

# **British Catholics must accept gay couple law: Adoption agencies may close**

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The Roman Catholic Church has lost the fight to opt out of new laws in England and Wales banning discrimination against gay couples, throwing its adoption agencies into a bind.

Despite protests from Catholics, who were supported by the Anglican Church of England in their campaign against the laws, British prime minister Tony Blair announced January 29 that there would be “no exemptions” for faith groups when the Equality Act comes into force April 6.

The act will outlaw discrimination in the provision of goods, facilities and services on the basis of sexual orientation. “I start from a very firm foundation: there is no place in our society for discrimination,” Blair said.

In a bid to soften the impact, Blair—whose wife, Cherie, is a prominent Catholic—said the adoption agencies would be given 21 months to get ready to abide by the new rules.

Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, leader of the Catholic Church in England and Wales, had warned that its adoption agencies would close rather than obey any regulations that require them to hand over babies to gay couples.

After the prime minister's declaration that there would be no exemptions to the Equality Act, the cardinal expressed disappointment in a BBC interview.

“The government has a right to legislate and homosexual couples are also able to adopt in other agencies,” Murphy-O'Connor said, “but we want to hold onto this principle” that “normally children should be brought up by a father and a mother.” He added, “We hold that that is extremely important.”

The cardinal said “there may well be some way in which, without breaking the law, our Catholic services can continue in their work according to Catholic principles.” But he did not elaborate. -*Religion News Service*