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# Jordan: Blessed union never easy for LGB

BY ERIC RANGUS

In recent months, the debate over gay marriage has been waged in legal circles all over the country. This legal discussion of LGBT relationships is relatively new, but from a religious standpoint, the conversation has been ongoing for some time.

It's a conversation that religion's Mark Jordan explores in his new book, *Blessing Same-Sex Unions: The Perils of Queer Romance and the Confusions of Christian Marriage*, to be released this week by the University of Chicago Press.

"The starting premise of the book," said Jordan, Asa Griggs Candler Professor of Religion, "is that whatever governments do about same-sex marriage or same-sex unions, Christian churches still have a question before them. The question is not going

churches, such as the Episcopal church and the United Church of Christ, bless same-sex unions.

Turning current arguments against gay marriage on their ear, Jordan said the religious blessing of gay relationships would actually strengthen the religiosity of heterosexual relationships, which he said have strayed far from traditional Christian teachings.

"If we are talking about the religious effects of a blessing, we aren't talking about a 'white wedding' or the wedding reception," he said. "What really is the relationship between Christian marriage and your average church wedding? There is this ideal of romance as marketed through the wedding industry. I think the more churches return to the particular religious part of what they are doing, the more they'll see that blessing same-sex couples will strengthen the idea of what the blessing is. Far from destroying marriage, it

been badly wounded by churches, having that blessing is like being embraced and welcomed back," Jordan said.

To research the book, Jordan spent countless hours paging through archives, reading blessing plans (which included prayers and song selection) and attending many services. Jordan also used one other primary source—something many see as a necessity in planning a wedding.

"I went to Borders and loaded up on these incredibly thick bridal magazines," he said. "Though I never brought myself to the point of subscribing, so I did keep that distance."

Jordan may have kept a certain distance, but much of what he read stuck. His chapter titles: "A Proper Engagement," "Your (?) Special Day," and "The Wedding and Its Attendants" sound etiquette-guide perfect.

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"The starting premise of the book," said Jordan, Asa Griggs Candler Professor of Religion, "is that whatever governments do about same-sex marriage or same-sex unions, Christian churches still have a question before them. The legal solution is not going to solve the religious question."

And those questions asked by Christians about gay marriage are by no means uniform. According to Jordan, some who quote scripture as being against homosexuality in all cases conveniently leave out instances and text that condone if not promote its practice. And while the loudest Christian voices in today's media are against church recognition of gay unions, several major

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While not often discussed in mainstream outlets, many in the LGBT community also are Christian and the importance of the church in their lives is something that cannot be replaced. That makes church blessing all the more important.

"For many couples, especially same-sex couples who have been rejected by the church as individuals or have

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"Some of the parts that were most fun for me to write were taking up a how-to manual for same-sex couples," Jordan said. "I also wanted to structure the book according to the cycle of a romantic novel, starting with falling in love and getting through the wedding, but going beyond where most romantic novels stop, and asking uncomfortable questions about what happens after the wedding."

Over the book's 207 pages, Jordan not only explores the intersection of religion and

explores many of those struggles through the prism of religion. In a new book, Jordan same-sex unions, but also asks pointed questions about romance. The perspectives originate from gay relationships, but the concerns apply to heterosexual ones as well.

"People really are a lot alike, no matter their sexual orientation, so they would recognize a lot of the stories, a lot of the heartbreaks and a lot of the joys from their own lives," Jordan said. "But I'm hoping anyone who reads the book will get a sense that there are many possibilities within Christian religious history for structuring relationships.

"Instead of squeezing everyone into this tight little shoebox of the modern marriage, which doesn't resemble

early Christian marriage—and current Christian marriage isn't Ozzie and Harriet—we should see Christian marriage as a huge variety of things, and we ought to feel the challenge and the liberation of that."

Following the release of *Blessing Same-Sex Unions*, Jordan will participate in book signings around the country. He already has moved on to his next project, a book about the experience of growing up LGBT and Christian. In the fall, Jordan will release a book tentatively titled *Rewritten Theology: Aquinas After His Readers*, which explores St. Thomas Aquinas and the idea of authority in Catholic theology.

#### Task FORCES from page 1

Public Health; and psychiatry Professor Steven Levy.

The small, nimble task forces are charged with collecting data from faculty, staff and students regarding, for one group, the most serious mental health challenges facing the campus community and, for the other, the proliferation of substance abuse across Emory.

There already is a good amount of data available regarding these subjects, not only specific to Emory but with a national focus, as well. However, it