The opponents of legal recognition for same-sex marriage frequently appeal to a Judeo-Christian tradition. But does it make any sense to speak of that tradition as a single teaching on marriage? Are there elements in Jewish and Christian traditions that actually authorize religious and civil recognition of same-sex couples? And are contemporary heterosexual marriages well supported by those traditions?

As evidenced by the ten provocative essays assembled and edited by Mark D. Jordan, the answers are not as simple as many would believe. The scholars of Judaism and Christianity gathered here explore the issue through a wide range of biblical, historical, liturgical, and theological evidence. From Davids love for Jonathan through the singleness of Jesus and Paul to the all-male heaven of Johns Apocalypse, the collection addresses pertinent passages in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament with scholarly precision. It reconsiders whether there are biblical precedents for blessing same-sex unions in Jewish and Christian liturgies.

The book concludes by analyzing typical religious arguments against such unions and provides a comprehensive response to claims that the Judeo-Christian tradition prohibits same-sex unions from receiving religious recognition. The essays, most of which are in print here for the first time, are by Saul M. Olyan, Mary Ann Tolbert, Daniel Boyarin, Laurence Paul Hemming, Steven Greenberg, Kathryn Tanner, Susan Frank Parsons, Eugene F. Rogers, Jr., and Mark D. Jordan.

My Personal Review:
The debate over same-sex marriage must be broadened to include a full range of religious questions, according to Emory University religion

Cslr Book Broadens Same-Sex Union Debate
professor Mark Jordan in his new anthology, Authorizing Marriage: Canon, Tradition, and Critique in the Blessing of Same-Sex Unions (Princeton University Press).

"No progress in the debate can be made just by rehashing unexamined notions about marriage as we wish it had been or by citing a few biblical verses out of context, in disregard of such obvious facts as Israelite polygamy or early Christian celibacy," said Jordan, Asa Griggs Candler Professor of Religion and a senior fellow in the Center for the Study of Law and Religion (CSLR).

Jordan calls upon a range of esteemed scholars to examine scripture, tradition, philosophical principles, liturgy, and church reform as a means of exploring religious arguments for and against same sex unions and marriage. Contributors include Jordan; Saul Olyan, Brown University; Dale Martin, Yale University; Mary Ann Tolbert, Pacific School of Religion; Daniel Boyarin, University of California at Berkeley; Laurence Paul Hemming, University of London; Steven Greenberg, National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership; Kathryn Tanner, University of Chicago; Susan Frank Parsons, University of Nottingham; and Eugene Rogers, University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

The scholars take up questions in dialogue between Jews and Christians, in some cases finding divergences between traditions, especially around scriptural sources, and in other cases, discovering common ground. They also illustrate the complexity of the issues, particularly involving scriptural interpretation, the lost variety of traditional blessing rites for relationships, and the philosophical assumptions about what it means to be male or female.

The book's first three essays focus on biblical interpretation. Olyan reviews passages from the Hebrew Bible that often figure in debates over same-sex desire, focusing on David's famous lament over Jonathan that suggests a homoerotic and possibly sexual relationship between them. Martin considers passages in the New Testament that make a strong case against marriage of any kind. Tolbert concurs with Martin and shows how canonical texts offer an ideal of friendship that contemporary same-sex couples can find affirming.

The next two essays focus on weddings. Greenberg shows how elements of a traditional Jewish wedding might be revised or replaced in a liturgy for same-sex couples. Jordan examines cases for historical existence of rites for same-sex pairs.

The final three essays provide theological assessments of the contemporary debates. Tanner argues that "conservative" Episcopalian opposition to same-sex love is in fact a new Puritanism that undoes principles of Anglican polity. Parsons looks beyond opposition to homoeroticism from natural law or purpose to a theology of created
relationship called into the future. Rogers argues that same-sex couples should be blessed in order to recognize that they are means of sanctification for those called to be within them.

Jordan says the book does not pretend to be representative of all viewpoints but does attempt to make two points: recognizing same-sex unions is much more complicated as a religious question than is typically admitted in public debate, and religious marriage itself has always been more problematic than most debaters want to admit.

"It is particularly important to demonstrate these points because they seem to be forgotten week after week, year in and year out, no matter how many other topics advance and retreat through the public debates," he said.

is the third major volume that Jordan has published as a senior fellow in the CSLR project on "Sex, Marriage and Family & the Religions of the Book." The others: Blessing Same Sex Unions: The Perils of Queer Romance and the Confusions of Christian Marriage (University of Chicago Press, 2005) and Telling Truths in Church: Scandal, Flesh, and Christian Speech (Beacon Press, 2002).

"This book serves to confirm anew Professor Jordan's standing as a most elegant, engaging, and erudite advocate for the proper place of same-sex ideas, institutions, and practices within church, state, and society," said John Witte, Jr., CSLR director and Jonas Robitscher Professor of Law and Ethics at Emory.

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