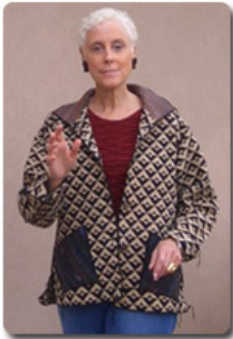


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## “A Strictly Christian Policy?” — Linda Hirshman Strikes Again

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Linda Hirshman, whose recent book suggesting that women should abandon motherhood for meaningful employment in the workplace caused such an uproar, is at it again. This time, she is aiming her guns at the U.S. military’s “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy on homosexuality. Her outrage toward women who actually love being mothers is now matched by her argument that calling homosexuality immoral is patently ridiculous.

Writing in *The New Republic*, Hirshman referred (with amazement) to General Peter Pace’s recent comments to the effect that he considered homosexual acts to be immoral. General Pace, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, had uttered the unthinkable.

In her words:

*“Immoral” seemed an odd phrase. In most western moral systems, immorality requires an element of harm to, or disregard for, others. The obvious examples are robbery or murder—though even sexual conduct that some call immoral supposedly degrades the moral climate of the community. That’s mostly nonsense; on the rare instances when sexual conduct should be an object of moral scrutiny, it involves harming another—as (in Pace’s other example) adultery does—through a hurtful breach of trust. But no one is actually harmed—and no civil liberties are trampled—by homosexuality.*

Evidently, Ms. Hirshman defines morality exclusively in terms of “a hurtful breach of trust” or the trampling of civil liberties. Thus, so long as no trust is breached (defined in exclusively private terms) and no civil liberty is trampled, sexual behavior cannot be considered immoral and, presumably, should not be outlawed or regulated by the state.

Hirshman sees the culprit in this outrage to be Christianity. As she explains, the Old Testament does include some rather negative statements about sodomy, but these are dismissed as relics of an outdated past, along with Kosher rules and laws against mixing fibers in fabric.

This is where her argument takes a bizarre turn:

*But why do Christians pay the Old Testament’s commandments any mind? After all they stopped keeping Kosher centuries ago, when Jesus wiped the rulebook clean except for the ethical code—e.g., the Ten Commandments. And the Judeo-Christian ethics don’t say anything about sodomy. The whole apparatus of condemnation rests on three letters from Paul, decades later, in which he called homosexuality “against nature.”*

Those who would write about Christianity in public ought at least to have some knowledge of the subject. Ms. Hirshman obviously does not. An actual reading of the New Testament reveals that Jesus did not, to use her expression, “wipe the rulebook clean” except for the Ten Commandments. See, for example, Matthew 5, where Jesus declared that He had come to fulfill the Law, not to abolish it, adding:

*For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. [Matthew 5:18-19]*

As she sees it, Jesus had no problem with sodomy. The entire blame for the bad press about sodomy lies with the Apostle Paul and his “three letters” in which he argues that homosexuality is “against nature.” In other words, the belief that homosexual acts are immoral is exclusively a Christian hangup.

In her words:

*Homosexuality thus presents the purest instance of whether a democratic republic should enforce a purely theological (rather than ethical) prohibition—one with not the slightest secular defense. It's as if Pace had said the Army would not take people who eat bacon.*

She minces no words here. Homosexuality is “the purest instance” of determining whether a democratic republic is truly democratic. A proscription of homosexual behavior is “a purely theological prohibition” — and the offending theology is a *Christian* theology.

She concludes:

*Because America is a country of many people and cultures; because the Armed Services have historically served as an avenue to full citizenship; because prejudices like Pace's have never survived the test of time; and because the diversity of people willing to make great sacrifices for their society is a source of strength, not weakness, there are only two immoralities a secular society should recognize when considering excluding gays from service—bigotry and ingratitude.*

Ms. Hirshman's argument — bizarre as it is — is important precisely because it is likely to become a prime focal point in the debate over marriage, gender, sexuality, and sexual morality. The distinctive morality of Christianity — the morality that allowed the emergence of Western civilization — is now seen as the last bastion of oppressive sexual prohibition.

Note carefully that Hirshman's argument about homosexuality could be extended to *any* sexual acts committed by consenting adults. According to her logic, *no* sexual act can be prohibited unless it breaks a trust or tramples on a civil right.

Is the belief that homosexual acts are immoral “a strictly Christian policy?” What about prohibitions against polygamy, non-reproductive incest, or anything else done between fully consenting, trust-keeping, civil rights-respecting adults?

This line of argument — that the immorality of homosexual acts is nothing but a Christian policy — has been on the horizon for some time. Now, it lands squarely on the pages of *The New Republic*. Expect to meet this argument again and again in days to come.

