

[Rebeka Anić, Gender – Where is the problem?](#)

On March 19, 2017, Rebeka Anić and Mercedes Navarro Puerto were awarded the prize of the Herbert Haag Foundation for Freedom, in the Church in Lucerne, Switzerland. We are happy to publish Rebeka's official speech here. The copyright lies with the author and the Herbert Haag Foundation for Freedom in the Church.

In my speech, I would like to address the complexity of the debate on gender concepts and the issue of the current anti-gender movement. In doing so, I start from the thesis that *Gender* can be perceived as a problem even before the actual Gender discourse, as in work that does not explicitly address gender. The demand of the seventies for the emancipation of women and their integration into work and politics preceded this issue.

Even if Gender Is Not Critically Considered, It is still Present.

Especially texts that do not address gender as a theological category are usually strongly influenced and thus implicitly produce gender, which has negative consequences for women. Here's an example.

In numerous documents of the Vatican and in statements of the last three popes, the gender concept is rejected as a gender ideology. Although gender is explicitly rejected as an analysis category, church teaching authority assesses the natural race in such a way that it subverts ecclesiology and the resulting church ministry. Male and female become central ecclesiological and soteriological categories. According to the teaching of John Paul II, the Church is composed of an Apostolic-Petrine (St. Peter's) and a Marian (St. Mary's) part, which are complementary to each other. According to this model, the Apostolic-Petrine, i.e. male part, represents the hierarchy, while the Marian or female part of the church is composed of lay men and lay women. John Paul II transfers the anthropological-complementary gender model to the church and, so to speak, it also links in a gendered way the church ministries (sacramental part and non-sacramental part). One consequence - among others - is the exclusion of women from ordination. The rejection of gender as a reflexive category with simultaneous use of the biological sex and a naturalization of the historically developed ecclesiology can thus be understood as the exclusion of any possibility of questioning and changing church structures. Righteousness in ecclesiology thus occupies a place behind the heterosexuality of male dominance, which is understood as a natural given fact.

Gender as a Problem in Gender-Theories

Of course, one can also speak seriously about gender as a problem. Then we speak about gender theories and the use of the gender term in various scientific disciplines, namely as a challenge to deal critically with the subject, to conduct further investigations and studies and to research new theoretical solutions. I only want to mention that from these debates, there has occurred a shift in the meaning of the term gender: away from an accumulation of socially constructed gender characteristics to gender as an analytical category that challenges the belief according to which the essential differences are essential to physical differences.

It is important to note that gender is also addressed in many ways in queer, intersex, transsexual and homosexual research. There is not one single, generally accepted theory, as falsely claimed in the anti-gender discourse. Astonishingly enough, this discourse does not

pay attention to discussions and divergences in gender research or the arguments between the individual gender theories and equality-oriented politics. Rather, everything is portrayed as a monolithic crowd pursuing a common ideology and concerted action with the goal of realizing a presumed secret plan, namely the destruction of traditional society.

Gender as a Problem in Anti-Gender-Discourse

In my presentation of how Anti-Gender authors pose gender issues, I will confine myself to three allegations that I consider crucial, as these allegations disavow any rational discussion on gender or gender equality policies.

The first objection is that the term gender and its derivatives are unclear. It has been persistent since 1995 - despite literature and international documents that reveal the meaning and use of the term in various scientific disciplines. Instead, the protagonists of the anti-gender movement create their own interpretations of the terms gender and gender mainstreaming. The blameable but persistent insistence on a misinterpretation suggests that this is not ignorance, but a deliberately misinterpretation. The two terms act as empty baskets that are filled at will with various allegations: from the creation of a new, sexless man and the annihilation of mankind, to the early sexualization of children, to the fight for homosexuality and the legalization of paedophilia. From such a broad spectrum one can then choose at will one or the other topic, which at the national level may be useful for political or religious purposes.

If the anti-gender authors are warned that their understanding of the terms does not correspond to the meaning that these terms have in international documents, they reject these objections by claiming to hide behind "such noble terms" as "gender equality" the desire to fight for and enforce a culture of death, "a sodomite ideology" or the right to euthanasia or eugenics, as, for example, Slovak and Polish bishops have recently done. It is quite obvious that this should make any discourse and even the use of the terms gender and gender mainstreaming impossible.

The second objection relates to a blanket condemnation of gender studies and gender mainstreaming as an *ideology*, with no explanation as to what this allegation is based on. This is to be taken as an indication that the term *ideology* is used because of its strong emotional charge. The accusation that a dangerous ideology hides behind the concept of gender weighs more heavily than the accusation that it is an error or a problematic theory.

Thus, the third objection. The gender studies are denied the scholarliness, coupled with the effort to discredit them as *excess*, *hocus-pocus*, *pseudo-religious dogmatism* or as *anti-or pseudo-science*. The anti-gender discourse usually represents a purely positivistic empirical understanding of science. And with such a scientific foundation, one's own knowledge seems to be protected from the mixture of science and politics and released from the necessity of a critical self-reflection.

The Problem of Interpretation of the Anti-Gender Phenomenon

Even the question of how to interpret the anti-gender phenomenon is a problem. One of the questions is: is it an anti-gender campaign or an anti-gender movement? If it is a movement, does it have a national or international character? The investigations so far suggest that these are national manifestations of a transnational movement. At the national level, those topics are

selected that are thought to trigger a *moral panic* and bring about a homogenization of society. This movement has a strong lobby even in the centre of the European Union, in Brussels.

Although this movement has clearly misogynist features since its inception, it tries to cover it up. In the anti-gender discourse one no longer speaks of *feminist ideology*, but of *gender ideology*. The aim of this rhetoric is to win women over to the fight against gender ideology by suggesting that this struggle has nothing to do with their rights.

The anti-gender movement obviously also has a political dimension. On the one hand, it appears as a kind of putty that combines various political options - from the Christian humanists to the neo-liberals and all the way to the radical nationalists. Particularly striking is the connection between anti-genderism and right-wing conservatism and right-wing populism. These are understood as identity-creating and complexity-reducing political narratives, which fit the defence of post-essentialist gender ideas and the fight against the recognition of sexual diversity.

Right-wing parties use different forms of anti-gender discourse to pursue their political goals. In some cases (for example, in France) they try to convince *migrant* by criticizing the gender ideology. Since *migrant* are considered conservative, but mostly vote leftist parties, they are a target group of the right-wing vote. In other cases (Hungary, for example), the anti-gender campaign against *migrant* is paired with clear anti-Semitism: It is claimed that creators of *gender ideology* are Zionist oligarchies who want to legitimize homosexuality. Homosexuality would cause a decline in the birth rate, in return immigration would have to be accepted - and that was the real goal of the oligarchy.

The Catholic anti-gender authors show through their anti-modernist views, their rebellion against a scientific theology, the advocacy of a literal interpretation of Scripture, by a dualistic world view, by conspiracy theories and the like. Characteristics of a Catholic fundamentalism.

One problem is that such theses have been incorporated into the *Lexicon Family - Ambiguous Concepts and Discussions on Family, Life, and Ethical Issues* (edited by the Pontifical Council for the Family). Thus, they found their way into church documents, in statements of the Holy See, the popes, individual bishops and episcopal conferences. Theologians who question such theses are declared to be gender ideologists; they are in danger of losing their jobs at church colleges. One possible explanation for such behaviour of the church hierarchy is that the church wants to regain the attention and influence it has lost in secular society through gender issues. Especially in the post-communist countries, the anti-gender discourse serves to homogenize Catholics, which has diminished after the fall of communism. However, it is above all the inability of the ecclesiastical hierarchy to act or act in a pluralistic society.

In the End, Where Exactly Is the Problem?

By touching the centre of identity, itself, Gender is - as Regina Ammicht Quinn, 2015 Herbert Haag Award winner - rightly concludes, a dangerous concept because it challenges many ideologies in which the social and ecclesial order is at stake. This provokes uncertainty and fears about what anti-gender activists and radical right-wing parties can use for their own purposes. By reducing the complexity of social issues to gender issues, they use gender to incite moral panic and to bring about a homogenization of society that is already lost. Its aim is to influence the creation of social norms and laws that are consistent with their own world view, a world view that is neither democratic nor respectful of the achievements of

secularization. In its hierarchical part, the Catholic Church has mostly joined this movement in the hope of regaining the social position it held in pre-modern society. At the same time, it dispels the obligation to deal with its own ideological theses and painful changes, which would entail the consideration of gender as an analytical category and as a category of justice.