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OPINION & EDITORIAL

Despite debate, university maintains anti-gay policies, benefits

by Yoav Sivan

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Jerry Seinfeld is coming to Madison this October, but why pay some \$40-50 for his stand-up when you could get a similarly entertaining show for free? Of course, I'm talking about the same-sex marriage debate that took place on Sept. 21 in the Union Theatre between gay-rights advocate Evan Wolfson and Glenn Stanton from Focus on the Family.

It takes a lot of imagination, strong rhetorical skills and a bit of playing to underdog sympathy to launch a worthwhile attack on same-sex marriage in liberal Madison. Unfortunately, Mr. Stanton's attack was lacking in all three. The result was either very sad or extremely hilarious, depending on your mood that evening.

One of the popular aspects of the issue dealt with at length in the debate is the "family" side (put differently, whether gay couples should be allowed to have or adopt children). Ostensibly, formal recognition of same-sex couples' right to marry will also encourage them to have children. Next, we ask, are children in same-sex families worse off than those in "normal" families?

This is the wrong question to ask. Undoubtedly, it is better off to be born in a rich, healthy, well-functioning family from New England, where the true dilemma from early childhood should be whether you'll go to Harvard like your father or Yale like your mother. But the comparison to the best-case scenario is misleading. I haven't reviewed the literature review or done much research myself, but most families I know of are less than perfect. If my own strongly divorced but very heterosexual (I think) parents could have three very disturbed children, everybody else can. If, by not having someone in a family that you can call "Daddy," the family is forever separated from real parental perfection, than so be it.

The children argument or the hunt after family perfection is superfluous: we should not inquire after the criteria for having the optimal family. Rather, we should investigate into the minimum criteria of having a family or raising children. Indeed, this is what the law is by-and-large concerned with. The primary interest of the legal system is in determining when a family does not function to the degree that a child should be taken from his or her parents — not in improving families to perfection. Usually the law does not tell people whether they should have children or how many; it just says under what extreme conditions they should not have any.

True, some anti-gay activists do see homosexuality as a sufficiently sinful lifestyle — indeed, an extreme condition to which children should not be "exposed" by any means — but this is not the case with the more sophisticated smooth talkers. Some of their best friends are gay. They just quote studies showing that gay families are not the all-time best recipe for well-functioning family life. Otherwise, they are the most fervent supporters of equality.

If we continue with the optimal family reasoning, we can reach surprising conclusions. If only perfect families should be allowed, then something should be done when those perfect conditions are not met:

promote abortion, perhaps? Or forced sterilization? Government regulation of family planning presents many intriguing ideas.

On a more local note, the campus discussion on same-sex marriage has been fueled by the proposed anti-gay amendment in Wisconsin. However, the discussion overlooks the situation in the university itself. The debate in the Union proved that the UW-Madison campus can be very liberal indeed, while at the same time the university maintains official anti-gay policies. In fact, UW is the only Big Ten school that does not allow same-sex benefits for its faculty. Wearing the apparel and symbols of a university endorses university policies. When we wear our favorite red Wisconsin T-shirt or other UW apparel, the anti-gay policies of this university are part of what the "W" stands for.

Go Bucky?

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