatever the canon lawyers may say, the liturgy teaches something else – yes, the couple do make their consent, and this is central, but the priest is the person who actually 'joins them together', before even the nuptial Mass has begun.[31]

And, of course, behind the so-called eastern and western traditions, we find evidence of an earlier tradition of God himself joining the couple together, expressed, for example, in this prayer from the Gregorian Sacramentary, 'O God, through you a woman is joined to her husband'.[32] Added to which, there is also the belief that the divine union is brought about through the couple's participation in the eucharist, as this passage from Tertullian suggests:

The marriage of baptized Christians is, by virtue of their baptism, a Church marriage, and one that is moreover firmly established in its adherence to the Christian way of life . . . by the joint participation of the two partners in the liturgical celebration of the Christian community and by their being able to pray together at home. The angels are witnesses of such a Christian married life, safeguarding its continued existence. The heavenly Father gives his consent and his blessing to such a marriage.[33]

What, then, of our Anglican rites? The Anglican – Roman Catholic report of 1975 was clear that 'in Christian marriage the man and the woman themselves make the covenant whereby they enter into marriage as instituted and ordained by God'.[34] Our Auckland document says something similar when it maintains that the 'marriage is "made" by the couple'; as does Charles Sherlock, 'It is the couple who enter the marriage covenant, and so are the proper "ministers" of the marriage';[35] and Bishop Mdimi, in his report on Tanzanian marriage rites, says: 'The couple are the ones that make the marriage by making promises to each other, the exchange of vows, the holding of hands and the exchange of rings'.

Well, if that is the Anglican position, how does it compare with what we find in Cranmer's liturgical revisions? My own reading of Cranmer's rites leads me to suggest that the couple, God, the priest

and the congregation all have a part to play in making the marriage. In the two Prayer Books of Edward VI, the consent of both parties is received by the priest before the couple make their vows to each other, and the man gives a ring (and, in 1549, 'other tokens of spousage') to the woman. Cranmer the Reformer does not permit the ring to be blessed by the priest before it is given (although it is first placed on the Prayer Book), but adapts and expands the Sarum blessing into a prayer for the couple, after which the priest joins their right hands together and says: 'Those whom God hath joined together: let no man put asunder'. This quotation from Matthew 19.6 is followed by the proclamation of the marriage, the text of which is drawn from Hermann's *Consultation*.

For Stevenson, the ordering of these liturgical elements is significant. The placement of the scriptural verse after the prayer expresses a 'Reformed theology of the marriage rite' which contrasts with the medieval rite's emphasis on the role of the priest.<sup>[36]</sup> The ordering of the elements here may well be significant, and makes good liturgical sense, but it is difficult not to interpret the priest's joining of the couple's hands, accompanied by the Matthean formula, as a statement that it is God who joins the man and woman together, through their consent freely given and vows which they have made, and also through the ministry of the priest who, in joining their hands, gives ritual expression to the church's belief that they have been joined together by God.

God, the priest and the couple, therefore, have a part to play in making the marriage, but so too does the congregation. The prefaces to 1549 and 1552 begin

Dearly beloved friends, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of his congregation, to join together this man and this woman in holy matrimony.

If, then, we accept that the Anglican tradition is not consonant with traditional Roman Catholic teaching that the man and the woman exclusively make the marriage, where do we go from here? One way forward is to adopt Michael Lawley's suggestion of seeing the priest as the 'co-minister' of the marriage along with the couple.<sup>[37]</sup> Charles Sherlock mentioned this last year, describing the priest's presence as a

sign that the couple's promises are made 'in the presence of God' [and] being fitting rather than being necessary to the sacramentality of the marriage being celebrated.

While a modified western approach is certainly a possibility, it does not, to my mind, remove the issue of what we are requiring of, or imposing upon, couples where one or both partners is not Christian. Is it pastorally appropriate to tell a Jew, Hindu or atheist marrying in church that they are one of the ministers of this sacramental rite? Do we maintain that this is our theology of marriage, and then leave it up to the couples who ask to be married in our churches to decide whether it is appropriate for them? This 'take it or leave it' approach lacks pastoral integrity and sensitivity if we want our banner headline to be 'You can get married in a church', and it also falls foul of the theological sleight of hand that I mentioned earlier when, in using a rite designed for the marriage of Christians, we upgrade one or both partners for the duration of the service.

So what other options do we have? I'd like to consider two. First, a rite which is explicitly not for the marriage of Christians. And then, second, an alternative theology of marriage to the modified-western model that we have been considering thus far, and which continues to dominate Anglican thinking on the subject.

### **Two possible ways forward**

In 2001 the Anglican Church of Canada authorized a rite for 'The celebration and blessing of a marriage between a Christian and a person of another faith tradition.'[\[38\]](#) Comparing this service with 'The celebration and blessing of a marriage' in the 1985 Canadian *Book of Alternative Services*,[\[39\]](#) a number of points are worthy of comment. First, the structure of the two rites is identical: Gathering, Word, Wedding, Prayers, Blessing of the Marriage and, finally, the exchange of Peace. Second, in both the presiding minister is referred to throughout as the 'celebrant'. This term is used in other Canadian services, not least the Eucharist, and so doesn't necessarily mean that it is used here to refer to the priest as the exclusive minister of the rite, as 'celebrant' can be taken to suggest. Third, and more significantly, the 2001 rite has been denuded of all trinitarian and christological language. Although it recommends that a Gospel passage should 'normally be read' at the service, the rite contains no other explicitly Christian content, save for one mention of the Holy Spirit in the nuptial blessing.[\[40\]](#)

To give a few examples: in the preface, although both rites declare that it is God's purpose that 'as husband and wife give themselves to each other in love, they shall grow together and be united in that love', the 2001 rite omits the Ephesian referent 'as Christ is united with his Church'. Given what has already been said about this particular scriptural image, this seems to make good theological sense. Less convincing, however, is the removal of all other distinctively Christian content from the service. The collect which follows the preface has been changed from being addressed to 'God our Father' to 'Holy God', and the latter, like the prayer for the blessing of the rings, omits the christological ending 'through Jesus Christ our Lord'. In the vows, 'according to God's holy law' is in brackets so that it may be omitted and, in the proclamation of the marriage, the couple are declared to be husband and wife 'in the name of God' rather than the persons of the Trinity. More radical still, given the importance of blessing within the rite, is the omission of the Trinitarian nuptial blessing, 'God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, bless, preserve and keep you' and its replacement with the Aaronic formula.[\[41\]](#)

What are we to make of such a rite? To my mind, whilst it has integrity in being explicit that it is not for the marriage of Christians, and in not pretending that non-Christians are Christians for the sake of supporting a particular nuptial theology, it nevertheless feels like a second class alternative, the liturgical equivalent of 'the kind of beverages sometimes produced in the forlorn hope that they will satisfy both teetotallers and others',[\[42\]](#) to quote Michael Ramsey, commenting on the 1971 Church of England report, *Prayer and the Departed*.

The removal of all references to Christ and the Trinity leaves a pale reflection of an Anglican marriage rite which has been drained of its theological distinctiveness and struggles to be recognized as Christian. If a Christian marriage rite is for the marriage of Christians, the desire to

produce a more neutral rite for the marriage of a Christian with someone of another faith tradition is understandable, but is it theologically or pastorally desirable or justifiable?[43] That is certainly an issue that this Consultation would do well to consider.

In the final section of this paper, I would like to suggest a second approach: that for missiological and pastoral, as well as theological and liturgical reasons, we affirm the importance of using an explicitly Christian marriage rite for all those who are canonically eligible to marry in our Provinces. Such a rite should be honest about the context in which the church finds itself, and is therefore not required to have underlying it the assumption that the bride and groom will always be Christian, or that they are the ministers of the marriage. Rather, marriage is celebrated by the church as a gift offered by God to a couple who wish to experience the transforming love which exists at the heart of the Trinity, and between Christ and his church, by entering into a permanent and committed relationship with each other. Understood in this way, the declarations, vows and exchange of rings are the couple's thankful response to this gift through the sacrificial giving of themselves, and their solemn commitment to treasure this gift in each other. Likewise, the prayers of thanksgiving and blessing are the church's recognition that the gift has been offered and received, and its sealing of that gift by the invocation of the Spirit and, where appropriate, the celebration of the Eucharist.

According to Trevor Lloyd, the Church of England's Liturgical Commission tried to embody a 'charismatic view of marriage as gift', 'a gift in *Trinitarian* creation', in its proposals for the *Common Worship* revision of the *Alternative Service Book* marriage rite, but were thwarted by the House of Bishops. Interestingly, bearing in mind the distinction that has been drawn between a rite for the marriage of Christians and a Christian marriage rite, the Commission unashamedly declared that there was a 'high view of Christian marriage embodied in the [proposed] service'.<sup>[44]</sup>

If we take seriously this view of marriage as divine gift, then we can talk confidently about a Christian marriage rite while at the same time offering the open invitation 'You can marry in a Church'. Developing Cranmer's possible deliberate ambiguity over the identity of the minister of marriage, God and the church, the couple and the congregation all play a part in making the marriage. To limit our theology of marriage to an exclusively western or eastern understanding seems unnecessarily restrictive and, as we have seen, can create problems when one or both partners is not baptized.

Such an approach would by no means seek to be inclusive by expressing the 'lowest common "God-consciousness" of the population', to quote Bryan Spinks,<sup>[45]</sup> nor encourage the development of a Christian rite that is so filled with biblical allusions, symbolic actions and theological jargon that it is completely alien and incomprehensible to those with no knowledge or experience of the Christian tradition. Rather, it is a suggestion that we recover confidence in the integrity of marriage rites which are explicitly Christian, as the Anglican tradition has received and revised them, and see marriage itself not primarily as contract or, even, as sacrament (though both are important) but as divine gift.

As well as being one rite for all, such a rite needs to be sufficiently flexible so that it can incorporate particular texts and symbolic acts for the marriage of Christians. In such situations, on the basis of the baptismal status of the couple, it is possible to talk about marriage as sacramental or a sacrament, and identify particular elements in the rite to express this: the nuptial blessing, for example, incorporating the Ephesian image of the marriage between Christ and his church; the celebration of a nuptial Eucharist with, again, the possibility of making reference to Ephesians 5 in the preface to the Eucharistic Prayer. Even when the Eucharist is not celebrated, we need to be creative in considering other ritual possibilities which express the understanding of marriage as a response to baptismal vocation. For example, the use of baptismal water to bless the rings and the couple; the oil of chrism to anoint the couple which, in the Coptic and Maronite traditions, has clear baptismal associations;[\[46\]](#) and the wedding cup, suggested by Bryan Spinks,[\[47\]](#) which is used in the rites of the Byzantine Church and Church of the East, recalling the presence of Christ at Cana.

Other possible ceremonies relate not so much to the relationship between marriage and the Christian tradition, but to marriage and local culture. Some of these are already incorporated into Anglican rites, such as the optional giving of the mangalasutra in India[\[48\]](#) and, in parts of Papua New Guinea, the bride's father leading his daughter onto a mat given by the groom's family before the couple exchange vows.[\[49\]](#) The Culture, Context and Symbols section of our Auckland document sounded a note of warning when it said that 'it may be that symbols of a prevailing culture need to be resisted, especially when they are more akin to a secular rite'. Whilst such hesitation is understandable, if incorporated into a liturgy which has a deliberate and confident Christian identity, we can perhaps be more generous about the place of local rituals and customs

Returning to liturgical texts, let me finally make three suggestions of elements which we may consider it appropriate to introduce or strengthen in our present rites.

First, this notion of marriage as gift, and of the couple's declarations and vows as their response to that gift. An example of this can be found in one of the prefaces to the 2007 Scottish rite:

Marriage is a gift of God and a sign of God's grace. In the life-long union of marriage, we can know the love of God, who made us in the divine image, man and woman.

Marriage finds its origin in God's own being. God is Love, and so wife and husband, giving themselves to one another in love throughout their lives, reflect the very being of God.[\[50\]](#)

In declaring marriage to be a gift, it is notable that the Scottish rite does not refer to it as 'a gift of God in creation', a phrase used in a number of other Anglican marriage liturgies,[\[51\]](#) but of God himself being the source of marriage so that, in their mutual love for one another, the man and woman reflect God's own being. In the next section of the rite, when the couple make their declarations, the verb used in the president's question is not 'take' but 'give': 'N., do you give yourself to N. in marriage?'[\[52\]](#) Thus the gift offered by God and received by the couple results in their giving of themselves to each other. Later in the service, the first form of the vows also uses 'give' rather than 'take'. If our pastoral practice is to be informed by a theological understanding of marriage as gift, then this must also be reflected in the language used in our liturgical rites.

Second, if in their love for each other the couple are to reflect the very being of God, the rite must be explicit that that God is revealed as Trinity. Our Auckland document says that 'All marriages provide the partners with the opportunity to enjoy that intimacy and creativity that the Christian tradition finds expressed in the life of the Trinity'. That being the case, it seems strange that many of our Anglican rites lack Trinitarian language and imagery, and that the Holy Spirit is a particularly notable absentee in liturgies which claim to enable couples to participate in the life of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. There are some exceptions, however. In the Church of South India, one of the two opening prayers asks God to 'graciously bestow upon *N* and *N* the Holy Spirit . . . as they give each other their vows of love and faithfulness'.<sup>[53]</sup> And in the Church of Ireland's second order, the collect asks that the Spirit, sent by the Father through Christ to be 'the life and light of all [God's] people', may fill the hearts of the couple with his grace 'that they may bring forth the fruit of the Spirit in love and joy and peace'.<sup>[54]</sup> More explicit still, in New Zealand, the second and third forms of intercession are addressed to the third person of the Trinity, as is an additional prayer of thanksgiving for the gift of sexual love.<sup>[55]</sup> However the language is used, if we understand marriage to be the gift of a Trinitarian God, and a means by which we are invited to participate in the life of the Trinity, it is not only necessary for the activity of each of the three persons to be given liturgical expression in our marriage rites, but also that the rites express the way in which the persons relate to each other as a community of self-giving love.

Third, and finally, if marriage is God's gift, would it not be appropriate, towards the end of the rite, for the couple themselves to give thanks for the life-transforming gift which they have received? The Kenyan rite includes a prayer of commitment between the marriage and the nuptial blessing.<sup>[56]</sup> Something similar, with an emphasis on commitment arising out of thanksgiving, may well be appropriate. At a Eucharist, it could replace or follow the prayer after communion. In whatever context it is used, the congregation could respond with a prayer of commitment and support for the couple before the priest concludes the service with the final blessing.



## Conclusion

In conclusion, let me summarise some of the issues I have touched upon as a series of questions which we may want to consider as we continue our work this week:

- i. Is the marriage of Christians the correct starting-point for our discussion of Anglican marriage rites or should we begin with an understanding of marriage as divine gift?
- ii. What is the relationship between the marriage of Christians and Christian baptism?
- iii. Who is, or who are, the ministers of the marriage rite?
- iv. Is it appropriate to provide one rite for the marriage of Christians and another for marriages involving those of other faith traditions and none?
- v. What are the theological differences between a civil marriage and a marriage celebrated according to a Christian rite?
- vi. To what extent can we describe marriages between Christians, and those between people of other faiths and none, as sacramental?
- vii. What liturgical role and theological significance should Ephesians 5 and John 2 have in modern Anglican marriage rites?
- viii. What liturgical issues are raised by performing part of the marriage rite for the remarriage of divorcees, but not the whole of it?

Marriage is not only a gift of God to those couples who enter into it, it is also a gift of God to the church and its mission. If we want to say to people 'It's your church and we welcome you', then we need to devise confident rites which reflect our good intentions, our theological convictions and, above all, the generous hospitality of the Trinitarian God who is the source of all life and love.

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[1] Up to ten couples marry in Merton College Chapel each year. One party must be a current or old member of the College and couples are married by Archbishop's Licence. 2011 will see five weddings: of two British Anglicans, both baptized but not practising; of two foreign nationals living

outside the UK, both non-practising Roman Catholics; of a Roman Catholic and an Anglican, both occasional worshippers; of a practising Anglican couple who will be married in the context of the Eucharist, the bride about to begin training for ordination; of a Roman Catholic and an Anglican, both practising, who will be married according to the 1662 rite in the context of a traditional language *Common Worship: Order 1* Eucharist, with part of the service in Latin!

[2] <http://www.yourchurchwedding.org/youre-welcome/you-can-marry-in-a-church.aspx> accessed on 12 July 2011.

[3] <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QjJcVz7zMKQ> accessed on 12 July 2011.

[4] R Leggett, 'Mysterion, Sacramenta and the Marriage of Christians', paper given at the *International Anglican Liturgical Consultation* (Auckland, 2009).

[5] R Leggett, 'Towards a Theology of Christians in Marriage', *The Marriage Canon: On Marriage in the Church: Canon XXI* (Toronto, ON: Anglican Book Centre, 2007), 18.

[6] In the Church of England, where couples are married according to Archbishop's Licence, it is required that one partner is baptized.

[7] In 2009 a debate in the Australian General Synod on a motion to remove the requirement that at least one partner be baptized was only narrowly defeated.

[8] It could be argued that, in the Roman Catholic Church, the exceptional permission granted to a baptized non-Catholic bride or groom to receive communion at their wedding, is an equivalent temporary suspension of ecclesial reality, again for good liturgical and pastoral reasons.

[9] Phillip Tovey states that 'The baptismal context is assumed and not made explicit in any Anglican marriage service', though he does not believe this to be 'a major issue as most Provinces assume that baptismal status of at least one of the couple'. P Tovey, 'Emerging Models of Blessing, Marriage Theology and Inculturation in Anglican Weddings' in K Stevenson (ed), *Anglican Marriage Rites: A Symposium*, (Cambridge: Alcuin / GROW, 2011), 60.

[10] Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission on the Theology of Marriage and its Application to Mixed Marriages, Final Report (1975), [http://www.prounione.urbe.it/dia-int/arcic/e\\_arcic\\_mar-info.html](http://www.prounione.urbe.it/dia-int/arcic/e_arcic_mar-info.html), accessed on 11 July 2011. The report was welcomed by the bishops attending the 1978 Lambeth Conference. See Resolution 34, <http://www.lambethconference.org/resolutions/1978/1978-34.cfm>, accessed on 16 July 2011.

[11] *The Rites of the Catholic Church as revised by the Second Vatican Council: Volume 1* (New York: Pueblo, 1990), 721. The introduction states that, if the local Ordinary permits it, the Eucharist may be celebrated when a Roman Catholic marries a baptized person from another Christian denomination, although that person may not receive Holy Communion. In 1993 the *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* distanced itself slightly from this position by admitting that there was a decision to be made on whether communion could be received by both parties: 'the decision as to whether the non-Catholic party of the marriage may be admitted to eucharistic communion is to be made in keeping with the general norms existing in the matter both for Eastern Christians and for other Christians, taking into account the particular situation of the reception of the sacrament of Christian marriage by two baptized Christians'.

[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc\\_pc\\_chrstuni\\_doc\\_25031993\\_principles-and-norms-on-ecumenism\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_25031993_principles-and-norms-on-ecumenism_en.html) accessed on 11 July 2011. Commenting on this in their teaching document, *One Bread, One Body*, the Catholic Bishops of Britain and Ireland have noted that 'The Directory identifies such marriages as possible situations when in certain

circumstances the Catholic Church may admit the non-Catholic partner to Holy Communion. The fact that a couple share not only the sacrament of Baptism but also the sacrament of Marriage can be seen to make them a special case, but the Directory still reminds us that even though 'the spouses in a mixed marriage share the sacraments of baptism and marriage, Eucharistic sharing can only be exceptional.' *One Bread, One Body* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1998), §83.

[12] *The Rites: Volume I*, 726 & 735. Walter Kasper also describes the marriage of Christians as 'a special form of being human in Christ that is based on baptism'. W Kasper, *The Theology of Marriage* (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 35.

[13] K Stevenson, 'Marriage Liturgy: Lessons from History', in K Stevenson (ed), *Worship: Wonderful and Sacred Mystery* (Washington DC: Paulist Press, 1992), 139.

[14] [http://www.prounione.urbe.it/dia-int/arcic/doc/i\\_arcicII\\_morals.html](http://www.prounione.urbe.it/dia-int/arcic/doc/i_arcicII_morals.html), § 62, accessed 12 July 2011.

[15] Kasper, *The Theology of Marriage*, 79-81. Where a Roman Catholic marries someone who is not baptized, the canonical position does not seem to correspond with the theology expressed by the liturgical rite.

[16] K Stevenson, 'Setting the Scene: Background and Development', in Stevenson, *Anglican Marriage Rites*, 24.

[17] Ephesians 5.25, 29-32. This is reflected in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which states that 'The Sacrament of Matrimony signifies the union of Christ and the Church. It gives spouses the grace to love each other with the love with which Christ has loved his Church; the grace of the sacrament thus perfects the human love of the spouses, strengthens their indissoluble unity and sanctifies them on the way to eternal life (cf Council of Trent: DS 1799)', *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994), § 1661.

[18] It is sandwiched between 'Hic incept / finitur benedictio sacramentalis'.

[19] 'Deus qui tam excellenti mysterio coniugalem copulam consecrasti, ut Christi & Ecclesiae sacramentum praesignares in foederu nuptiarum'. This text goes back at least as far as the Gregorian Sacramentary. M Searle & K Stevenson, *Documents of the Marriage Liturgy* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992), 48.

[20] K Stevenson, *Nuptial Blessing* (London: Alcuin Club / SPCK, 1982), 80-81.

[21] These references to Ephesians 5.32, in the preface, blessing and homily, appear in the Prayer Books of 1549, 1552, 1637 and 1662.

[22] Long before the western church officially recognized marriage as a sacrament at the Council of Florence in 1439, a number of influential theologians were talking of it in sacramental terms. Anselm of Laon (d 1117) and Hugh of St Victor (c 1096-1141), for example, maintained that all marriages were, in a sense, sacramental, but only the baptized received the sanctifying grace that was symbolized by the sacramental sign. E Schillebeeckx, *Marriage: Secular Reality and Saving Mystery* (London & Melbourne: Sheed & Ward, 1965), 116-118.

[23] Tovey cites New Zealand (1989), CNI (1995), CSI (2006), and Nigeria (1996 alternative introduction). Tovey, 'Emerging Models of Blessing', 61.

[24] H Oppenheimer, *Marriage* (London: Mowbray, 1990), 8.

[25] *Ibid.*, 59.

[26] J Meyendorff, *Marriage: An Orthodox Perspective* (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984<sup>3</sup>), 23.

- [27] Searle & Stevenson, *Documents of the Marriage Liturgy*, 62.
- [28] *Ibid.*, 60.
- [29] 'Ego vos in matrimoniumconjungo'.
- [30] Searle & Stevenson, *Documents of the Marriage Liturgy*, 186.
- [31] Stevenson, 'Lessons from History', 139.
- [32] Searle & Stevenson, *Documents of the Marriage Liturgy*, 48.
- [33] *Ad uxorem* 2.9. Schillebeeckx's translation is somewhat free, but helpfully conveys the sense of the passage. Schillebeeckx, *Marriage: Secular Reality and Saving Mystery*, 150.
- [34] See above, fn 10.
- [35] C Sherlock, 'The Solemnization of Matrimony: some theological perspectives towards liturgical revision', paper given at the *International Anglican Liturgical Consultation* (Auckland, 2009).
- [36] Stevenson, *Nuptial Blessing*, 137.
- [37] M Lawler, *Marriage and Sacrament: a theology of Christian marriage* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1993), 115.
- [38] <http://www.anglican.ca/faith/worship/resources/marriage-other-faith/> accessed on 26 July 2011.
- [39] Anglican Church of Canada, *Book of Alternative Services* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1985), 541-549.
- [40] Give the removal of all other Trinitarian language, this seems curious.
- [41] Numbers 6.24-26.
- [42] Church of England, *General Synod Proceedings* (1972), 673.
- [43] It is noteworthy that when the Australian General Synod was debating the removal of the requirement for one partner to be baptized (see above, fn 7), the members of the Australian Liturgy Commission were, according to Elizabeth Smith's report for this Consultation, 'unanimous in not wishing to be drawn into devising a rite of marriage for non-baptized persons'.
- [44] T Lloyd, 'The Church's Mission and Contemporary Culture in the Making of *Common Worship* Marriage Liturgy', *Anaphora* 4.2 (2010), 61-63.
- [45] Introduction to the Church of England Liturgical Commission's report on marriage, originally drafted by Bryan Spinks, sent to the House of Bishops in 1996 (unpublished). *Ibid.*, 62.
- [46] J van Overstraeten, 'Le rite de l'onction des époux dans la liturgie copte du mariage', *Parole de l'Orient* 5 (1974), 92.
- [47] B Spinks, *The Wedding Cup: a useful option for Anglican marriage rites?* (unpublished paper circulated for IALC, Canterbury 2011).
- [48] The mangalasutra, a sacred thread of love and goodwill worn by women as a symbol of their marriage, may be given instead of, or as well as, a ring in the rites of the Church of North India and Church of South India. *The Book of Worship of the Church of North India* (Doriwalan, New Delhi: IPSCK, 1995), 356-357. *The Church of South India Book of Common Worship* (Royapettah: CSI, 2006), 130.
- [49] *Anglican Prayer Book* (Lae, PNG: Anglican Church of Papua New Guinea, 1991), 207. There is also the possibility to follow local customs after the vows have been exchanged: 'In some provinces it is the custom that a man makes a canoe or builds a house for his wife or there are presents of baskets, maps, tapa cloth that help to tie up the marriage'. *Ibid.*, 209.

[50][http://www.scotland.anglican.org/index.php/liturgy/liturgy/marriage\\_liturgy\\_2007/](http://www.scotland.anglican.org/index.php/liturgy/liturgy/marriage_liturgy_2007/), accessed 27 July 2011.

[51] This is particularly true of those rites influenced by the *ASB / Common Worship* rites of the Church of England. It is interesting that the alternative preface of the Church of Nigeria's marriage rite uses the language of gift to describe love as 'man's greatest accomplishment and God's most precious gift'. The Church of Nigeria, *The Book of Common Prayer* (Lagos: CSS Press, 1996), 425. In the United States and those Provinces influenced by its 1979 Prayer Book, such as the Episcopal Churches in Brazil and the Philippines, marriage is described as being 'established by God in creation', rather than his gift. The Episcopal Church, *The Book of Common Prayer* (Seabury Press, 1979), 423. Igreja Episcopal do Brasil, *Livro de Oração* (Porto Alegre, SPCK: 1987), 183. The Episcopal Church in the Philippines, *The Book of Common Prayer* (2001), 217. The Kenyan rite is more explicit about how God establishes marriage when it says that 'God himself ordained it [marriage] when, in the Garden of Eden he created our first parents, Adam and Eve, and joined them for a life-long companionship'. Anglican Church of Kenya, *Our Modern Services* (Nairobi: Uzima Press, 2002 /3), 146. Finally, the Church of Ireland's second rite gives a much more general description of marriage as 'part of God's creation'. Church of Ireland, *The Book of Common Prayer* (Dublin: Columba Press, 2004), 417.

[52] This follows the Roman Rite: 'N. and N., have you come here freely and without reservation to give yourselves to each other in marriage?' *The Rites: Volume I*, 726.

[53] *The Church of South India Book of Common Worship*, 127.

[54] Church of Ireland, *Book of Common Prayer*, 418.

[55] 'Creator Spirit, we thank you for your gift of sexual love, by which husband and wife may express their delight in each other, find refreshment, and share with you the joy of creating new life. By your grace may N and N remain lovers, rejoicing in your goodness'. The Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia, *A New Zealand Prayer Book* (London: Collins, 1989), 803.

[56] The prayer reads: 'O God our Father and author of marriage, we rejoice on this our wedding day. True to each other help us to stay, safely guarding all the solemn vows we have taken today. Never should the memories of this day grow dim with each passing day. Progressing through life with its many hurdles, may selfless love be our banner; seeking ever to promote the other; Rejoicing in our strengths and bearing with each other's weaknesses. In all our days together, may we draw strength and comfort from you and from each other. Guide as us we begin this new life; we know not what lies ahead. You are our refuge and underneath are your everlasting arms. Bless our marriage, Lord, and grant us many happy years together until we come to the wedding banquet of the Lamb'. *Our Modern Services*, 149.

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### ***About the International Anglican Liturgical Consultation***

The International Anglican Liturgical Consultations (IALCs) are the official network for liturgy of the Anglican Communion, recognized by the Anglican Consultative Council and the Primates' Meeting, and holding first responsibility in the Communion to resource and communicate about liturgy on a Communion-wide basis.

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