

Prosperity Through Timeless Values

Dr. Jennifer Roback Morse • Your Coach for the Culture Wars



IS SAME SEX ADOPTION ABOUT KIDS OR ABOUT ADULTS?

Biological parents, married to each other, are best for children: better than divorced parents, step parents, cohabiting biological parents, or single parents. We have no right to assume that children will do just fine with same sex couples. Giving preference to married couples as adoptive parents is completely rational.

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The United Kingdom is about to repeat the ill-treatment of the Catholic Church pioneered in Boston. The government of the UK may effectively shut down the nation-wide Catholic adoption services rather than grant a religious exemption to the new law requiring equal treatment on the basis of sexual orientation. The Archbishop of Canterbury along with the Muslim Council of Britain have both stated their support of the Roman Catholic Church.

The churches are correct: non-discrimination in adoption is an adult-centred policy, despite its supporters' best efforts to depict it as child-centred. The demand that every adoption agency in the UK take no notice of sexual orientation is irrational and incoherent.

The best pro-child argument that proponents have is the claim that children are better off with gay couples than "languishing in foster care". Notice the tacit admission that gay couples are not the first choice: the first choice is heterosexual, stable, married couples, who are simply too few in number to meet the needs of all the children.

But this claim, even if true, does not justify the new British policy. British law does not permit adoption agencies to line up prospective adoptive parents in order of desirability, and then work its way down the list until all the adoptable children have been allocated. No. Non-discrimination law insists that neither marital status, nor sexual orientation, can even be considered as a factor in placing children with adoptive parents. Besides, Catholic adoption agencies handle about a third of all adoptions of children considered difficult to place.

The Church concurs with science and common sense in believing men and women make complementary contributions to child development. Mother-absence in infancy places a child at risk for attachment disorder. The absence of a child's father in the household places boys at risk for delinquent behaviour and girls at risk for early sexual activity. Across a wide array of behaviours, boys and girls respond differently to father absence than to mother absence. Boys and girls develop differently, and respond to their environments differently.

We know that children do best with their biological parents, married to each other. This is superior to having divorced parents, step parents, cohabiting biological parents, or single parents. That evidence -- and the inconclusive nature of the evidence on same sex parenting -- means we have no right to assume that children will do just fine with same sex couples. Preferring married couples as adoptive parents is completely rational.

There are circumstances in which same sex adoption should not be prohibited, including private adoptions and some second party adoptions. Adop-

tion by same sex couples related to the child, when no other suitable relative is available may be the best situation for a particular child.

But these limited circumstances are quite different from the generalised “right” that the state should not discriminate against same sex couples in placing its wards for foster care or adoption. The state absolutely should discriminate in favour of opposite sex, married couples. It is utterly irrational for the state to pretend that there are no differences between opposite sex married couples and cohabiting couples or single individuals or same sex couples. To ban such discrimination by otherwise responsible and reputable private adoption agencies is more than irrational. It is an indefensible violation of the freedom of those private agencies.

The homosexual activists and their allies in the British government evidently hold that gender is an irrelevant category for parenting. They apparently believe that there is no unique contribution of either gender to anything that matters to the well-being of children. But if men and women were really perfect substitutes, the very idea of sexual orientation would make no sense.

A gay man who insists on a male sexual partner does not regard men and women as perfect substitutes. A lesbian woman’s desire for a female partner illustrates that she does not regard a man, even a feminine man, to be just as good as a woman. If men and women were truly interchangeable, then the idea of “sexual orientation” would be incomprehensible. Evidently, the same sex experience cannot be replicated by having an opposite sex partner.

Yet, advocates of same sex parenting claim that gender is irrelevant for the purposes of parenting. Everything a child gets from his mother can be equally obtained from a household with two fathers. Likewise, a child can get everything he needs from his father all across his developmental stages, from a household with two mothers. Thus the same adults who insist on a partner of a specific gender claim also insist that the gender of parents is

insignificant to children. This is an incoherent set of claims.

This is why I say that the demands for non-discrimination in adoption are irrational and incoherent. Adoption agencies, public and private, absolutely ought to take notice of the sexual orientation and marital status of prospective adoptive parents. Gender and marital status are relevant to the success of parenting. It is irrational to claim otherwise. It is incoherent to claim that gender is irrelevant to parenting and at the same time claim that gender is absolutely crucial to sexual activity.

The religious authorities -- the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Church and the Muslim Council of Britain -- are more clear-headed than the “progressives”. The religious leaders of the UK reject the gay activists’ arguments that adults are entitled to have what they want, and that children have to take whatever we give them.

The British government must find some way to meet the legitimate needs of gay adults, without sacrificing the well-being of the most vulnerable children in society.

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