

FEMINISM, GAY RIGHTS AND MULTICULTURALISM

RICK HINSHAW

Western progressives seem in the throes of an intractable internal conflict, pitting their commitment to secular feminism and gay rights against their multiculturalist vision of respect for the mores of different cultures. Particularly on issues involving sexuality, laws in some developing countries go well beyond what progressives like to call the “extremes” of pro-life, pro-family westerners.

On abortion, for example, among the “25 percent of the world’s population (living) in countries with highly restrictive abortion laws,” reports the pro-abortion group Women on Waves, most are in “Latin America, Africa and Asia.” Moreover, while the restrictive abortion laws that prevailed in western nations until recent years invariably treated the woman as a second victim of abortion, some of these restrictive laws in the developing world target the woman for harsh punishment.

Similarly with gay rights: while the debate in the west centers on legalizing gay “marriage,” laws in many Islamic and sub-Saharan African nations criminalize homosexual behavior – to the extreme of life imprisonment, or even death in some Islamic societies.

One predictable response to this conundrum is to attribute such practices to the vestiges of western colonialism.

But pro-gay rights commentator James Kirchick, writing in the Daily Beast, debunks that convenient analysis. As many post-colonial societies “have repealed all sorts of colonial-era laws,” he points out, their maintenance of anti-homosexuality laws reflects a reassertion of their own culture’s “religious and societal mores.”

So, if traditional mores and their harsh enforcement in developing nations cannot be blamed on past “western imperialism,” how can they be effectively dealt with, without undermining multicultural tolerance?

For a long time, the answer was simply to ignore these laws and practices, pretend they did not exist. The *New York Post* recently highlighted an example of this approach, explaining how “Ayaan Hirsi Ali – a champion of women threatened by radical Islamic fundamentalism – had her invitation to speak at Brandeis’ (University) commencement cancelled because her message was too politically incorrect.”

But that approach, of silencing and denial, is becoming increasingly untenable, as many developing nations become increasingly assertive in their own demand for western respect for their cultures.

If western progressives were true to their professed principles – feminism and universal human rights, joined to a respect for the values of diverse cultures – they would respond by working to eradicate the persecutions and draconian punishments that some governments in the developing world visit upon certain groups – women, homosexuals, and – one that never visibly troubles western progressives – Christians in some Islamic-ruled societies; while at the same time respecting the legitimate moral values – including respect for pre-born human life, for the family and traditional marriage – that predominate in developing nations. They would, in short, embrace the natural law principles that uphold the sanctity of human life, the integrity of the family, and universal human rights.

Instead, as Sharon Slater, president of Family Watch International, a UN watchdog group, explains, their response has been to undertake their own brand of “cultural imperialism” in service to what she terms a “sexual rights agenda” – one that includes “contraception, sex-change

operations, same-sex marriage, homosexual, bisexual, and transgender behavior, prostitution, and comprehensive sexuality education for children.”

In a half-hour documentary – that, she explained to Lifesitenews.com., she made in “response to African, Islamic, and Caribbean United Nations delegates who ‘constantly complained’ to her organization about pressure from the ‘U.S. government, UN agencies, and other rich Western countries’” to implement that agenda – Slater “makes the case that the West’s imposition of ‘sexual rights’ on these countries erodes their religious and cultural values, leading to the demise of the natural family unit and resulting social chaos.”

And so western progressives have made their choice: prioritizing a “sexual rights” agenda over advancement of universal human rights, and trampling on the moral values of developing nations to impose that agenda.

Rick Hinshaw is editor of the Long Island Catholic magazine.