

THE MARRIAGE SERVICE IN THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND: SOME LITURGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

It is highly significant that in his *A History of Anglican Liturgy* Dr G. J. Cuming can write "Of all the medieval services, Matrimony would seem most familiar to a twentieth-century worshipper".¹ Until the appearance of the Series 3 Wedding Service authorised for use from November 1977, the marriage rite in the Church of England, whether in its 1662 form, or with the 1928 emendations, was basically Cranmer's revision of 1549/1552; and although Cranmer made use of Luther's *Traubuchlein*, itself in part a radical departure from the German *Agendas* and having its roots in Luther's theology of marriage,² the Archbishop was at his most conservative in this particular reform of medieval liturgy. Whereas the scholastic theology of the eucharist was entirely dispensed with in his reform of the mass, and the Divine Office was completely restructured, Cranmer presented a medieval theology in the opening exhortation of his English marriage rite, and whether for reasons of pastoral wisdom or simply lack of interest, he was content to rely heavily upon the Sarum *Ordo ad faciendum sponsalia*. Revisers since Cranmer, whether in 1662, the attempt at Comprehension in 1689,³ the nineteenth century suggested reforms,⁴ or the abortive book of 1928, have all shied away from attempting any radical change in the received rite. Thus when the Church of England came to produce a new Wedding service—Series 3—it was the first opportunity for something like five hundred years to consider afresh what the Church's task is in a liturgical celebration of marriage, and to reconsider the form it should take, and therefore the theology it expresses. As the Root Commission on marriage which reported in 1971 stated, "any enquiry as to 'what the Church of England teaches about marriage', whether from a lay person interested, or from a theologian or lawyer, or from another Church, should be answerable by reference to the marriage liturgy".⁵

With the appearance and authorisation of the Series 3 Wedding service, this paper is concerned to suggest that fresh thought on the matter is urgently required.

The "1662" marriage rite: Its parentage and offspring⁶

In his study of the development of the christian marriage liturgy to the eleventh century K. Ritzer observed that in the early British

liturgical books it is possible to distinguish three groups of formulas for marriage:⁷ (1) Those such as the *Leofric Missal* which contain the Roman (*Gregorian*) form of a mass with nuptial blessing; (2) Those such as the *Pontifical of Egbert* which contain the *benedictio in thalamo* and *benedictio annuli* with no mass, being the old Gallican or Gallican-Celtic rite; and (3) those which contain the Roman form followed by the Gallican form.

The Roman usage as attested by the *Verona Sacramentary* gives a mass with a nuptial blessing.⁸ This latter consists of two prayers, and seems originally to have been associated with the *velatio* of bride and groom.⁹ The first prayer, *Adesto, Domine*, is short, and reappears in the *Gregorian* and Roman books as *Propitiare Domine*. The second prayer, *Pater mundi conditor* is a longer prayer alluding to biblical passages which present marriage and procreation as being God-given and good, and invoking graces upon the couple.¹⁰ The *Gregorian Sacramentary* also has two blessings, the *Propitiare Domine*, and a form of *Pater mundi conditor, Deus qui potestate*.¹¹ The *Gelasian Sacramentary* gives three prayers: *Deus qui mundi crescentis exordio*, the *Verona Pater mundi conditor*, and a prayer *Domine sancte*.¹² What all three witnesses to the Roman or Italian liturgical use attest is a blessing in Church within the celebration of a special mass.

The old Gallican and Gallican-Celtic rite which is embedded in the *Bobbio Missal* and the Anglo-Saxon books, and the Mozarabic rite, provide a *benedictio thalamo* which took place at the home in the evening following the marriage. (This custom is found in the *Acts of Thomas*, and occurs in the East Syrian rite). The blessing of the ring in the early British books seems to have been an Anglo-Saxon peculiarity, but the Mozarabic rite had a *benedictio arrarum*, possibly reflecting the Eastern betrothal ceremony.

These two distinct and different Western liturgical celebrations of marriage were at some stage brought together, as represented by the *Sacramentary of Vich* which unites Roman and Spanish usages. In the third group of British books which Ritzer mentioned, the Roman and Gallican-Celtic usages were brought together: a mass in church with nuptial blessings, and a further blessing at the home.

However, the marriage rite in the *Sarum Manual* which Cranmer knew and used represents a further stage of liturgical development, which according to Ritzer, can be first traced textually to the coastal regions of Northern France.¹³ Under the influence of the Pseudo-Isidoriens, the Canon-lawyers, and with the defining of a sacramental theology, great weight came to be

placed upon the public exchange of vows, and marriage consent *in facie ecclesiae*, and, quite literally, marriage at the door of the church, gave rise to the *Ordines ad facienda sponsalia*. Thus the Sarum rite provided for the exchange of vows with the blessing and giving of a ring (transferred to this position from the Gallican-Celtic blessing which took place in the home) at the door of the church, then the entry into church with prayers, a mass with nuptial blessings, and later, at the home, the *benedictio thalamo*. The exchange of vows, which may be regarded as the legal and civil marriage formalities thus became part of the marriage liturgy. But the mass with its blessings and the *benedictio thalamo* would seem to represent the older strata of the rite.

Although some evidence suggests that Cranmer may have been experimenting with a reform of the marriage rite in the early 1540's¹⁴ it was not until the publication of the 1549 Prayer Book that the Archbishop revealed his ideas on the form of this liturgical rite. In fact the 1549 marriage rite represents a conservative "Englishisation" of the Sarum rite, with some modifications and omissions. The whole service now took place in the church. The opening exhortation was an amplification of the brief exhortation which appears in the Sarum rite.¹⁵ The rubric in the Sarum rite required it to be read in the mother tongue, and in the York Manual it was rendered as follows:

Lo, brethren, we are comen here before God and his angels and all his halowes, in the face and presence of our moder holy Chyrche, for to couple and to knyght these two bodyes togyder, that is to saye, of this man and of this woman, that they be from this tyme forthe but one body and two soules in the fayth and lawe of God and holy Chyrche, for to deserve everlastynge lyfe, what somever that they have done here before.

I charge you on Goddes behalfe and holy Chirche, that if there be any of you that can say any thyng why these two may not lawfully be wedded togyder at this tyme, say it nowe outhur pryvely or apparty in helpynge of your soules and theirs bothe.¹⁶

In the new exhortation this was expanded with what are apparently the common-place scholastic theological causes for matrimony, found also in Chaucer's Parson's Tale, and with considerable verbal similarity in the *King's Book* of 1543.

The consent, vows and the giving of the ring were already in English.¹⁷ Cranmer excluded the blessing of a ring, but the two

Latin prayers he made into a single blessing of the couple. The tokens of espousal, gold and silver, were retained. The text Matthew 19: 6 and the declaration of marriage were added from Luther's *Traubuchlein* and took the place of a psalm and the Lord's Prayer. The rest of the rite followed the medieval order, and led to the communion, and if there was no sermon, a homily was provided to be read. However, two changes here are of some importance. The mass prayers *Propitiare domine* and *Deus qui potestate* which followed the *Pax Domini* were brought forward to follow the prayer *Deus Abraham*; that is, they were removed from the mass and placed in the marriage *in facie ecclesiae*; and the propers of the mass were replaced by a rubric:

The newe married persones (the same daye of their marriage) must receive the holy communion.

The old Gallican-Celtic *benedictio thalamo* disappeared. Thus, however conservative the revision, there was a considerable change in liturgical emphasis. The old Gallican marriage blessing was abolished; the Nuptial Mass was reduced to a rubric, without the provision for propers, and the Nuptial blessings were removed into that part of the service which was a later liturgical development. Whether intentional or not, it gave the appearance that the liturgical celebration of marriage in church centered upon the exchange of vows with prayers, and the eucharist, although required, was an appendage and not a primary part of the celebration. It gave a liturgical emphasis to marriage *in facie ecclesiae* that it had not previously had.

Very few changes were made to this rite in 1552. Martin Bucer, in his *Censura*, had spoken highly of the service, though in his opinion the third cause of matrimony in the exhortation—mutual societie, helpe, and comforte—was the primary cause. He also felt that the ring and the tokens of espousal needed an explanation.¹⁸ However, Cranmer seems to have disregarded Bucer's views. The exhortation remained unchanged; and far from being given an explanation, the gold and silver, tokens of espousal, disappeared. Minor changes were made to the prayer "O Eternal God, creator and preserver of al mankinde", the blessing, and also the Apocryphal references were removed from *Deus Abraham*. Otherwise the service remained unaltered.

The same is also true of the 1662 revision. Minor alterations to wording were made, and the references to Rebecca and Sarah disappeared from the prayer "O God, who by thy mighty power". However, one alteration was of considerable significance. The final rubric concerning communion was altered as follows:

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.

Now communion was regarded as something which should be received, but as an act of devotion or thanksgiving, or a godly discipline, rather than as an integral part of the marriage celebration. Since the communion did not necessarily follow the marriage rite, the whole weight of the liturgical celebration was placed firmly on the exchange of vows and consent, giving the impression that this was the main or only part of the Church's celebration of marriage.

The 1928 revision once again hardly altered the basic 1549 rite. The language of the exhortation was refined, "honour" substituted for "worship" and the bride no longer had to "obey" her husband. A third choice of Psalm was added (37: 3-7) and the Old Testament couples were expelled from the shortened prayers. A paper was provided for communion. Overall, the revisers had not made any significant changes to the structure of what had become the traditional rite.

Not surprisingly, the "1662" marriage rite has influenced other English speaking churches, whether in the Anglican communion, the Free Churches and the Reformed tradition. Thus the basic shape of the rite reappears for example, in the Canadian BCP of 1922 (1918). The compilers had emended the exhortation, gave an alternative version of the prayer "O Merciful Lord", and provided a collect, Epistle and Gospel for the communion. The 1960 Church of South India rite, while inserting a prayer before the consent, a blessing of the mangalasutra or ring, some new prayers, and allowing the communion to follow from the Breaking of the Bread (offertory), did not stray far from the "1662" format. Of surprise is the conservative rite in the 1977 Proposed BCP of the American Episcopal Church, where the exhortation seems to reflect a satisfaction with the 1928-type of revisions. Direct borrowing is found in the Methodist tradition, the Congregational Union's *A Book of Services and Prayers*, 1959,¹⁹ and to a lesser extent, the Church of Scotland's *Book of Common Order*, 1940. With such reverence shown to the basic structure of its marriage rite, it is perhaps little wonder that the Church of England seems to have concluded that even if the whole Prayer Book is not an "incomparable liturgy", its traditional marriage rite is.

Some reflections on the "1662" marriage rite

Although the "1662" marriage rite has embedded itself deeply in

English life and tradition, neither its age nor its influence can automatically vindicate the theological and liturgical integrity of the rite. Indeed, reflections upon its derivation and its present use might suggest that it is a liturgy which is in need of some serious re-thinking.

(a) *Reflections on Western liturgical history*

From the discussion on the making of the "1662" rite, it is apparent that the earlier strata of Western liturgical celebrations of marriage—represented by the Roman and the Gallican-Celtic rites—have either been suppressed, or reduced in importance by a rubric, and now the emphasis of the English rite falls upon the latest stratum of the marriage rite, the public consent and exchange of vows.

The report form of the Series 3 Wedding Service (GS 228) stated:

It is the unvarying teaching of Christendom that the essence of marriage is consent. The core of all Christian marriage rites is, therefore, the point at which the two parties declare their consent to one another.²⁰

The first sentence, in so far as it relates to the definition or form of a valid marriage is quite correct, though it has not always been the case.²¹ However, it is certainly not the case that consent, and vows, have always formed the core of the Christian liturgical celebration of marriage.²²

There is of course no logical reason why the "1662" form should not be regarded as the perfect apex in the evolution of an English marriage rite, and superior to the older Roman and Gallican-Celtic forms. However, in most modern liturgical revision—the eucharist, initiation, the Office and the Ordinal—the revisers have found it illuminating to return to earlier patterns. One wonders why the marriage rite should be an exception. The question must be asked whether the "1662" concentration on Christian marriage celebration as the public consent and exchange of vows is not distorted, and whether the older Western usages suggest that the centre of the rite could be usefully moved?

(b) *Some reflections upon the theology expressed in the rite and upon its use*

It is significant that Martin Bucer questioned the priority of the causes of marriage outlined in Cranmer's exhortation, suggesting that the third cause should have been placed first. It is also

significant that most churches, when borrowing the "1662" rite, have modified and re-written the opening exhortation.

It cannot seriously be maintained that the exhortation firmly states a sound Christian theology of marriage, though for most Anglican clergy it is the only one they seem to have ever considered. (It was reproduced in summary in Canon B30 in 1969!) Marriage is essentially about the love and commitment of a man and woman expressed positively in conjugal love, and not a negative institution to avoid fornication, nor primarily for begetting children. Its positive nature therefore needs to be expressed and celebrated, and perhaps it is best expressed in the overall form of the liturgy rather than in an exhortation, however modernised. The life-long commitment of marriage is well expressed in the "1662" rite, but little is said about marriage, and its celebratory nature is not self-evident in the rite.

However, the theology of a rite must also be considered from the context in which it is used. Here there are well known difficulties.

The Root Commission stated that "there is no such entity as 'Christian Marriage' except in the sense of the marriage of Christian men and women",²³ and the Anglican Church tends towards the view that marriage is a "creation" ordinance, and "does not derive from faith in Jesus Christ and membership of his Church".²⁴ However, Edward Schillebeeckx's important study suggests that marriage has a salvific dimension to it, and in the Old Testament was used to interpret the covenant with Yahweh, and the covenant also influenced the concept of marriage.²⁵ Furthermore Paul in 1 Corinthians 7: 39, and the Pauline privilege in 1 Corinthians 7: 12-16, suggest that baptism and being "in the Lord" have a bearing upon marriage. Marriage may be "from the beginning", but since the beginning there has been the Fall, and the whole of human history now stands in the shadow—and the light—of the Cross. All marriages take place between the Resurrection and the Parousia, and we may assume that Christian men and women will be aware of this, and would wish to celebrate their marriage in this context. Christian Agape is also not entirely irrelevant to a marriage.²⁶ In other words, although there may not be an entity called "Christian marriage"—and that is by no means as certain as the Root Commission suggested—there *is* a specifically Christian view of marriage, and therefore a Christian celebration of marriage. In an important paper on the marriage liturgy, J. J. von Allmen suggested that in the latter, the following elements ought to be included:²⁷

- (i) The confession that this marriage is willed by God.
- (ii) The confession that the parties wish to enter married life and to live it as Christians—an emphasis on Ephesians 5: 22-23.
- (iii) The intercession of the church.
- (iv) The blessing and consecration of the marriage in the name of God, including the eucharist.

Von Allmen's list envisages that when two Christians marry, the church—the body of Christ—will join in the celebration (*in facie ecclesiae*) and because it is the church celebrating the marriage, a eucharist will be especially appropriate.

In the Church of England the celebration is, according to the exhortation, "in the sight of God, and in the face of this congregation". In the earlier books of 1549 and 1552 this was "in the syght of God, and in the face of *his* congregacion". Certainly this must refer back to the rubric which mentions "theyr frendes and neighbours", but in 1549 it was supposed that the friends and neighbours would also be "his congregacion", the *ecclesia*, because this was the era of Christendom. It may well be the case that the trivial textual change made in 1662 already reflects a change in the status of those witnessing the marriage. In the following century, Thomas Cooke, Rector of the village of Black Notley in Essex, recorded that between 1735 and 1751, he married three hundred couples, mostly strangers, and he hoped they were all very happy.²⁸ It may be presumed that their "friends and neighbours" were also strangers to the Rector. In practice, "this congregation" now means family and friends who act as witnesses, and certainly not as the *ecclesia*. Most marriages take place on Saturdays, whereas the Church meets on Sunday. Furthermore the law allows parishioners to be married according to the Anglican rite even if they are unbaptised and unbelieving. The rubric concerning communion is in most cases a dead letter. The result is that the "1662" rite is not celebrated *in facie ecclesiae*, need not be a marriage of two Christians, and is hardly ever celebrated with a eucharist. It could be said that the "1662" rite is therefore concerned mainly with effecting a valid marriage and not specifically with *celebrating* the marriage of Christians. In fact so much does it support the view of marriage as a "creation" ordinance that A. K. Robertson's comments on the Church of Scotland's rite apply equally as well to "1662":

... the marriage of Christians is held to be only a manifestation of the universal phenomenon of human marriage. In the marriage service they are not made one flesh

by sacramental grace given through the rite. . . . the onus is put entirely on the bridal couple. They have to swear that there is no legal impediment. They must take each other as husband and wife by their own free consent. . . . it is up to the couple to 'make a go' of their marriage. God will help them if they obey the rules and help themselves. But nowhere—nowhere clearly, exaltedly, is it stated what God promises to do and commits Himself to be to the very end of their lives to all who are married in His Name, in His Church and by His minister.²⁹

God's grace and the status of baptism are so ignored that one is tempted to conclude that apparently like the French Roman Catholic Church, the Church of England "tends to place the wedding liturgy on the least exacting level, thereby making it a marriage service for proselytes rather than for baptised Christians".³⁰

(c) *Reflections on the "1662" marriage rite and the Church of England's discipline on remarriage after divorce*

The Church of England's discipline on remarriage after divorce has an important liturgical dimension; it raises a fundamental question of what the Church's marriage rite is primarily about—simply contracting a valid marriage or the blessing and celebration of the marriage of Christians?

The discipline of the Church of England is succinctly set out in the 1978 report, *Marriage and the Church's Task*, and only a summary is necessary here.

While teaching the indissolubility of marriage, the medieval Church's Canon Law allowed for annulment on many grounds. Reformers such as Luther and Calvin abandoned the Canon Law and accepted that Christian marriage was a life-long bond, though on account of Matthew 5: 31-32, divorce and subsequent remarriage was possible. The proposed *Reformatio legum ecclesiasticarum* would have meant that the Church of England followed the reformers on this matter, but it remained a dead letter. The Canons of 1604 provided only for the annulment of "pretended marriage" and divorce *a mensa et thora* (separation without remarriage). A number of marriages after divorce by Act of Parliament did take place using the "1662" rite in the period 1670-1857. However, the Anglo-Catholic revival of moral theology together with biblical criticism which questioned the authenticity of Matthew 5: 31-32 seem to have been the cause for a change of attitude against remarriage in church after divorce,

resulting in the ruling of Convocation in 1938. Although the Law allows a parish priest to remarry divorcees, the Convocation ruling, reiterated in 1957, stated:

That in order to maintain the principle of the life long obligation which is inherent in every legally contracted marriage and is expressed in the plainest terms in the Marriage Service, the Church should not allow the use of that Service in the case of anyone who has a former partner still living.

The 1957 Convocation also adopted the following resolution:

No public Service shall be held for those who have contracted a Civil marriage after divorce. It is not within the competence of the Convocation to lay down what private prayers the curate in the exercise of his pastoral Ministry may say with the persons concerned, or to issue regulations as to where or when these prayers shall be said.

There has been a growing concern in the Church of England for a change of policy, reflected in the Root Commission report of 1971, and the 1978 report. However, both reports failed to find the necessary support in General Synod; the earlier Convocation ruling remains in force, and most clergy feel bound to abide by it.

The liturgical dimension to the matter is as follows. The "1662" rite, concentrating as it does on the exchange of the life long vows, is deemed to state quite clearly the Church's teaching on marriage, and is quite inappropriate for a marriage after divorce. Nevertheless, divorce is a reality which even Christians cannot always avoid, and divorced Christians, on subsequent remarriage, often request some form of blessing on their new marriage. As a way around the Convocation ruling some dioceses have provided forms for the blessing of a civil marriage. While not exclusively for the use of divorcees, it is recognised that it will be primarily for use where one or both partners have had a former marriage dissolved.

Such a form was prepared for use in the diocese of Chelmsford. Mainly the work of the Reverends John Shillaker and Peter Elers, it took some three years (1973-1976) for the final text to be agreed upon and issued with the bishop's authority. It consists of: (1) Introduction (an exhortation based mainly upon that of the Series 3 Draft rite GS 228); (2) a reading; (3) permission for a short address; (4-26) three forms of "The Offering" when the couple offer their lives to God (the third form uses the Series 3 marriage vows in the past tense—I, N, have taken you, N...); (27) The

Lord's Prayer; (28-31) appropriate prayers; (32) provision for silence and spontaneous prayer; (33) The Grace.

This form was closely modelled upon the structure of the "1662" rite, using material from GS 228, and, being a public service, is technically in breach of the Convocation ruling. However, the use of such a service alongside "1662" poses the question, What is the Church's *liturgical* task at a wedding?

The question may be illustrated by considering four marriages. Couple A, both devout Christians, are married in their parish church, using the "1662" rite. Couple B also marry in the same church, using exactly the same service. But Couple B have no beliefs at all; one partner is unbaptised, but both wanted a church wedding. Couple A and Couple B have exactly the same liturgical celebration; the faith of Couple A made no difference to the form of the liturgical celebration.

Couple C are both Christians, but for private reasons they prefer a civil wedding. However, after the civil wedding they celebrate their marriage using a form of Blessing of a Civil Marriage. Couple D are also both Christians, but are both divorced. They are not allowed to be married in church according to the "1662" rite, but desire a form of blessing. They therefore have a civil wedding, followed by the form of Blessing of a Civil Marriage. Although divorced, they *liturgically* celebrate their marriage in precisely the same manner as Couple C.

What then is the church doing liturgically at a wedding? Is it merely to preside at a valid and lawful marriage, or is it more than this? The Church of England will marry those with no faith, but will refuse to officiate at what is simply the legal formalities of marriage—the exchange of vows in the present tense and the signing of the register—where a party or the parties are divorced. Yet it will "bless" such a marriage. Since the *legality* of remarriage after divorce is not in question, logically one would assume that it would be the "blessing" which was withheld from divorcees, and not the legalities. If, in our illustration, Couple D had had a eucharist as well as the form of blessing, they would have been celebrating their marriage in a very similar liturgical manner to those marrying in the early Roman church—civil marriage, followed by a eucharist with blessings. Yet Couple B, with no Christian beliefs, are permitted to have the marriage rite of the Church of England which is withheld from Couple D. Undoubtedly there is some confusion here, and surely this confusion comes about because marriage liturgy is identified with the "1662" concentration on the exchange of long life vows? But if Christian marriage celebration could be seen as many other

things alongside the vows, perhaps a new discipline could be more easily agreed upon.

Series 3 Wedding Service 1977

Until the publication of the approved text of the Series 3 Wedding Service³¹, the only alternative marriage rite to have been authorised for use in the Church of England alongside 1662 was that of Series 1, which was largely an assimilation of the 1928 proposals, and therefore a "1662" rite. GS 228, the Liturgical Commission's report containing the draft form of the Series 3 marriage service was published on 29th May 1975, but delays in General Synod, including controversy over some of its phraseology, meant that the definitive text was not authorised for use until November 1977.

According to the Introduction of GS 228, the brief answer to the question "Why do we need a new rite?" was:

We seek to give liturgical expression to a view of Christian marriages and of the relationship between the sexes which incorporates modern insights and which differs in some aspects from that of earlier periods.³²

However, it is abundantly clear that a new rite did not mean, as it had done in the case of eucharistic and initiation revision, a departure from the "1662" form of liturgy. In fact, apart from its modern language and one or two additions, Series 3 stands as close to the format of "1662" as had Cranmer's revision to the Sarum rite; in contrast to modern eucharistic and initiation revision, it is marked by its conservatism. One major source of this conservatism can be traced to the Root Commission's report, *Marriage Divorce and the Church*, 1971, the debt to which GS 228 acknowledged in its introduction.

While primarily concerned to prepare a statement on the Christian doctrine of marriage, the Root Commission — bereft as it was of a competent liturgist — ventured to suggest proposals for a revision of the then existing marriage rites, 1662 and Series 1. Regarding the idea of a revision the report stated:

On the one hand, there is much to be said for a conservative revision, maintaining as far as possible the traditional style and structure of the rite, in order not to deprive people of the familiar elements in the service to which they are most attached. On the other hand, there will certainly be those who wish for more radical reforms, both in language and content. Their convictions should also be respected, and notice should be taken of experimental forms permitted in other churches.³³

However, after suggesting that a closer integration of marriage and the eucharist would be desirable, the proposals were limited to changes to the *wording* and *content* of the "1662" rite, and the report did not question the basic liturgical structure. The proposals may be summarised as follows:

(1) Although the wording of the vows is not sacrosanct, "their reform is to enterprised and taken in hand, as marriage itself is, not unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly, but reverently, discreetly, soberly, duly considering both the truths expressed and the most sensitive manner of their expression".³⁴

(2) Paragraphs 106-110 of the report were concerned with the need for revision of the exhortation, concluding with the observation: "It is at this point, therefore, that the marriage liturgy requires most serious revision, if it is to represent in words a true understanding of marriage".³⁵

(3) The word "obey" might be omitted as in 1928. Perhaps "Acknowledge" would better express that there are occasions when the family is dependent upon the decision of the husband.

(4) The ceremony of the giving of the bride is an ancient and simple custom, and can be retained.

(5) To strengthen the concept of mutuality, provision could be made for giving and receiving of two rings.

(6) The note of spontaneous joy and gaiety in orthodox marriage liturgy (and in the Jewish rite) might suggest either a borrowing or appropriate compilation for inclusion in a revision of the Anglican rite.

(7) The prayers relating to Ephesians 5 should be revised to make them more easily intelligible.

Thus overall the report envisaged that the major task of revision centred upon the exhortation. Apart from the "note of spontaneous joy", the proposals were concerned with minor modifications to the existing "1662" format.

A comparison of the Introduction and text of GS 228 with the above proposals suggests that the Liturgical Commission did not depart far from the Root Commission's report. A completely new exhortation was provided, entitled "The Preface"; certain words and phrases, especially the vows, have sunk so deeply into English life that the Commission has felt reluctant to change them; the giving away of the bride was made optional; provision was made for the exchange of rings; acclamations "which express joy and thanksgiving somewhat in the mode of the seven blessings of the bridegroom and bride in Jewish marriage rites" was added; new prayers in modern English were added, and a suggested structure was given for the integration of the marriage and the eucharist.

The 1975 draft underwent some revision before its authorisation in 1977. The service may commence with a sentence of scripture, greeting, collect, lessons and sermon, but the first mandatory section is the much revised preface. An alternative set of vows was provided to allow for the use or omission of the words "worship" and "obey". The wording of the blessing and giving of the rings, the declaration of marriage and the blessing was altered. A lesson is to be read after the acclamations if not used at the opening of the service. Again structures were suggested for the integration of the rite with the eucharist.

When compared with the "1662" rite, it would seem that most of the Liturgical Commission's energy went into the writing of a new exhortation (Preface), and the "incomparability" of "1662" was unquestioned. There seems ample justification for regarding Series 3 as "1662" put into modern English, with modern sociological and psychological views of marriage replacing the scholastic theology of Cranmer's composition. It is true that there is a suggested structure for the marriage with the eucharist, with readings, a proper thanksgiving and a post-communion sentence. However, all this is to be found at the back of the Wedding Service, almost as an appendix, and is clearly regarded as an exception from the usual marriage service.

One is tempted to ask why the Liturgical Commission relied so heavily upon the proposals of the Root Commission to the neglect of historical and comparative liturgy? Doctrine is indeed important, but revision of the eucharist, initiation and the Ordination rites was not carried out simply from the standpoint of doctrine alone; historical and comparative liturgy were regarded as of prime importance. One wonders why the marriage rite seems to have been an exception.

Learning from others

Although the Root Commission had suggested that notice should be taken of experimental marriage rites of other churches, and referring to "a note of spontaneous joy" in the Orthodox rite even suggested that material might be borrowed, Series 3 shows few signs of the Liturgical Commission having looked further than the "1662" rite. Indeed, liturgical revision in the Church of England has been marked by a reluctance to borrow and use good material from other churches. In fairness, however, it must be admitted that since most English speaking churches have compiled marriage rites based upon "1662", the sources for

ideas and borrowing are limited. Even the rite in *Contemporary Prayers for Public Worship*, 1967, produced by a group of Congregationalists, the intercessory and benedictional prayer of which is worthy of inclusion in any marriage rite, follows the basic "1662" structure. But there are other traditions which have marriage rites that are quite independent from "1662", and from which the Church of England — and indeed the Anglican Communion — could usefully learn.

(a) *The new Roman Catholic Rite*

The new Roman Catholic *Ordo Celebrandi Matrimonium* is a *rituel-type* which may be freely adapted to meet cultural and pastoral needs of different nations and regions. Reference here is made to that authorised for use in the dioceses of England and Wales.

With regard to structure, the marriage rite normally takes place *within* the celebration of the eucharist; marriage and mass are no longer simply juxtaposed but form one coherent whole. Thus the rite first provides for the celebration of marriage within mass, and then, as an *exception* to the norm, the rite for celebrating marriage outside the mass. The first, normative rite, places the marriage service firmly within the *synaxis* with the eucharist proper and nuptial blessings. The second alternative rite simply omits the mass, the nuptial blessings coming at the end of the *synaxis*. Thus marriage is not an "occasional office" with a structure quite unlike any other service. Although it has distinctive elements which make it a marriage service, it is firmly embedded in the normal structure of the liturgy of Word and Sacrament.

Not only is this "historically" more satisfying, but I venture to suggest that it is also more theologically correct. The *synaxis* derives from the synagogue service where scripture was read and expounded concerning the Coming One, which Jesus claimed to fulfil (Luke 4). But until the Parousia all men — including the Bride and Bridegroom — must listen to the Word of the heavenly Bridegroom until he comes to claim His Bride. The eucharist itself is a natural blessing on the Bride and Bridegroom, and is an anticipation of the Marriage feast of the kingdom.

Various elements within the new Roman rite are also worthy of notice. The introductory address is far shorter than the verbose Anglican "Preface", and the meaning of Christian marriage is proclaimed by the whole rite and not in a single exhortation. Vincent Ryan comments:

In the texts of the new Order we see theological reflection at work expounding the relationship of the two sacraments and pointing out its consequences. What these liturgical texts have to say may be synthesised as follows. The eucharist is both the sign and the source of Christian unity and love. It is from this source that married couples must draw if their love is to deepen and mature and attain spiritual fulness. If it is to withstand the stress and strain of life together, it must show itself a self-sacrificing love such as the love Christ showed his Church. The covenant which Christ made on our behalf with the Father and sealed with his blood is reflected in the marriage covenant. At every celebration of the eucharist that covenant is recalled and renewed, and the faithful, associating themselves with it, are drawn into the love of Christ; for those joined in Matrimony each mass is an occasion for them to renew their marriage vows. Finally, this love which Christ communicates to us through the sacrament is an *outgoing* love. Married couples must be witnesses to the loving presence of Christ in the world by their mutual fidelity, the care they bestow on their children and by a concern for the less fortunate of their fellow-men which has something of the universal character of Christ's love.³⁶

In accordance with the old Roman tradition, the nuptial blessing comes after the canon and the Lord's Prayer. As a literary prayer-genre it may be classed with the great prayers of blessing or consecration such as those at ordination. The blessing, which has a choice of three opening paragraphs corresponding to the choice of lessons, asks for blessing and grace upon the couple, for help in keeping their vows, and that they may be an example of the Christian life. Again Vincent Ryan comments usefully:

It should be noted that the position of the nuptial blessing in close proximity to the Communion of the Mass gives a marked eucharistic character to this prayer. This is intentional and is underlined by a direct reference in the introductory formula to the sacrament of Christ's body and blood which perfects and puts the seal to married love.³⁷

The whole rite expresses the celebration of the marriage of Christians in the context of the Christian life, and is not simply concerned with the taking of vows to effect a legal and valid marriage. Has not the Church of England something to learn here?

(b) *The Oriental Marriage Rites*

When turning to consider the Marriage rites of the Eastern Church, the liturgist is faced with two problems. The first is that the history of the Eastern marriage rites is as obscure as that of the Western Church, and critical texts are lacking. As early as the fourth century it was the practice in the Eastern Church for the bishop or priest to attend the marriage feast and give a blessing, although the Alexandrine Church may have inherited the Egyptian pagan custom of the priest attending and solemnising a marriage. A marriage rite began to develop around the hellenistic ceremonies of the joining of right hands and the garlanding or crowning. It would seem that the Armenian Church was the first to adopt the garlanding as part of the marriage rite of the Church, and the Armenian, Nestorian and Syrian Orthodox rites developed before that of the Byzantine Church, and exerted a semitic influence upon the latter.

Although the texts of the Oriental rites have been published by Raes,³⁸ a comparison of his Chaldean rite with the Nestorian rite published by Badger, and the Syrian Orthodox rite with that published by Metropolitan Mar Athansius Yeshue Samuel,³⁹ illustrates the need for a critical text of these rites.

A second problem is quite simply that the ceremonies of the exchange of right hands, the coronation of the bridal pair, and the blessing and drinking of a cup are quite foreign to Western Christians. While the Church is free to change customs and introduce new ceremonies, those which have no immediate and obvious meaning are embarked upon with caution.

Nevertheless, in spite of these problems, Jan Tellini has suggested that the Oriental rites can help us to recover and rephrase a theology of marriage which the Western Church could usefully adopt in her proclamation of the Gospel to the pluralist world of today.⁴⁰

(1) Marriage as a matter of Grace, calling and election. This Tellini suggests is illustrated by the coronation of the bridegroom and bride, not only in the ceremony but also in the accompanying prayers. So the Syrian Orthodox rite:

The crown in our Lord's hand comes and descends from heaven. Fitting to the bridegroom (bride) is the crown which the priest places upon his (her) head.

The belief that the marriage is willed by God and is his gracious gift is admirably expressed here.

(2) Marriage as fulfilment. Through God's election the

bridegroom and bride become one undivided being, the fullness of each other. The crowns of their marriage will become for them the crowns of their eternal glory, and their earthly marriage the eternal wedding banquet of the Lamb. Salvation, the ultimate fulfilment, is represented in the New Testament as the marriage between Christ and His Church; in their earthly marriage the husband reflects the glory of God and the wife reflects the glory of her husband. The life of mutual fulfilment which God has given them as a gift is the only way for the bridegroom and bride to attain to the promised crown of heavenly glory. In the Nestorian rite the drinking from the cup symbolises their future life together, and also the spiritual drink which Christ won for his bride the Church through the sacrifice on Calvary.

(3) Marriage as the microcosm of the union between Christ and his Church. Christ is the true bridegroom and the Church the true bride, and the Eastern rites develop the important analogy drawn in Ephesians 5. The crown of high and powerful glory the earthly couple receive from God is to be an instrument of proclamation. The Coptic rite has the following prayer:

O Lord, place upon your servants
a crown of invincible grace;
a crown of high and powerful glory;
a crown of correct and unshakable faith;
and bless all their actions.
For it is from you, O Christ our God
that all good comes,
and to you it is that glory and honour return,
and to your good Father
and to the life giving Spirit
who is consubstantial with you.

Tellini's points are worth careful consideration. But I would suggest that the very nature of some of the prayers and blessings of the Eastern rites merits direct borrowing or imitation in a revised Anglican rite. The blessing of the ring in Series 3 is terse, but has no beauty:

Heavenly Father by your blessing, let
this ring be to N and N a symbol of
unending love and faithfulness, to
remind them of the vow and covenant
which they have made this day;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Compare that of the Syrian Orthodox rite:

O Lord, Jesus Christ, Bridegroom of truth and justice, You betrothed to Yourself the Church of the Gentiles and by Your Blood You wrote the deed of dowry, and by Your nails You gave her a ring. As the ring of the Holy Church was blessed, bless now, O Lord, these rings that we give to Your servant and Your maid. This is the ring by which Sarah was betrothed to Abraham, Rebecca to Isaac, and Rachel to Jacob. By this ring all the power and authority over Egypt was placed in the hands of Joseph. By its surety Daniel was delivered and became great in the king's presence. By this ring the prodigal son was accepted. By the truth of this ring the just gained victory, and by its fame the merchants became rich. Great, therefore, is the pledge of this ring. This is the ring which invites the races and generations to the betrothals and wedding feasts and gathers them that are far, and mutual relations are accomplished between them. By this ring women are betrothed to men. By this ring the bridegrooms and the brides are joined in marriage. Bless my Lord these rings that they may become the sign and seal of the true betrothal of our daughter N to our son N. May they receive heavenly blessings and bring forth righteous sons and daughters. By your grace, O Lord, let their promise come to happy fulfilment. Rejoicing and exulting, let them offer praise and glory to You now and evermore.⁴¹

In place of the short blessing of the bride and bridegroom, could not the Anglican rite utilise something akin to the Syrian Orthodox prayer over the crowns, without the necessity of adopting the actual crowning ceremony?

O Lord, Who did adorn the sky with luminaries: the sun, the moon, and the stars; O God, Who did crown the earth with fruits, flowers, and blossoms of all kinds; O Jesus Christ Who did crown kings, priests, and prophets; O Compassionate One, Who did bestow His triumph upon his worshippers in return for their heroic combat to keep the faith; Lord, Who crowned king David with the crown of victory; O God, who encircled the ocean like a crown around all the earth; O Good One, Who blessed the year by His grace, put Your right hand, full of mercy and compassion, upon the heads upon which these crowns are placed. Grant them that they also may crown their children with righteousness, justice, and mirth. May Your peace and concord abide with them throughout their lives forever.⁴²

Certainly this is florid language, but if florid language is not justified at a wedding celebration, then when is it justified? Perhaps the Church of England can learn from the Oriental rites what the word "celebration" means.

Towards a structure for the liturgical celebration of marriage

While it is neither my intention, nor is it within my capabilities, to present a text of the "ideal" marriage rite for the Church of England, it seems not only fitting and right, but also my duty in the light of the criticisms which I have put forward, to conclude by proposing some positive suggestions for the restructuring of the Anglican marriage liturgy. I would suggest that in place of one marriage service, a marriage celebration rite should contain at least three services.

(1) Although there is nothing sacrosanct about the old Roman usage — blessings within a special mass — it seems that there are good theological reasons for preferring this structure to an occasional office centred around the legal vows. Although some may relish the thought of reviving the Gallican-Celtic blessing of the bed, for reasons of a practical nature, and perhaps propriety, this usage perhaps best belongs to liturgical history.

Judging by the Root Commission's report, and the communion structure found at the back of the Series 3 Wedding Service, the theological appropriateness of a nuptial eucharist is acknowledged by the Anglican Church. What needs to be done, however, is for the nuptial eucharist to be printed fully at the beginning, and as in the new Roman Catholic rite, presented as the normative rite of marriage celebration.

The Liturgy of the Word should not be an optional extra, but the very setting of the public consent and vows. The prayers, praises and lessons, with perhaps a short introductory paragraph, should render the traditional Anglican exhortation obsolete. The consent and vows should be housed within the Liturgy of the Word, and not form the core of the rite around which other items may or may not be added. And regarding the consent and vows, I would venture to suggest that in place of the present Pelagian answers and vows, something akin to the ordination vows should be used — "I will by the help of God". The vows are such that God's grace is very much a necessity. The giving and exchange of rings may be retained here, but the actual blessing of the rings might be deferred to become part of the nuptial blessings.

The core of the liturgical celebration should be the nuptial blessings followed by communion. The blessings might include the blessing of the rings (as distinct from the exchange of rings), a blessing of the couple using language of the type used in the Oriental rites for the crowning, and a prayer for their future lives, home, family and friends, such as that found in *Contemporary Prayers for Public Worship*. These blessings would be reserved for those who were able to make their communion; that is, a celebration for committed Christians with the Church.

Since for practical reasons the Christian couple might wish for a wedding with family and friends, and not have a nuptial eucharist, perhaps the nuptial blessings — the Church's celebration and benediction — might be postponed until a Sunday eucharist after the couple have returned from honeymoon and attend worship with the Church, for there is a distinction between a clergyman officiating at a wedding, and the Church celebrating the marriage of two Christians.

(2) Although the nuptial eucharist would be the normative rite, a service for the less committed without the eucharist should be provided, again as found in the new Roman Catholic rite. It should be a Liturgy of the Word, and should have different blessings from those found within the normative rite. This is not to suggest a rite for second class citizens, but to suggest that baptism and confirmation does make a difference to the language and concepts used in prayers and blessings, and indeed, to the depth and quality of the celebration.

(3) Any revision should, as recommended by the 1971 and 1978 reports, provide a service for use when one or both parties have had a previous marriage dissolved. This task should not be left to the individual dioceses. Certainly, "What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder", but it is too readily assumed that all those joined together by the Church are also joined by God; clearly in some cases it is more like the work of the devil! Furthermore, as Karl Barth reminds us, no man can put asunder, but God himself might choose so to do. Barth reminds the Church — which includes the Church of England — that it might not

be able to conceal from itself the fact that legal divorce may be the better way for certain men, that it may bring order out of chaos, that it may mean a return to a point from which alone there can be healing and new obedience. In any case it will not regard them all polluted, or

scandalously (in the worst sense of the word) refuse them the Church's benediction in the case of a second marriage.⁴³

Since the legality of remarriage after divorce is not in question, there seems to be no valid reason why the Church of England should find itself unable to preside over the vows at such a wedding. Instead of its traditional vows, it could make use of the form used in the Register Office, and could make a necessary distinction between the theological proclamatory nature of a first and second marriage, as is done in the Oriental Churches. The service might be an occasional office, or a eucharist with special propers and appropriate prayers and blessings in place of the nuptial blessings of the normative rite. This can be achieved once it is recognised that marriage celebration is more than the exchange of life-long vows.

These suggestions are offered tentatively as an answer to some of the questions I have raised, but I would not wish to imply that they are the only or the best answer. But if the questions raised are valid, then clearly some rethinking is urgently needed. Dr Cuming's *A History of Anglican Liturgy* replaced the older work by Procter and Frere. When Cuming's work is revised or replaced, I trust that his successor may be able to write: "Of all the medieval services, Matrimony would seem the least familiar to a twenty-first century worshipper".

NOTES

1. G. J. Cuming, *A History of Anglican Liturgy*, London: Macmillan 1969, p. 25.
2. B. D. Spinks, "Luther's Other Major Liturgical Reforms: 3. The Traubuchlein", in *Liturgical Review*, 10: 1 (1980), pp. 33-38.
3. Ed. T. J. Fawcett, *The Liturgy of Comprehension 1689*, Mayhew-McGrimmon: Southend on Sea 1973.
4. R. C. D. Jasper, *Prayer Book Revision in England 1800-1900*, S.P.C.K.: London 1954.
5. *Marriage, Divorce and the Church*, S.P.C.K.: London 1971, p. 54.
6. By "1662" is meant that of 1662 and the variations used from the 1928 Prayer Book.
7. K. Ritzer, *Le Mariage dans les Eglises chretiennes du I^{ER} au XI^E Siecle*, Lex Orandi 45 Les Editions du Cerf: Paris 1970, pp. 310-314.
8. Ritzer, op. cit., pp. 238ff.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid., p. 240.
11. Ibid., p. 246.
12. Ibid., p. 244.
13. Ibid., pp. 373ff.
14. Cuming, op. cit., p. 68.
15. *Manuale Sarum*, ed. A. Jefferies Collins, Henry Bradshaw Society 91, London 1960.
16. *Manuale et Processionale ad usum insignis Ecclesiae Eboracensis*, ed. W. G. Henderson, Surtees Society LXIII, Durham 1875, p. 24.

17. C. Wordsworth and H. Littlehales, *The Old Service Books of the English Church*, Methuen, London 1904, p. 53.
18. Ed. E. C. Whitaker, *Martin Bucer and the Book of Common Prayer*, Mayhew-McCrimmon: Great Wakering 1974, pp. 120-124.
19. With the exception of the Society of Friends, all Christian marriage rites in England and Wales other than the Church of England must include the declaration of no impediment and the marriage vows as used in the Register Office and laid down by the Registrar General. An exception was to be found in the Congregational Union's *Book of Congregational Worship*, 1920, where permission was given for different words to be used. This caused confusion for Registrars attending weddings, and this permission was subsequently withdrawn.
20. *Alternative Services Series 3. The Wedding Service*. A Report by the Liturgical Commission of the General Synod of the Church of England. GS 228. S.P.C.K.: London 1975, p. 6.
21. See Edward Schillebeeckx, *Marriage, Human Reality and Saving Mystery*, ET N. D. Smith, Sheed and Ward: London 1965, pp. 272ff; pp. 350ff.
22. So the Eastern rites. Schillebeeckx, op. cit., pp. 350ff.
23. *Marriage Divorce and the Church*, p. 24.
24. *Marriage and the Church's Task* (GS 363), Church Information Office: London 1978, p. 31.
25. Schillebeeckx, op. cit., passim.
26. Ibid.
27. J. J. von Allmen, "The Celebration of Christian Marriage" in *Liturgical Studies (Liturgical Review)* 1: 1 (1971), pp. 1-17.
28. Black Notley Parish Church Records, Essex County Record Office, Chelmsford Essex.
29. A. K. Robertson, "The Marriage Service" in *Liturgical Review* 7: 1 (1977), pp. 12-19, 13-14.
30. J. J. von Allmen, art. cit., p. 9.
31. For a rather too sympathetic appraisal, Charles H. Hutchins, *Liturgy for Marriage: Some Guidelines with Reference to the Series 3 Service*, Grove Books: Bramcote, 1976.
32. GS 228, p. 5.
33. *Marriage Divorce and the Church*, p. 54.
34. Ibid., p. 55.
35. Ibid., p. 57.
36. Vincent Ryan, "The Roman Rite of Marriage," in *Liturgical Review* 3: 2 (1973), pp. 1-8, pp. 4-5.
37. Ibid., p. 6.
38. A. Raes, *Le Mariage dans les Eglises d'Orient*, Editions de Chevetogne: Paris, 1958.
39. G. P. Badger, *The Nestorians and their Rituals*, 2 Vols., Joseph Masters: London 1852; ed. Metropolitan Mar Athanasius Yeshue Samuel. *The Order of the Sacrament of Matrimony According to the Ancient Rite of the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch*. Lebanon 1974.
40. Jan Tellini, "Marriage and the Oriental Churches", in *Liturgical Review* 6: 1 (1976), pp. 22-30.
41. Samuel, pp. 24-25.
42. Ibid., p. 44.
43. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, T. & T. Clark: Edinburgh, 3/4, p. 213.

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