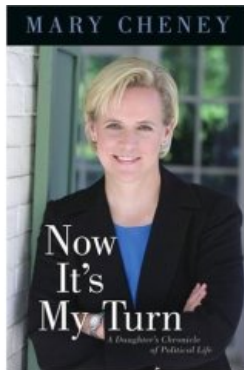


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## Is Morality Relative When It Comes to Relatives?

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The Office of the Vice President of the United States announced last week that Mary Cheney, daughter of Vice President Dick Cheney, is expecting a baby. The official word came from Lea Anne McBride, a spokeswoman for the Vice President.

The spokeswoman also told reporters that Mr. and Mrs. Cheney were “looking forward with eager anticipation” to the baby’s birth. The baby will be the Cheney’s sixth grandchild.

From *The New York Times*:

*Mr. Cheney’s office would not provide details about how Mary Cheney became pregnant or by whom, and Ms. Cheney did not respond to messages left at her office and with her book publisher, Simon & Schuster.*

*The announcement of Mary Cheney’s pregnancy, which was first reported today by The Washington Post, and her expected status as a same-sex parent, prompted new debate over the administration’s opposition to gay marriage.*

Mary Cheney has been a controversial, but largely private, presence in Washington and its circles. In 2004 she took a position as a senior aide to her father during the presidential campaign, and she was often at his side.

Nevertheless, she is also a public figure — a fact made clear by the publication of her autobiography, *Now It’s My Turn: A Daughter’s Chronicle of a Political Life*. She revealed in the book that she first told her parents of her lesbian identity when she was age 16.

The book did not represent a frontal attack on the Bush administration and its opposition to same-sex marriage, but Ms. Cheney did reveal that she considered resigning from the 2004 campaign when President George W. Bush endorsed a proposed constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriage.

Ms. Cheney, who has lived with her partner Heather Poe for 15 years, argued that a ban on same-sex marriage would “write discrimination into the Constitution.”

Her father broke with President Bush on the issue during the campaign, stating that his own position is that “freedom means freedom for everyone” including the freedom to “enter any kind of relationship they want to.” He specifically opposed the proposed Federal Marriage Amendment.

The announcement of Ms. Cheney’s pregnancy mixes the personal and the public. The private life of the Cheney family deserves as much respect as that of any other family. But, at the same time, other families do not have pregnancy announcements made by White House spokespersons.

By all accounts the Vice President and Mrs. Cheney dearly love their daughter — as they surely should. She is their daughter, after all. She is also obviously a very gifted person, and her presence and



advice were sought by her father in the midst of a grueling presidential campaign. The love the family shares is admirable, natural, and a testimony to the goodness of the family as an institution.



The Cheneys will love this new grandchild as well. The circumstances of the baby's conception were not revealed to the press, but those circumstances would not add or subtract from the baby's ontological and moral status as a child made in the image of God. Every child is to be welcomed, loved, and celebrated.

But, this does not mean that the circumstances of every conception and parenting arrangement are equal in moral terms. Make no mistake, we are witnessing a moral revolution taking place within our sight.

Ruth Marcus of *The Washington Post* called the announcement of Ms. Cheney's pregnancy an "Ellen DeGeneres moment of national politics."

Further:

*Acceptance won't come immediately, of course, and certainly not from all quarters. The folks who have fits about "Heather Has Two Mommies" are beside themselves over "Heather Is One of Two Mommies." Especially because the other mommy is — as Mary Cheney is inevitably described — the vice president's Openly Gay Daughter.*

Debra Chasnoff, who made a documentary film about lesbians having children added a bit of historical context to the revolution:

*When I heard the news this week that Vice President Cheney's daughter Mary and her partner were expecting a baby, I thought, "Wow. It's finally happened." A true revolution within our lifetime. Actually, in less than 25 years.*

*In 1984, I made my first film, a documentary that explored the then extremely radical and unheard of idea that lesbians could have children. Fellow producer, Kim Klausner, and I traveled across the country unearthing a handful of lesbians who had boldly decided to become mothers.*

Now, of course, this is a subject portrayed regularly on prime-time television. Chasnoff's film, *Choosing Children*, is now quite out of date.

*I knew we had helped launch a profound culture shift, but I have to confess, that in my wildest dreams, I never imagined there would come a day when *Choosing Children* might be of interest to the White House — not only of interest, but a political and personal necessity. But, now, thanks to Mary and Heather, I'm dusting off a copy and sending it to the Cheney family today. I hope they show it to George.*

*When they watch it, they might begin to understand that, today, the daughter of an ultra-conservative leader of the United States is able to create and define family however she wants, thanks to the more than two decades of pioneering activism that paved the way.*

*So, congratulations Mary, Heather, Grandpa Dick and Grandma Lynne. Enjoy the movie. And, hey, welcome to our revolution. Maybe now you'll finally get with the program.*

On the other hand, Dr. James C. Dobson, founder and chairman of Focus on the Family, writing in *TIME* magazine, put the announcement in the context of what this means for the future of the family:

*A number of social conservatives, myself included, have recently been asked to respond to the news that Mary Cheney, the Vice President's daughter, is pregnant with a child she intends to raise with her lesbian partner. Implicit in this issue is an effort to get us to criticize the Bush Administration or the Cheney family. But the concern here has nothing to do with politics. It is about what kind of family environment is best for the health and development of children, and, by extension, the nation at large.*

*With all due respect to Cheney and her partner, Heather Poe, the majority of more than 30 years of social-science evidence indicates that children do best on every measure of well-being when raised by their married mother and father. That is not to say Cheney and Poe will not love their child. But love alone is not enough to guarantee healthy growth and*

*development. The two most loving women in the world cannot provide a daddy for a little boy—any more than the two most loving men can be complete role models for a little girl.*

More:

*In raising these issues, Focus on the Family does not desire to harm or insult women such as Cheney and Poe. Rather, our conviction is that birth and adoption are the purview of married heterosexual couples. Traditional marriage is God's design for the family and is rooted in biblical truth. When that divine plan is implemented, children have the best opportunity to thrive. That's why public policy as it relates to families must be based not solely on the desires of adults but rather on the needs of children and what is best for society at large.*

Those words represent a truthful and compassionate response to the announcement of Mary Cheney's pregnancy. Dr. Dobson's statement contains no rancor or condemnation, just a restatement of the centrality of marriage, the non-negotiability of its heterosexual character, and of a child's need for both mother and father.

This new development raises a problem that may hit many evangelical Christians closer to home than we would like to admit. Most evangelicals know enough to resist the ideological allure of moral relativism. Nevertheless, when a *relative* becomes involved, even many evangelicals blink and become moral relativists of a very different sort.

In order to keep family peace, show love to a loved one, or avoid awkward conversations, major moral issues are simply overlooked. Some even change their position on questions of grave moral significance, only because a relative is involved.

This happens with reference to divorce, cohabitation, homosexuality, adultery, and any number of other issues. It is a habit we must break.

Moral integrity demands clear and convictional moral thinking, based in the infallible wisdom of God's perfect Word. Love demands that we love persons, no matter what their sin may be. Honesty demands that we admit the difficulty of knowing how to combine moral integrity and love with perfect pitch. The Gospel demands that we tell the truth with love.

No one ever said this was going to be easy. But becoming a moral relativist when a relative is involved is a path the faithful Christian cannot take. We must resist moral relativism — even with relatives.

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We discussed this issue on Monday's edition of *The Albert Mohler Program* [listen [here](#)]. I also dealt with this issue in a [major commentary](#), first published on August 30, 2004. See "[Moral Relativism—Republican Style](#)."

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT: I am a member of the Board of Directors of [Focus on the Family](#).

