

## **«GENDER IDEOLOGY» THE VATICAN HUNT OF A SPECTRE**

**A SOCIO-RELIGIOUS ANALYSIS by Enric Vilà i Lanao**, a graduate in Religious Sciences of the ISCREB's Theology Faculty of Catalonia. Barcelona

reprinted with the permission of the author from the N.º 267 edition, July-September 2016 of the review IGLESIA VIVA (the Living Church) pp 75-88, Copyright Asociación Iglesia Viva ISSN.0210-1114.

Translation by Hugo Castelli Eyre. (In the event of any involuntary difference between the original and this translation, the correct version is the original)

A spectre challenges the whole world: «Gender ideology». The catholic hierarchy and with it the Bishop of Rome, now manifestly, have issued the order for its arrest warrant. As if it was a dangerous Pokémon (it has been compared with nazism, marxism and now yihadist ISIS), this ubiquitous and global spectre must be hunted without delay, with the help of interreligious allies and civil society. This spectre possesses the virtue of congregating fears very quickly. Its multi-purpose properties make it both easy to apply as a powerful stain remover and it exorcizes the power of rapidly mobilization of neo-con personnel in a coherent way and with internationally proven efficacy. The term has been used for years but with the repeated usage by the Bishop of Rome, hey presto, we have «Re-Habemus gender ideology» But, does this «ideology» exist? What is it about? Is it a spectre of feminism? Does it also stem from the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transexual (LGBT) group, the so called «gay lobby»? What mechanisms and strategies does the ecclesiastical hierarchy use today for its construction, usage and the appeal for a «global crusade» for its destruction? Why is so important the Vatican struggle in the UN and in international forums? Why does gender unite interreligious rivals and civil society?

This article is written to dissolve the shades of fear, deconstruct the spectre, clarify the term and, modestly, shine a light for understanding it. I offer recent clues of the phenomenon and avenues of reflection for discernment and taking into account.

### **Francis: recent declarations and documents**

The Bishop of Rome has made it very clear in his public statements. Let us review the most recent and important ones to know exactly how he conceives «the ideology or the theory of gender».

One of the first times where Francis explicitly called it «theory» was in the general audience in Rome, on wednesday 15th April 2015 in the following terms, at the beginning of a series of general audiences to prepare the Synod of the Family:

«Experience shows us: to know oneself well and to grow harmoniously the human being needs the reciprocity between men and women. When this is not given, you can see the consequences. We are made to listen to each other and help ourselves mutually. We can say that without the reciprocal enrichment in this relationship – in thought and action – the two cannot even understand in depth the meaning of being men and women. Modern and contemporary culture has opened new spaces, new liberties and new depths for the enrichment of the understanding of this difference. But it has also introduced many doubts and much scepticism.

For example, I ask myself if the so-called theory of *gender* is not also the expression of a frustration, of a resignation, focussed to cancel the sexual difference because it does not know how to confront itself with it. Yes, we run the risk of taking a backward step. The remotion of the difference, in fact, is the problem, not the solution. To resolve their relationship problems, men and women must speak more to each other, listen more, know each other more, love more. They must treat each other with respect and cooperate in a friendly manner. With these human basics, maintained by the grace of God, it is possible to project the matrimonial and family union for the whole of life. The marriage and family bond is something serious, and it is for everybody, not only for the believers. I would like to exhort the intellectuals not to abandon this subject, as if it had become of secondary importance, for the engagement for a freer and more just society».<sup>1</sup>

Francis assumes the thoughts of Benedict XVI who, from his discourse to the roman curia on the occasion of Christmas greetings, on the 22nd December 2008, had already pronounced on the subject in the following terms:

«When the Church speaks of human nature as a man and a woman, it demands that mankind respects this order of creation, this is not an outgrown metaphysics. Here, in fact, it is about the faith in the Creator and of listening to the language of creation, whose contempt would be an autodestruction of humanity and, consequently, a destruction of the very work of God. What is frequently expressed and understood by the term *gender*, boils down to the auto-emancipation of mankind from the creation and from the Creator. Mankind wants to create itself by itself and arrange whatever is concerned with itself always and by itself. But in this way it is living against truth, against the Spirit creator. I agree that tropical forests require our protection, but so does also mankind merit, in what is inscribed a message that allows no contradiction of our liberty, but its condition»<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/es/audiences/2015/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150415\\_udienza-generale.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/es/audiences/2015/documents/papa-francesco_20150415_udienza-generale.html)

<sup>2</sup> [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-vi/es/speeches/2008/december/documents/hf\\_benxvi\\_spe\\_20081222\\_curia-romana.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-vi/es/speeches/2008/december/documents/hf_benxvi_spe_20081222_curia-romana.html)

In the apostolic exhortation «Amoris Laetitia» Francis aligns himself with the conclusions of the final text of the recent Synod of the Family and he expresses it in detail in Nr. 56, in the second chapter «reality and challenges for the families» in march 2016:

«Another challenge arises from various forms of an ideology, generically called gender, that «denies the natural differences and reciprocity between men and women. It presents a society without differentiation of sex and voids the anthropological basis of the family. This ideology leads to educational projects and legislative directives that promote a personal identity disconnected with the biological diversity of men and women. Human identity can be projected by an individualistic option, that also changes with time.» It is worrying that some ideologies of this type respond to certain aspirations, sometimes understandable, that endeavour to impose a single mindset that even determines the education of children. We must not ignore that «biological sex (sex) and the socio-cultural role of the sex (gender) can be distinguished but must not be not separated.

Additionally, «the biotechnological revolution in the field of human procreation has introduced the possibility of manipulation making it independent of the relationship between men and women. In this way, human life and paternity and maternity have become compoundable and discompoundable based on the desires of individuals or couples». It is one thing to understand the fragility of human life but it is quite another to pretend to break in two the inseparable aspects of reality. We must not fall into the sin of taking the place of the Creator. We are creatures but we are not all powerful. What has been created takes precedence and must be considered as a gift. At the same time, we are called to be the custodian of our humanity and that means, above all, to accept it and respect it as what has been created».<sup>3</sup>

In his recent journey to Poland on the occasion of the XXXIst Worldwide Youth Days (27th to 31st July 2016) in his meeting with the Polish bishops in the cathedral of Crakow, Francis restated what is now an explicit manifestation:

But the problem is worldwide: the abuse of creation and the abuse of people. We are living a moment of annihilation of mankind as an image of God. I would like to end here because behind this there are ideologies. In Europe, the United States (America), Latin America, Africa and some Asian countries, there are real ideological colonizations. And one of these – I say it clearly with first and last names – is “Gender”. Today, they teach the children – the children – in school that each person can choose their own sex. Why do they teach that? Because the books are supplied by persons and institutions that provide the money. These are ideological colonizations supported by very influential countries. And this is terrible.

Speaking with Pope Benedict who is very well and who has a clear intellect, he said to me: «Holiness, this is the age of the sin against the Creator.» He is intelligent. God has created man and woman; God has created the world in such a way, thus, and we are doing the opposite. God gave us an «uncultured» status so that we could transform it into culture. And now, with this culture we are doing things that return us to the status of «uncultured». We must consider what Pope Benedict has said. «It is the age of the sin against God the creator».<sup>4</sup>

3. [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/es/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20160319\\_amoris-laetitia.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/es/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia.html). Number 56 is found in the final draft of the Synod of Bishops of 2015, numbers: 8, 58,33.

4. [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/es/speeches/2016/july/documents/papa-francesco\\_20160727\\_polonia-vescovi.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/es/speeches/2016/july/documents/papa-francesco_20160727_polonia-vescovi.html)

As you can see the language and the thoughts of Francis are not new. He is following the steps of Benedict XVI. And, at the same time, he is giving continuity to the traditional Vatican discourse on «gender» that I am briefly going to explain, focussing on the role the Vatican has played in the United Nations, as an example.

### **The Vatican struggle in the United Nations against the term «gender»**

According to the analysis of Joke Swibel in «*Recognizing Gender and Sexuality at the United Nations*»<sup>5</sup> in the seventies the word the term «gender» (firstly in grammar and biology) was indispensable in the feminist agenda to indicate the quintessence of the movement. The concept was «invented» to underline that the roles of men and women are not fixed or predetermined, but they vary in time and space and can be chosen. They are social constructions that do not derive from the biological sex. Up to the middle eighties the term did not exist in the United Nations. The first important document that mentioned the term «gender» was in the Third Womens' Conference of Nairobi (1985). We find it used with two meanings: the first in the context of the roles of gender and also as an equivalent or synonymous with the two sexes. It had been developed in this way in the academic fields of that time.

The series of UN Conferences of the nineties on the Environment (Rio de Janeiro 1992) Population (Cairo 1994) Social Development and Women (Copenhagen and Peking 1995) offered an area for worldwide debate. Governments and social movements deployed various strategies to locate the different demands on a global level and gather the results to apply them in the national and regional contexts. The Vatican did the same. Its strong resistance to abortion and contraception led it to a refined strategy that incorporated a subtle discredit of the basic principles of feminism and the movement for sexual rights. The intent to bring gender into disrepute was the quintessence of this strategy.

In March 1995 in the session of the Committee on the status of Women in the preparation of the Fourth Worldwide Conference on Women, in Peking (1995), the Vatican and its allies (countries like Guatemala, Honduras, Malta and also Egypt, Iran, Pakistan, Sudan) challenged the term «gender» and demanded placing it between brackets (the method used in United Nations documents to indicate that the drafts including the term have not been agreed). The discussion revealed that they could not accept sexual identities not based on the biological identities, man or woman, and that it was an intent of the western countries to also reclassify the different sexual orientations. A future was foreseen with claims based on gender identity. In fact, the Holy See tried to marginalise feminism and the movements in favour of sexual minorities as western constructions, that did not represent the women and persons of the south, where sexual rights were given excessive emphasis to the detriment of poverty and tropical sicknesses.

<sup>5</sup> JOKE SWIEBEL, «Recognizing Gender and Sexuality at the United Nations», en *Habemus gender! Déconstruction d'un risposte religieuse*, Bruselas: Universidad de Bruselas, 2015, pp. 25-41.

It presented itself as a better defender of the interests of women than the feminist movements and the governments that supported them. The attack on gender ended in a typical UN solution: The Committee on the Status of Women decided to establish «an informal contact group on gender» to search for an agreement on the usual meaning of the term gender. It was agreed that «gender» was understood and would always be understood in its «accepted and ordinary usage», without further explanation.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the brackets were removed and the word «gender» appeared in the final draft of the Peking Conference.<sup>7</sup>

The texts on gender and sexuality have been the maximum achieved. In the five years following meetings (Peking +5, +10, +15, +20) and in the sessions of the Committee on the Status of Women, there have been no further steps forward. On the contrary, there has been a lot of energy spent on not losing what has been achieved. After Peking, this conflict emerged on the surface with greater visibility in the conflicts on the question of «sexual orientation».

### **Gender in the UN: the rights of the LGBT groups**

The first attempt to raise the question of «sexual orientation» at UN level took place at the Third Worldwide Conference on Women (Nairobi, 1985) when Annelien Kappeyne van de Coppello, Minister of Women's Rights of the Netherlands, presented the case for the rights of lesbians. This breaking the silence on the question heralded the heated debate that would take place ten years later in Peking. Technically the debate on sexual orientation reached the UN in February/March 1995, when the delegations of the Netherlands and Sweden placed the term in the draft text. Immediately, the Vatican, its followers and some Islamic states placed the term in brackets.<sup>8</sup> In practice, the term was on the agenda since the Principal Committee of the Peking Conference debated the question for hours. Politically, the decision to erase the texts where sexual orientation was mentioned were effectively removed from the agenda.

After Peking, it took nearly another decade before the first substantial results could be obtained in the struggle to obtain access to the machinery of the UN and for sexual orientation to be explicitly included on the agenda. These actions took form in four ways: 1) Granting consultative status to an LGBT NGO (several received this and the most important one was the International Lesbian Gay Association (ILGA) in 2011); 2) the systematic introduction of cases of discrimination for sexual orientation in the deliberations and documents of the organisms belonging to the UN and those associated but independent to it; 3) the (long) struggle to obtain (from) the Human Rights Committee and its successor the Human Rights Council, the adoption of a resolution confirming sexual orientation as a question of human rights and as such a subject belonging to the UN agenda (the resolution was finally adopted on 17th June 2011 and a second in September 2014); 4) the systematic introduction in the process known as the *Universal Periodic Review*, the instrument by which all the member States submit to a revision of their State with respect to human rights.

---

<sup>6</sup> Report of the Informal Contact Group on Gender, 7 July 1995, UN doc. A/CONF.177/L.2.

<sup>7</sup> Platform for Action, in Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, 4-15 Sept. 1995, UN doc. A/CONF.177/20, Ch. I, Annex II p. 4 ff.

<sup>8</sup> Proposals for consideration in the preparation of a draft declaration [and] draft platform for action, UN doc. A/CONF. 177/L.1, 14 May 1995, § 48, 180b, 226 and 232h. The principal controversy in these paragraphs was an appeal to combat discrimination based on, amongst other things, on their sexual orientation.

<sup>9</sup> UN doc. A/HRC/RES/17/19.

The controversy over gender and the on-going struggles on «sexual orientation» and «sexual identity» both in the United Nations and in other international forums (European Union, European Council), are two sides of the same coin. In all cases what is at stake is the right of any individual to define their sex and/or their sexuality and to decide freely how to manage it, accept or reject a sexual identity or ignore the pressure to do so. Furthermore, the safeguard of individual rights that the state protects these liberties and facilitates the equalitarian participation of all its citizens without discriminating their sexual identity and/or conduct provided they respect the rights of others. Many religions and conservative standpoints have difficulties with these ideas. Instead of a personal election they put forward a limited vision based on the bipolarity of two sexes, the complementarity and the heteronormativity. Inevitably, these principles underline the unequal power relationships between men and women. It is not a coincidence that in the countries that most defend this premise, women are frequently second class citizen. This includes the Vatican.

### ***Manif pour tous* or the neo-conservative May 68 in France**

As David Paternotte notes <sup>10</sup> the first polemics about gender in France date from 2011 and appeared in relation to the new manuals on «Sciences of life and of the Earth» in the schools. Some Catholic educators expressed their doubts and fears about teaching gender in the schools. These disputes were limited but the debate truly exploded in 2012 with the mobilizations against the *Taubira Law* that opened matrimony to unions of the same sex. These gathered thousands of people from 2012 onwards and this was the detonator for what happened in the following years. Nobody expected a movement of such a magnitude and even less that the demonstrators used the concept «gender». Beyond the traditional placards defending the family and natural reproduction, they used slogans like «We want sex, not gender», «Equal and different. Stop gender ideology in the school». In the *Manif pour tous* the debate was not solely on the right of homosexuals to marry or have children but equally on the anthropological definition of individuals and of parentage.

A complex polysemic academic definition like gender, taken later to public debate: How could this have been transformed into a concept of mobilization? Why did this object of mobilization generate such hostility and mobilize so many people? As Eric Fassin <sup>11</sup> contends it would be a mistake to believe this is another French exception. They were preceded by mobilizations in Europe (and since 2012) of the same type in Spain <sup>12</sup> and to a lesser degree in Italy («Day of the Family»), in Slovenia and Croatia. «Gender» entered strongly in public debate in Poland, and the *Manif pour tous* has been exported to Germany and Italy, etc., with vigour.

---

<sup>10</sup> DAVID PATERNOTTE, «Habemus Gender! Autopsie d'une obsession vaticane» en Habemus gender! Déconstruction d'un risposte religieuse, Brussels: Brussels University, 2015, pp 8-22

<sup>11</sup> ERIC FASSIN, «Why France? A political exception-not a cultural one», Presentation during the panel Gender Crusades: Mobilizing Against Equality in Europe, Council for European Studies, Paris, 10 julio 2015.

<sup>12</sup> S. AGUILAR FERNÁNDEZ, «Political activity of the Catholic Church during the Zapatero Government (2004-2010), Papers, 95/4, 2010, pp. 1129-1155.

According to the discourse of *Manif pour tous*, gender constitutes a vast ideological project that unites feminists, LGBT militants and researchers in gender studies and is the root of all the ethical reforms condemned by the Catholic Church: contraception, abortion, civil union, homosexual marriage, sex education, «gender mainstreaming», the struggle against gender violence. It allows a simple explanatory globalizing picture and incorporates simultaneously projects at times antagonistic and uniting exponents well known for their rivalries or disagreements (catholics and muslims, for example). Frequently registering in a conspiratory logic, this discourse presupposes the existence of a project of anthropological revolution that attacks the complementarity of sexes and places humanity in danger. By means of this activity, the Catholic Church denounces a threat that curiously passes as barely perceptible whilst, however, it is more dangerous than marxism. <sup>13</sup>

For Dale O’Leary in his pioneer study, <sup>14</sup> the gender agenda does not sail in our communities like a large cruise ship but as a hardly visible submarine. Inspired by the gramscian concept of supremacy, <sup>15</sup> the Church has constructed this message as a discursive strategy underscoring key concepts like gender, feminism and transforming the content and sowing confusion. They denounce the totalitarian dimension of «gender ideology» and call on the peoples to resist this political project imposed with great discretion by a global elite from international institutions like the United Nations, the Council of Europe and the European Union. Rekindling a postcolonial discourse, they denounce a new kind of western imposition, especially in Africa. Francis takes directly this argument when he describes gender time and again as a form of «ideological colonization» as indicated above.

### **The neo-con anti-gender discourse: the success of the simplification of the message**

For the neo-con groups, the simplification of the message is the key and from that its success. The Neo-cons explain in a simple way the fearsome «gender ideology». Summing up: gender ideology is an offshoot of radical feminism and counts on the claims of the LGBT sexual minorities. For the gender feminists, the marxists failed by concentrating on economic solutions without directly attacking the family, which is the true cause of classes. The driving force of gender ideology is hatred: Nazism was based on hatred between races, Marxism on hatred between classes and gender ideology on hatred between sexes. Therefore it wants to reach a «society without sexes» and a deconstruction of the values, family, language (gender is a linguistic term that has more varieties: masculine, feminine and neuter.) education, culture and religions (a human invention by men to dominate women). As an ideology it is a closed system that accepts neither debate nor reason.

---

<sup>13</sup> T. ANATRELLA SJ, «Gender theory as a Trojan horse», in Pontifical Council for the Family, *Gender the controversy*, Paris, Pierre Téqui, 2011, p. 3-26.

<sup>14</sup> DALE O’LEARY, *The Gender Agenda: Redefining Equality*, Lafa yette, Vital Issue Press, 1997, p.21.

<sup>15</sup> M. PEETERS, *Marion-ethics: The UN «experts» impose their law*, Madrid, Rialp, 2011, p.221.

The instruments of gender ideology for the neo-cons are 16 to:

- Alter or destroy the family (the equality of women lead them to abandon their traditional role, «diversity» of families, fall of patriarchy, a non-monogamous and heterosexual family...).
- Alter or destroy the matrimonial institution (divorce, marriage between persons of the same sex, unmarried partners, civil unions...);
- Depersonalize sexuality (use of condoms, campaigns of safe sex, free love without marriage, the practice of sex without love, the production of children without sexual relationships: rental wombs, assisted reproduction or in vitro fertilization...).
- Alter the nature of sexual identity (end with the feminine and its phobia of maternity, a positive vision of homosexuality and as a couple, sweep away the distinction between women and men, interchangeability of roles, the defence of sex change or transexuality);
- Destroy life (contraception, reproductive rights of women or abortion...).
- Influence in the education of children (alter the gender roles, sex choice, introduce homosexuality in schools, subject of education for citizenship...).
- Manipulate the language (alter the definitions of «gender» and «marriage», «interruption of the pregnancy» instead of abortion, use «gender violence» instead of domestic violence...).

In short, gender ideology is the final rebellion of the creature against its nature of creature (Josef Ratzinger). In this way, everything remains interconnected and simplified in a simple and clear fashion prepared for the challenge and combat.

### **The enemies of within, the outside allies**

As Anne Morelli <sup>17</sup> indicates the Vatican directives are disseminated throughout the whole of Catholic Europe, from Portugal to Poland but also in North America and Latin America. With the same slogans, the same logos, the same arguments, they appear in their national political agendas. The propaganda channels for the matters elaborated in Rome are the catholic schools, internet or the «missionaries» who spread the message internationally. The forms of mobilization against «gender ideology» are varied but they are found in all countries, controlled by the catholic hierarchy. To launch an anti-gender campaign, you definitely need to find a good pretext, it could be a the proposal of a new law, a book for children or adolescents, etc.

But inside the Catholic Church the condemnation of the ideology or theory of gender is not unanimous. The Church is not monolithic and if the conservatives occupy the public spaces, the progressive catholics, more discrete, do not agree with these exaggerated positions. Organized Catholic feminist movements and groups of homosexual catholics criticise the sacralized patriarchal authority. They consist of the interior dissident voice of within. An alliance of lay people with progressive catholics is necessary to curb those who in the name of their purported social order legitimize the patriarchal cultures hostile to women and gays.

16 Synthesis Table from the web «Spanish Forum of the Family» en [www.forofamilia.org](http://www.forofamilia.org) [10/09/2016].

17 ANNE MORELLI, «Genre et catholicisme», en Habemus Gender! Déconstruction d'une riposte religieuse, Bruselas: Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 2015, pp. 244-246.

But the anti-gender neo-cons can count on support coming from other religions. If Catholics are in the front line on this discourse and offer a repertoire of effective actions (demonstrations, petitions, internet mobilizations, political lobbying,...) the other confessions offer them a sounding board. Against gender, the rabbis and Muslims (with the argument of Muslim law) have joined them. On the Protestant side, the progressives who support diversity have become a minority. And as Joke Swiebel shows<sup>18</sup> the role of Russia in the UN (and in the Council of Europe) for strategic reasons, has been transformed by the hand of the Orthodox Church as the leading defender of the family and traditional values. All this religious convergence grants them a claim of universality.

Jacqueline Heinen underlines that in the anti-gender combat, the Churches have taken an active part in the name of religious standards and especially in the «right to life». The Catholic Church heads this commitment with the Orthodox followers and the Evangelical Protestants. These religious faiths in competition and frequently antagonistic (especially in the United States and Latin America) have not hesitated to reaffirm the sacrosanct role of heterosexual marriage, of the traditional family, or of the place assigned to women in view of their supposed «feminine nature». In many countries, it is the reproductive rights of women that have receded. Facing the energy of the religious movements, the public authorities have had the tendency to yield a little or significantly, under the pressure of the conservative or fundamentalist movements. The rights won by women and homosexuals have changed the things of their daily existence over recent decades. The will to impose reactionary standards a ferocious resistance in civil society and activities of defence in human rights.

However the capacity to impose a lasting democratic change has been shown to be limited whilst the religious or conservative forces are anchored in time and have access to networks endowed with important financial resources.<sup>19</sup>

### **The Vatican strategy of fear and the delegitimization of feminism and the LGBT community**

For Anne-Charlotte Husson<sup>20</sup> the discursive fabrication of a «single opponent» allows another reconsideration by which *gender* is located in front of the conservative scene and has proceeded to fill all the space for the role of main enemy around which is structured a reactionary discourse (in the literal sense). It is attributed to all the problems and consequences that already existed in the Catholic discourse. This reconfiguration has, as a consequence, notoriously, the imposition of a certain vision of confrontation, in a total vision where gender occupies the whole space. From the nineties onwards, gender has begun to function as the main explanation, in the Catholic discourse, of all the perversions of the contemporary world.

The insistence of the Vatican to present gender as an «ideology» the baton handover in the emergency context of the Catholic discourse, of the end of the «ideologies» and of the disappearance of Marxism as the proclaimed and clearly identified enemy of Christianity. «Gender» therefore plays the role of the privileged objective and the global explanatory principle. Hence the importance of presenting it as a single enemy, enunciator of a coherent and unequivocal discourse.

<sup>18</sup> JOKE SWIEBEL «Recognizing Gender and Sexuality at the United Nations», in *Habemus Gender! Déconstruction d'un riposte religieuse*, Brussels, University of Brussels 2015, pp 25-41

<sup>19</sup> JACQUELINE HEINEN, «Genre, normes et re-ligions», en *Habemus Gender! Déconstruction d'une riposte religieuse*, Bruselas: Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 2015, pp. 247-249

<sup>20</sup> ANNE-CHARLOTTE HUSSON, «Stratégies lexicales et argumentatives dans le discours anti-genre: le lexique de *VigiGender*», en *Habemus Gender! Déconstruction d'une riposte religieuse*, Bruseels: Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 2015, pp. 107-108.

Bérenquère Marques-Pereira notes that the Vatican fabrication of a supposed gender ideology expresses different nuances of reactionary thinking: exaltation of the complementarity of the sexes, phobia of the indifferentiation of the sexes, fear of the disassociation between sexuality and procreation, (thence the criminalization of the right to abortion, the legitimization of homophobia, the stigmatization of marriage for all and of parenthood of couples of the same sex) that amalgamates such diverse realities. It proceeds equally from a manicheism and a conspiracy theory. Phobias and stigmatizations that go hand in hand with call to common sense and make an emotional appeal to discredit the idea of equality between men and women and to disqualify the access of sexual minorities to the rights of citizenship. This discreditation and disqualification is frequently expressed by a violent rhetoric.

The virulent rhetoric of gender ideology is supported by anti-intellectualism and anti-feminism. Years ago, anti-intellectualism was set to work by the religious right exponents against the theory of evolution.

Today this same anti-intellectualism comes back to disqualify a recognised field of studies in different scientific disciplines and developed from the notion of «gender». Anti-feminism reduces the equality of the sexes and recommends segregation of the sexes and is condescending with feminicide. The principle of equality appeared to have been achieved following the recognitions of the United Nations and the signature in 1979 of the Convention on the elimination of all discriminations against Women in the General Assembly. But today the realization of the principle of equality remains uncertain and contingent.

The disputes around gender ideology are revealing of the transnationalization of the discourse elaborated by the Catholic Church, since the middle of the nineties, in international agencies, especially since the UN conferences started the emergence of reproductive and sexual rights. This transnationalization of the ecclesiastical discourse goes hand in hand with the mobilizations by thousands of ultra-conservatives and reactionaries who stigmatize with the same energy very diverse realities. This discursive and practical activity wants to renaturalize the order of the sexes and the sexual order. The political challenge is to proceed to a demobilization around civil and social citizen rights. It consists in undermining the legitimacy of stakeholders as varied as family planners, feminist associations or LGTB associations. <sup>21</sup>

### **Final reflections for discernment**

1. I would like to invoke the Holy Spirit to enlighten us on this question of «gender ideology». A first clue already offers us the singularity of this same Spirit, which in various languages acquires different genders: *Ruah* is denominated in Hebrew (feminine gender); *pneuma* in Greek (neuter gender); *spiritus*, in Latin (masculine gender).

2. Rosa Maria Belda states that undermining Feminism, by not recongnising its entity and specific weight, appears more like a vested interest than a scientific truth. It is an injustice not to recognize its contribution that has cost so many lives and efforts (...) we need to define what we mean by gender, clarify its terminology, because gender is a word that can easily be translated into an «ideology». <sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> BÉRENGÈRE MARQUES-PEREIRA, «Genre et backlash» en *Habemus Gender! Déconstruction d'une ripostereligieuse*, Bruselas: Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 2015, p. 242.

<sup>22</sup> ROSA MARÍA BELDA, *Women. Shouts of thirst, seeds of hope*, PPC, Madrid, 2009, 15 y 68.

3. Teresa Forcades stresses that Christian Feminism recognises the categories of «woman» and «man» and recognizes as «real» the bodily differences that have given rise to these categories, but at the same time states that human plenitude is not based in the couple nor is it based on the essentialized confirmation of the categories of sex and gender, which she considers necessarily as penultimates and as destined to be surpassed in the plenitude of the implacable originality of the personal self which can only be experienced in the loving interpersonal relationships and freely open to all that should characterize the ecclesial community. <sup>23</sup>

4. Jose Casanova contends that the religious gender politics have become one of the most important issues in the whole world and it is probable that this will become of increasing importance in the immediate future (...). Feminism appears to have replaced Communism as the «spectre» that haunts all the religious traditions. Likewise, the discourses on feminism and secularism reciprocally feed each other in the same way as communism and atheism were linked in the XIXth century. Gender has become one of the most polemic social questions, whilst the religions have seen themselves launched, willingly or unwillingly, to the centre of this global debate.

The traditional religious institutions tend to perceive the feminist claims and, especially, the notion of gender as a socially constructed contingent reality. They consider it as one of the greatest threats coming from the culture of today. And not only for their religious traditions, but for the very idea of a natural order either sacred or divinely ordered, inscribed in the natural law, the Sharia or whatever each religion considers «the correct way» of acting, universally valid for the whole of time (...) It is legitimate to allege that with respect to the religious politics of gender both Catholicism and Islam tend to give their support, sometimes in tandem as occurred in Cairo in the World Conference on Population and Development of 1994, to similar versions of patriarchal fundamentalism.

Although the argument is accepted that the catholic aggiornamento represents a successful adaptation to secular modernity, is it not also true that on questions of family structure and the role of women, authority and power in the Church, sexuality and reproductive health, the Catholic Church, or at least its hierarchy, remains anchored in a fundamentalist, naturalist and traditionalist patriarchal position? (...) Sociologically, one can predict that it is only a question of time until the Catholic Church adopts the modern value of gender equality as a sign of the times and revises some of its positions admitting that they are unacceptable kinds of gender discrimination like for example the non-ordination of women (...)

The very strong misogynistic tendency of the Christian tradition cannot be denied and has been widely and critically documented by men and women specialists in theology and religious sciences. However, no serious scholar can state today that this misogynistic tendency derives from the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, nor can it be denied that in its origins Christianity was countercultural and represented an equalitarian movement against the patriarchal culture of its time (...)

---

<sup>23</sup> TERESA FORCADES, «Cristianity, gender and social change. A catholic feminist perspective», Iglesia Viva 252 (septiembre.diciembre de 2012) 75-88.

In crucial gender matters that are fundamental for secular feminist objectives like, for example, contraception, abortion, homosexuality, divorce and family values, the catholic hierarchy has maintained a firm conservative traditionalist position not only in the public sphere of civil society, but also organizing political mobilizations and trying to influence directly in democratic legislative processes and in State regulations. It is not surprising that the liberal and secular groups, as well as the catholic feminists, have responded with counter mobilizations and accusations of religious fundamentalism (...) The majority of catholics disobey the instructions of the catholic hierarchy to follow their own consciences in matters of sexual morality. There is a very large number of catholics who explicitly disassociate their sexuality from their religiosity, stating the religion has no influence on their attitudes and practices of sexuality with a clear erosion of the ecclesial authority.<sup>24</sup>

5. Izaskun Saez de la Fuente Aldama defines «ideology» as any system of ideas, values, attitudes and opinions that explain the position of a social group (whether political or religious) or of a society and which pretends to justify and guide its behavioural patterns. The creators and opponents of the expression «gender ideology» - the ecclesiastical hierarchy and related neo-cons – employ it in a markedly derogatory sense. After identifying its existence, they rate it as simplist, totalitarian, self-centered and immune to external questioning and they do this locating it on the same level as nazism – for whom history was limited to a racial confrontation – or marxism (...) We are facing a long-distance race and there remains a long way to travel (...)

The establishment of direct and unambiguous correlations between radical feminism, homosexuality, feminist political agenda and pro-abortist mentality simplifies a reality that is much more complex and fertile both from the philosophical perspective and in the field of strategic political alliances. And it is a fallacy of perverse implicatins to consider the UN as an organization whose momentum is based on the pressure of homosexual *lobbys*. This qualifier serves as a defence mechanism against the criticisms the Vatican receives from its alliances with the most traditional sectors of other religious confessions to prevent resolutions in favour of womens' rights (that, incidently, do not refer solely or mainly to abortion).<sup>25</sup>

6. For Mary Anne Case the Vatican sees in «gender ideology» a way to link feminism and homosexual rights in a worldwide effort to redefine not only the secular laws of governance of the sexes, sexuality, reproduction and the family but also human nature itself. Consequently it has opposed not only these changes in secular laws but also whatever use of the word *gender* itself, in the academic world or in legal documents. The two uses of the term gender – the academic and the legal – the first emphasising the difference between sex and gender and the second using the terms in an interchangeable and synonymous fashion (...) How much of this vision does Francis, bishop of Rome, share with his predecessor?

From the moment of his election, the Vatican observers have been scrutinising his steps. Today there is little doubt that his emphasis is far from opposing the gender agenda, in a more amiable way than his predecessor. Defenders of the LGBT community praise the meeting of Francis with a Spanish transexual in the Vatican and his quoted phrase: «If someone is gay and searches for the Lord pursues goodness, who am I to judge him?» But similarly to the case of remarried divorced people it is important to highlight his approximation is not in the least acceptance but only an «accompaniment of compassion». Has he is the first to note, there are no signs of change in the fundamental doctrine but only a pastoral approximation<sup>26</sup>.

24. JOSÉ CASANOVA, «Religion, Politics and Gender Equality», Iglesia Viva 251 (julio-septiembre de 2012) 9-40.

25 IZASKUN SÁEZ DE LA FUENTE ALDAMA, «Ecclesiastical usage of gender ideology», Iglesia Viva 239 (julio-septiembre de 2009) 9-30.

26 MARY ANNE CASE, The gender agenda, The Tablet, 10 septiembre 2016, pp. 4-5 en [www.the-tablet.co.uk](http://www.the-tablet.co.uk).

---

### **By way of conclusion**

The spectre of «gender ideology» that the Vatican has launched looks like a powerful stain remover designed to combat the impurities, stains or shadows, amongst others, of feminism and of the LGBT movement in the Vatican washing machine. But neither the cold water washing of Benedict XVI nor the mild washing of Francis allows reaching the required whiteness. Perhaps it would be better to change to a colour programme adapted to the varied and global humanity of the signs of the times. The persons to whom it is applied would perhaps see their potential strengthened their talents and colours to improve the warmth of the world. Perhaps such a programme would not deteriorate so much the Vatican washing machine...

The colours of the rainbow shine twice in the Bible, in an arch that goes from Genesis to the Apocalypse: from God's alliance with Noah after the flood (Gn 9, 12-17) to the heavenly Jerusalem where the sacred scriptures close. The arch is a symbol of divine grace and the sign of the first alliance between God and the earth. This arch closes with the radiance of the iris around the throne of God (Ap 4,3). God has established an alliance with all the diversity of the planetary arch so that all humanity can be saved and can contemplate his face. And the colours of the iris are used to design the radiance around the throne of God...

---