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PhD THESIS

**GENDER IDEOLOGY: THE ORIGINS AND CONSEQUENCES OF A
TOTALITARIAN IDEOLOGY**

(ABSTRACT)

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INTRODUCTION

The changes in the middle of modern, civilized society have led us to look more carefully at the dynamics of inter-human relations and, above all, have prompted us to investigate the trends of structural modification of concepts that have a man and his socio-moral evolution at their centre.

"Gender ideology" is one of the "changes" that stand out as the most "desirable" in modern society, and we find that it is being "implemented" at all levels. It is no accident that I used quotation marks. We wanted to emphasize the terminology used by the normative acts and in the bibliography. In the last ten years, widespread and polyform sociocultural activities have been carried out worldwide (and in our country, although less publicized). They try to build the idea of "gender identity" on the concept of "gender equality", and the theorizations of this approach crystallize in what I called earlier "gender ideology".

We believe that sociological research is necessary from a moral-Christian perspective of the impact that these new ideas about gender equality could have on Romanian society (but also on the societies of other European nations or from any other corner of the world), which gave rise to those tendencies to exclude the concept of biological gender from everyday discourse, the concept of "social gender" being increasingly present in contemporary language, which represents a "socially assumed role".

THESIS THEMATIC FIELD

Our thesis entitled *Gender Ideology. The Origins and Consequences of a totalitarian ideology* represents scientific research from the perspective of Christian-Orthodox morality, which also calls on the methods and perspectives of the humanities to develop a broader, more complex vision of the phenomenon of "gender ideology", because we would notice that sociocultural activities of all kinds try to build the idea of "gender identity" on the concept of "gender equality".

We consider necessary research from the moral-Christian perspective of the impact on Romanian society regarding gender equality, which gave rise to the tendency to exclude the concept of biological gender from everyday discourse, "social gender" representing a "socially assumed role."

THE AIM AND GENERAL OBJECTIVES OF THE THESIS

Analyzing the impact of ideas about gender equality and tendencies to distinguish biological and social gender from a moral-Christian perspective is a complex and

multidimensional endeavour. In this sense, our research draws attention to the following aspects:

- a) Historical and social impact;*
- b) Ethics and Christian theology;*
- c) The dynamics of gender equality in a social and religious context;*
- d) Public dialogue and education.*

We believe that it is our duty, all of us, especially mine as a graduate of university theological studies and as a minister of the Church of Christ, to make the necessary effort to find answers to the questions of society that seems to be looking for a new identity, a "new garment", invoking a legitimate right, a right enshrined in the Holy Scriptures - freedom.

Starting from the concepts promoted by Christianity, such as equality before God of all people, and wanting to correct some inequities regarding how to value the status of women in specific communities, militancy for women's rights arose, which transformed over the years in feminism.

Approaching gender equality through the lens of religion and feminism is a complex field. The Christian concept, such as the equality of all people before God, impacted the emergence and evolution of feminism. For example, female biblical figures such as Esther in the Old Testament, the Blessed Virgin Mary (in the New Testament), and the Myrrh-bearing saints or later saints were outstanding figures in this context.

It could be said that feminism, starting with the earliest works, was inspired by principles of fundamental equality and universal human rights. Sometimes, it reflected Christian ideals of equality, but it reorientated them towards the concrete problems of inequality between men and women and of women's rights in secular society.

Having modern and accessible technical means that allow instant communication even at vast distances transforms society extremely fast, and it is difficult to anticipate what it will look like shortly. This fact creates instability, especially regarding traditional concepts like "marriage" or "family". All these changes related to the status of the family are profound. However, Art. 16.3 of the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights", integrated into the legislation of European, North American and most modern civilized states, states that "The family constitutes the natural and fundamental element of society and has the right to protection from society and the state".

WORKING HYPOTHESES AND RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Any problems associated with these new theories or ideologies are caused by the terminology used and the definitions of the initiators of global initiatives associated with different terms.

Terminology can create confusion or divergence, especially in complex areas such as human rights. Accurate definitions and terminological consistency are essential for correctly understanding and effectively implementing policies at the European and international levels. When terms are defined differently by various entities or in different contexts, it can lead to misunderstandings and inconsistent implementation of laws and regulations.

In the international human rights arena, associations and non-governmental organizations coordinate their efforts to influence and negotiate the definitions and terminology that will be included in international documents, recognizing that how these concepts are presented can affect the acceptance and application of rights at the international level.

The word "gender" in the *Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language* represents "the distinction between male and female beings" (DEX, 2016, sv: gender). This word was given a new definition in the *Convention of the Council of Europe on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence* of May 11, 2011, in Istanbul, ratified by Romania on February 29, 2016. In the document of the Convention, in the framework of article 3, called "Definitions", the meanings of seven terms and phrases are specified, including that of "gender", which is in some contradiction with the DEX: "gender shall mean the socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities and attributes, which a given society considers them appropriate for women and men".

We requested and received an edifying response from the People's Advocate regarding the ratification of the Istanbul Convention in our country (Annex 1). Our intention was to identify the terminology with which gender ideology operates and to clarify and nuance, from the perspective of Christian morality, the meanings of the main concepts, such as "equality" or "freedom."

In relation to public policy, the Christian moral perspective can provide a basis for argument for policies that promote human dignity, justice and the common good while retaining certain traditional conceptions of family and community.

In trying to clarify the essential terms of "gender ideology" and to nuance them from the perspective of Christian morality, it is essential to recognize that within the Christian tradition, there is a diversity of interpretations and opinions regarding equality and freedom.

From the traditional perspective, "gender" is often associated with biological sex, considering that there are intrinsic and essential differences between men and women,

intended by God and which have implications for "gender roles", family structure and ecclesiastical practice. These differences can influence public policies that encourage a specific family structure and well-defined "gender roles".

In the Christian context, equality is understood as equality in dignity before God, regardless of sex or "gender roles". Men and women are created in the image of God and are equal in His eyes. From the perspective of Christian morality, we set out to highlight what de facto equality is. What kind of freedom should be strengthened in today's society? Thus, our research approach analyzed *the impact of "gender ideology" on the morality of the Romanian Christian society*.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

It is essential to state that "gender ideology" is not a monolith but encompasses a wide range of theories and practices that can have both positive and negative effects in Christian communities, depending on how they are implemented and perceived in society.

In order to understand the perceptions and experiences related to "gender ideology", we found instrumental methods specific to sociology, which supported qualitative research, especially semi-structured interviews and focus groups organized with members of the Christian community.

a) Semi-structured interviews and focus groups are highly effective qualitative research methods for deepening understanding of the perceptions and experiences of Christian community members regarding 'gender ideology'.

Through open discussion, the interviews allowed participants to express their views in their own words, leading to a better understanding of personal feelings and beliefs. The flexibility of the discussions allowed us to explore unexpected themes that arose during the discussion, thus enabling a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of the implementation of "gender ideology" within some university study programs. Through informal discussions with dialogue partners, personal perspectives were revealed to us that quantitative methods could not have been discovered.

Also, the focus groups organized with the young people from the parish or high school students encouraged the dialogue between the participants, which led to new perspectives that a dialogue with a single partner could not offer because the group dynamics revealed the social norms and pressures in the Christian community related to "gender ideology" and the ways of supporting or resisting these norms.

Thus, the results gathered from these interviews and focus groups gave us a clearer picture of how "gender ideology" and Christian morality can influence each other. These dialogues can serve as a basis for developing broader dialogues and formulating theological and practical responses to contemporary "gender problems."

b) Text and discourse analysis is another scientific method used to examine how "gender ideology" is addressed in contemporary Christian religious literature and official statements of the Christian Orthodox community.

The analysis of the text and discourse in the context of Christian religious literature, as well as the official statements of the autocephalous Orthodox Churches, is a complex endeavour that requires a good understanding of theological doctrines by appealing to the homilies, commentaries and sermons of the Holy Fathers, who explained the teachings found in The Holy Scriptures made it easier to understand church traditions.

In this sense, we examined the biblical and doctrinal interpretations, considering the Holy Church Fathers' interpretations and contemporary theologians' writings. This helped us to analyze the scriptures and church teachings regarding the roles of husbands in marriage. I noticed the differences between past practices and teachings and current trends in different communities. The analysis of some specific cases (Church of Greece) revealed a firm position on how churches deal with "gender equality" and the rights of the LGBTQ+ community.

c) The case study is another method that provided us with important information regarding the reactions of Christian communities to national or other countries' legislative changes related to the field of "gender ideology".

The case study is a research method used in many fields, including sociology and other social sciences, to examine the reactions and interactions of communities to legislative or social change. Using this method, researchers can collect detailed data and deeply understand communities' behaviours, perceptions, and responses to legislation related to sensitive issues. Case studies allow for an in-depth analysis of the particular context of a community and how the legal and cultural framework influences the norms and values of that community.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

Regarding the limitations of the research, we had to consider the specific context and delimitations. The origins of discussions of gender equality can be traced back to feminist movements and political philosophy. For example, Simone de Beauvoir, in her book *The Second*

Sex."¹, published in 1949, distinguished between sex and gender, suggesting that social traditions constrain women to assume specific roles at the expense of equal opportunities with men.

Gender identity and its impact on Christian morality is a complex topic, and research in this area can encounter several limits and challenges:

1. *The diversity of theological interpretations*: We identify different theological and ethical interpretations within Christianity, hence diverse perspectives on gender identity.

2. *Methodological challenges*: Methodological aspects such as the selection and interpretation of sources, the clear definition of the terms used, and the correct application of theological dogmas can all be difficult to use.

3. *The sensitivity of the subject*: Gender identity is a personal and sensitive subject that involves respecting the dignity of the people involved.

4. *Data representativeness*: Given the diversity of communities and practices worldwide, it is difficult to conduct studies that are representative of all Christian perspectives.

5. *Ethical aspects*: Research often involves ethical dilemmas and respecting participants' privacy and confidentiality regarding religion or gender identity.

6. *The necessary interdisciplinarity*: Quantifying the impact of gender identity on Christian morality requires collaborations between different fields: theology, ethics, sociology, psychology, and the health sciences. Limiting the analysis to a single discipline could lead to a distorted understanding of the phenomenon.

7. *Lack of data over long periods*: Cross-sectional studies cannot establish the direction of causal relationships, and therefore, longitudinal research is needed to observe the evolution of attitudes and beliefs related to gender identity among Christians.

8. *Limits in the generalization process*: Arbitrary sampling leads to results that cannot be generalized to all of Christendom, with all geographic or cultural contexts.

9. *Prudence in the application of principles*: The complexities of each case must be considered when addressing questions of gender identity and Christian morality.

Research on gender equality is multidimensional. The phenomenon is a global challenge with implications that cross-cultural, economic, and political boundaries and our analyses faced significant limitations that required caution, sensitivity, and an interdisciplinary approach.

¹ The original text was published in France by the Gallimard Bookstore in 1949 under *Le Deuxième Sexe*. It was then published for the first time in English in Great Britain in 1953 and reprinted in 1956. In Romanian, it appears at Humanitas Publishing House; cf. Simone de Beauvoir, *Al doilea sex. I. Faptele și mature. II. Experiența trăită*, translation and notes by Marieva Ionescu and Elena Ciocoiu (vol. I), Iuliana Glăvan and Cristina Balinte (vol. II), Humanitas Publishing House, 2022.

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PRESENTATION OF THE THESIS CHAPTERS

In the first part of our paper, we highlight that, for older and newer feminist movements, a rather severe problem is using words with grammatical forms of the masculine gender to name human activities. So, the first sub-chapter was called *The problem of masculine grammar*. Here, we highlight the importance that feminist movements – both past and contemporary – place on the challenge of using grammatically masculine terms to describe human activities.

Out of the desire to overcome some linguistic barriers, the language of discourses integrating the gender perspective had to give new meanings to old words. This aspect was addressed in the sub-chapter *Giving new meanings to old notions*.

Because new ideas need appropriate linguistic clothing, gender ideology calls for linguistic innovations (the subject of another sub-chapter), and the appreciation of some lexical structures as falling into the category of those that bring social or moral harm to discriminated minorities led to the analysis in the sub-chapter *Legal implications of "disparaging statements"*. Gender ideology is based on the concept that gender identities are not fixed and can express themselves in various ways. Language plays a vital role in how we

express and understand these identities. Thus, linguistic innovations appear to respond to the need to reflect greater diversity and inclusion in everyday language.

The work *Language, Gender and Sexual Identity* by Heiko Motschenbacher addresses how the construction of gender and sexual identities is achieved in various ways, including through language. For example, the chapter on the construction of linguistic identities in queer cinema in this book analyzes the films, *But I'm a Cheerleader* and *Boys Don't Cry* to show how non-normative characters' traditional gender' is presented through languages, such as through the use of specific personal nouns and other lexical characters.

This sphere of language study also addresses lexical structures that can induce social or moral prejudice against discriminated groups. Thus, it analyzes the use of stereotypical linguistic codes and how they can be subversive. This research supports the idea that language is not only a vehicle for communication but also a medium through which social reality is constructed and reflected and that paying attention to how language can contribute to injustice can be a step forward in creating a more just society.

In the second chapter of our work, *Gender ideology of gender – the birth and development of the phenomenon*, we establish what we call the starting point of the phenomenon that gender ideology represents. The specialized bibliography leads us to consider the World Conference on Women in Beijing as the most critical moment of international acceptance of the incipient formulas of the later gender discourse. This conference, held in 1995, was a crucial moment in the international recognition of women's rights. Within this, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action were adopted, which set a robust agenda for promoting women's social, economic and political rights in various areas of society. This event represented an important recognition of women's rights. It was a significant step towards improving the status of women globally, influencing public discourse and policies on women's rights for years to come. In a subchapter of this part of our paper, we show how common terminology takes on new meanings and tends towards a lexicon specific to the gender perspective. Thus, we will see that in the discourse of the followers of the ideology, the word "sex" is replaced by "genre", and the latter is given new meanings, thus distinguishing itself from the homonymous word in the explanatory dictionaries. For example, through the Istanbul Convention of June 2014, it is established that "gender" has a different meaning for the societies that ratify the treaty than it had until then, i.e. genders represent "socially constructed roles". According to this Convention, the term "gender" has been given a new interpretation among societies that ratify the treaty, referring to socially determined roles, as opposed to the traditional definition of "sex".

In the third chapter, we analyze the appearance of gender as an ideology in the political discourse of European states, noting that someone interested in the subject can easily discover the beginning and propagation of "gender ideology." The specialized literature proposes the concept of Gender mainstreaming, which could be understood as the "systematic integration of the gender perspective in equality policies."

In this chapter, we discover part of the phenomenon's evolution in the politics of some European states, including our country. Gender mainstreaming is a concept that was developed by international organizations such as the United Nations in the 1980s and gained greater visibility in the 1990s, particularly after the 1995 Beijing World Conference on Women. It entails introducing gender ideology into all stages of policy processes, including planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The goal of gender mainstreaming is to promote gender equality and ensure that the interests and needs of both sexes are taken into account in public policy areas.

Regarding European policies, the European Union has adopted gender mainstreaming as a strategic approach in its legislation and policies. In certain member states, including Romania, this approach has influenced the promotion of national laws and policies to ensure equal opportunities for women and men.

The evolution of the gender phenomenon as an ideology in the political discourse of European states can be seen in the multiple directives and regulations that promote gender equality and in the efforts to combat gender discrimination in both the public and private sectors. For example, in Romania, "gender mainstreaming" in policies has been strengthened by creating government agencies dedicated to gender equality and the development of national strategies for gender equality.

In the subchapter *The ideology of gender equality – the development of the phenomenon*, we follow how gender ideology develops starting from the identity crisis of the generation of the 80s. We can say that this period was significant for movements that tried to redefine the concept of identity, including through the lens of gender. During this period, intense debates about gender roles and identity occurred, leading to new theories and interpretations. We then analyze the moment of launching the theory through the contribution of the American philosopher Judith Butler, the opinion leader of gender feminism, an American philosopher known for her significant contributions to feminist theory and "gender studies". This introduced the idea that sex and gender are not natural and fixed but socially constructed, a perspective that has profoundly influenced gender ideology and feminist movements. The sub-chapter then presents the evolution of the means of promoting gender

ideology in Romanian academic environments and ends with a case study aimed at the impact of integrating the gender perspective into state policies in Canada.

Regarding the evolution and means of promoting gender ideology in Romanian academic environments, there is a growing interest in this field, starting from the 2000s with the development of "gender studies" programs and centres. Within SNSPA, for example, the Center for Curricular Development and Gender Studies - FILIA was founded, and at "Babeş-Bolyai" University, an interdisciplinary research centre on "gender studies" was established, which proves that gender ideology has had an essential impact on the research of "gender relations" in Romania. These centres and programs have contributed to applied research on "gender relations" in Romanian society, published frequently and co-opted collaborations with domestic and international organizations to improve the understanding of women's economic, political, cultural and family situations.

The chapter *The sociopolitical impact of gender ideology* traces the birth of this ideology starting from the conceptual intersection points and cross-influences that neo-Marxism, the Frankfurt School, the North American successors of the Frankfurt School and gender mainstreaming have.

The name neo-Marxism sums up the theories and approaches that have evolved from Marxism but include new analytical elements such as psychology, social structure, culture, and criticism of other dominant ideologies. The Frankfurt School is the best-known group of neo-Marxists. It included thinkers Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse. Their work combines Marxist theory with other branches of philosophy and social criticism, including elements of psychoanalysis and criticism of consumer culture and society.

American successors to the Frankfurt School are the thinkers and researchers who have continued and developed the founders' work in the North American academic and cultural context. They explored how consumer society and mass culture influence behaviour and social consciousness.

In this context, the concept of gender mainstreaming appears. Although it is not considered directly related to the Frankfurt School, it shares the same interest in criticizing power structures and promoting equality. While the Frankfurt School did not specifically address gender issues in their early work, the concepts of critique of authority and analysis of structures of oppression are relevant to gender studies and social movements promoting gender equality. Postmodern and contemporary thinkers often use critical theory to interrogate and deconstruct gender roles and social norms, a process rooted in neo-Marxism and the social critique advanced by the Frankfurt School.

Thus, in the third chapter, we show how gender mainstreaming benefits from the critical approaches of neo-Marxism in that attempts to integrate gender equality into institutional policies and programs can be seen as a form of opposition to the structures of power and domination that perpetuate gender inequality. For example, promoting gender equality in education at all levels seeks to dismantle the systemic basis of privilege and oppression.

Furthermore, current perspectives in gender theory and LGBTQ studies can be seen as extending and applying critical Marxist and Frankfurtian techniques to gender identity questions. These approaches borrow from neo-Marxism and the Frankfurt School in their critique of the socioeconomic structures that constrain and shape individual lives. So, there is a tangential connection between neo-Marxism, the Frankfurt School, and the practice of gender mainstreaming, which is related to the shared aspiration to critique and change power structures.

Cultural Marxism, gender ideology, political correctness, deconstructivism and postmodernism are phrases and words that, although they describe various perspectives and theories in the sphere of social sciences and humanities and have different origins and applications, we appreciate that they are closely related, being in the centre of the phenomenon investigated by us in this paper.

Cultural Marxism is an extension of Marxist theory, which applies social criticism not only to economic structures but also to culture and ideology, analyzing how these influence and perpetuate social inequalities.

Political correctness is a term used, usually with negative connotations, to describe efforts to adopt language and practices that do not discriminate against or offend marginalized groups, often based on race, gender, sexual orientation, or other characteristics.

Deconstructivism is a critical and philosophical approach pioneered by Jacques Derrida that focuses on dismantling and interpreting texts, thought structures, and assumptions in a way that reveals their internal ambiguities and contradictions.

Postmodernism is a cultural and intellectual movement that suggests that reality is subjective and socially constructed. It emphasizes pluralism, relativism and scepticism towards universal ideas of truth and rationality.

Our analysis highlights the connection between these concepts and theories, as each plays an important role in critiquing power structures. For example, postmodernism and deconstructivism break down concepts and categories considered "normal," a practice that can be associated with political correctness. The latter proposes a more critical analysis of language and representations to promote inclusion and diversity.

At the same time, this chapter notes that gender ideology seeks to highlight discrepancies and inequalities, a context in which it intersects with cultural Marxism. In all cases, it criticizes various aspects of contemporary society and proposes new perspectives to transform social and cultural realities.

In the chapter *Christian Morality and the Ideology of gender equality*, we analyze the idea of equality between people from the perspective of Christian morality compared to the vision of gender ideology about what this equality should be.

From the Christian perspective, equality is often framed in the context of the intrinsic dignity of every human being created in God's image. This includes an understanding of men and women as fundamentally equal. While there may be different gender-specific roles or functions within religious practices or communities, these differences do not generally indicate a person's worth or dignity.

Gender ideology, in contrast, emphasizes the social and cultural constructs of gender roles and norms and seeks equality by challenging traditional views that may perpetuate stereotypes or inequalities. It recognizes a more fluid spectrum of gender identities beyond the male and female binary, advocating for rights, equal opportunities and respect for self-identification and individual expression. Gender ideology focuses on dismantling the systemic barriers that limit people based on gender expression.

Both the Christian perspective and gender ideology promote respect for human beings, but they differ in their approaches to understanding and interpreting the roles assumed by men and women. The traditional Christian view upholds inherent God-given male and female differences, while gender ideology questions or attempts to redefine those differences in pursuit of broader equality and inclusion.

Also, in this chapter, we parallel the idea of the nature of man and his role in the Christian community, where freedom and free will are other fundamental concepts, which we subject to analysis from the perspective of Christian teachings found in the pages of the Holy Scriptures or the writings of the Holy Fathers of the Church.

In Orthodox Christianity, free will is fundamental and rooted in biblical teachings and patristic traditions. Free will means people's ability to make free choices that are not entirely determined by external or internal forces, allowing the person to choose between good and evil.

In contrast, adherents of gender ideology often distinguish between biological sex, which is defined by physical characteristics, and gender identity, which they see as a social construct, i.e. male or female status would represent the social and behavioural roles associated with masculinity and femininity. In their view, these gender roles can vary between

societies and change over time. A person can identify with a gender different from their biological sex or not conform to the specific stereotypes of the society in which they live. Proponents of gender ideology argue that each person can define their own gender identity, thus suggesting a kind of "free will" in individual gender expression and perception.

Therefore, while Orthodox Christianity focuses on free will in the moral and spiritual context, looking at how individual choices relate to divine teachings and the realization of sound, gender ideology emphasizes the individual's freedom to choose and express their gender identity according to personal perception and social experience, regardless of the norms established by tradition or biology.

While orthodox Christianity may see the expression of free will as directed toward conformity with divine will, gender ideology emphasizes self-determination in the context of social and personal identity.

Within gender ideology, the notion of freedom refers to the individual's ability to express their gender identity and make personal choices about how they live their lives authentically without the pressure of conforming to traditional gender norms. It also argues that individuals should be free to explore and assume an identity they feel comfortable with, unfettered by strict social or cultural constraints. Proponents of gender ideology advocate freedom of gender expression and self-determination within the limits of personal ethics.

In our paper, we caution that it is essential to distinguish between personal freedom of expression and libertine behaviour, as the line is very thin and can easily slip into the negative side of freedom of expression, with different implications for ethical conduct and society. Like other religions and ethical systems, Orthodox Christianity evaluates these personal choices through the prism of its moral values and teachings and the direction in which gender ideology goes. However, especially some so-called "gender expressions" qualify, instead, through the concept of "debauchery".

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