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Gender ideology in psycho-pastoral approach

Summary

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Keywords

Gender, ideology, dysphoria, art, feminism, toxic masculinity, patriarchy, masculinity, femininity, pastoral, polytheism, emotions, empathy, icon, iconography, Mass, Eucharist, human, gender role, stereotypes, labor, transgenerational, counseling, psycho -therapy, program, intervention, multidisciplinary.

Summary

The present paper proposes a complex analysis of gender, starting from artistic and political influences, from feminist currents, or toxic masculinity and up to the influences of polytheistic religions.

Analyzing history we notice that masculinity and femininity have taken on different forms depending on political changes and cultural influences. Social expectations dictated gender behavior, starting from differences in personality or biological characteristics. Rights, privileges, and even culture are formed out of these differences.

Women were often seen as driven by emotion, and men driven by reason, competence and assertiveness. In some cultures, the possibility of feminine traits being present in men (empathy, emotion) and masculine traits in women (leadership, competitiveness) has been ruled out, but anthropologists and sociologists have found a number of similarities closely related to family behavior. Despite their differences, both men and women have a strong instinct to protect the material and emotional well-being of the family, and the spirit of self-sacrifice is heightened in both sexes when it comes to the common good of the family.

In polytheistic religions, such as Rome and Ancient Greece, where we find Zeus and Jupiter, Hera and Juno, Athena and Minerva, Artemis and Diana, Demeter and Ceres,

Poseidon and Neptune, or in Nordic culture, where we have gods such as Freyja and Thor; in the Geto-Dacian pantheon where we find Zalmoxis, or Bendis, the genders are often distinct. Gender differences allow for a dynamic and often sexual relationship between deities and even between gods and humans, exemplified by Zeus and Leda¹

It is important to note that all religions speak of the existence of two genders, male and female, and the occasional transitions from one gender to another are short-lived episodes, each time the gods revert to their proper gender. Even in the case of eunuchs, it is recognized that they are castrated men.

The Old Testament provides a clear and firm picture of the genus and gender roles; The man occupies an important place in the political and religious scene, having full power over his children and wife. The man can, at will, disobey the union with his wife, divorcing her example: *Deuteronomy* , chapter 24, "If a man marries a woman, but she becomes displeasing to him because he finds some indecency in her, he may write her a certificate of divorce, hand it to her, and send her away from his house."

The woman of the Old Testament, marked by contrasts, is presented to us as a daughter, wife, sister, mother (her value, as a person, increased when she became a mother, or decreased if she could not have children), widow, mistress or slave, believer or unbeliever, virtuous or impure. In a few cases, however, women with political influence are also mentioned.

The Old Testament highlights several names of women who stood out for their different qualities: Eva, Sarah, Rebeca, Bathsheba, Izabela, Deborah, Iaela, Judit, Esther, Atalia, Mariam. The Old Testament outlines the images of two types of women: the virtuous woman and the bad woman, and regardless of the social category, the virtuous woman enjoys the appreciation of those around her, being the image of perfect femininity, having the qualities of the ideal woman: gentleness, kindness, respect and modesty. Although the woman owed obedience to the man, her quality as a mother gave her an important place in the family, and children, by God's commandment, are obliged to honor her as well as their father:

Christianity differs from polytheistic religions and the Old Testament in that it goes beyond the barrier of gender and looks at man in his complexity, but does not cancel gender roles, but encourages man and woman to each fulfill their purpose. Each person is born with a unique character, with graces and gifts that differentiate him from other people,

¹ Representations of this myth are characterized by ambiguity.

which compose his reality, that are specific to his calling and service. Woman and man have unique ways of being and communicating. Just like a man, a woman is a personal, unique existence, with creative powers and the ability to shape its entire life. The woman being capable of emotional intensity and depth has the power to form a special bond with God, but also with others.

Over time, the human gender has been a subject of interest for anthropologists, sociologists, psychiatrists, psychologists, priests, but also for artists. The cultural process of defining sexual and gender identity has art as a means of expression. Regardless of whether we are talking about the art of ancient cultures, the masculine energy of the Baroque style, or the feminine modesty of Rococo art, the art of polytheistic religions, or the religious painting of Christianity, the masculine and the feminine have always been at the center of artists' interest.

Gender, gender roles, gender equality or inequality, have had an impact on the production, consumption and interpretation of works of art. Beyond the biological peculiarities of the sexes, artists often took into account the cultural and social classification of masculinity and femininity, which implies the existence of a dynamic of perception and representation in art. From gender dichotomy to fluidity, from ancient art to contemporary art, the perception and representations of gender have undergone changes. Most paintings reinforce the gender binary, but with the advent of feminist movements a dialogue is created about the dynamics of gender roles, between convention and fluidity.²

New theories of gender increasingly push society towards the annihilation of the differences between male and female. Current generations live in a state of identity confusion, and the male-female paradigm highlights a strong imbalance in the gender barometer.

In this sense, iconography comes to our aid by shedding light on the definitions of male and female genders. If a human, as a social being, goes through different changes according to his interactions, the icon, as a door to God, brings us the steadfastness of the Truth, offering us clear examples of men and women, who, fulfilling each of their roles, became partakers of His Kingdom. The most suitable examples for gender roles are the Savior Jesus Christ, the "Bridegroom" (Luke 5:34) and the Mother of God, whom the Son Himself calls "woman" (John 2:4) offering an example of femininity for the human race .

² Spectrum of identities dynamic , neither exclusively feminine nor masculine, which have the possibility to change , rejecting binarity the genre .

Written history indicates that from ancient times societies had patriarchy as their form of organization. This ideology has its center on the focus of man, the male leader, head of the family, dominant, with perfect authority. The rule of the man becomes the operating principle of the family, making it a sovereign, whose word matters and creates. The family, with everything it entails, becomes the domain of the so-called *pater familias*.³

Patriarchy breeds toxic masculinity, which imposes restrictions in its own interest. Male hegemony focuses on consolidating and increasing power,⁴ promotes a toxic, aggressive and rigid masculinity that constantly feels the need to aggressively compete with others and dominate them.⁵ This need was easily satisfied in relation to the woman, making her an object used for purposes to satisfy the male ego. So since ancient times toxic masculinity creates a pattern from which the woman cannot get out. Worthy and honorable women were those who strictly followed the rigid directions of men, suppressing their desires and capacities that could overshadow male dominance. From the creation of the world until now, gender and gender roles have been the subject of discussions, polemics or politics, as well as artistic muse. Although Christ proposes an approach based on love and mutual respect, patriarchy gradually emerges from which toxic masculinity springs and which provokes a wave of feminist backlash.

Feminism takes up the fight to achieve gender equality, demanding the expansion of women's freedoms and rights in society. It is a set of political ideas and practices based on the equality between the male and female sexes. On a social, political and economic level, the man had more rights and opportunities, thus being placed in a relationship of superiority to the woman and forming a gender inequality. Feminism also influences artistic styles and also has socio-political implications. New gender ideologies are emerging with an emphasis on Gender Dysphoria, gender reassignment and "political correctness". Sexual minorities demand that their sexual identity as well as their sexual orientation be recognized and accepted at the social level. Gender dysphoria is the emotional distress caused by the lack of congruence between the expressed gender and the sex assigned at birth. Gender dysphoria is followed by hormonal treatments, by blocking puberty, by artificial stimulation of the gonads. It also involves performing some

³ Maria Bucur, Mihaela Miroiu, *Patriarchy and emancipation in the history of Romanian political thought*, Polirom, Iași, 2002, p. 12

⁴ Connell, RW, & Messerschmidt, JW., "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept.", *Gender & Society*, 19(6), 2005, p. 830

⁵ Kupers, TA "Toxic masculinity as a barrier to mental health treatment in prison.", *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 61, 2005, p. 713

irreversible surgical interventions, through which genital organs are constructed that correspond to gender expression.

Gender identity becomes an umbrella term that includes other terms such as gender fluidity, non-binary, gender expression. The present research, regarding the sphere of gender identity, includes theories of gender evolution, such as psychoanalytic theory, social learning theories, socio-biological theory, or cognitive development theory. And in order not to be accused of moving away from science, we included essential information about the human chromosomal structure in the text of the thesis. In the past, gender dysphoria was considered a disorder, but now the International Classification of Diseases, version 11, includes gender dysphoria under the chapter "Disorders related to sexual health", thereby reducing, according to specialists, the labeling and stigmatization of patients and making therapy more acceptable.⁶

For the human species, the karyotype is composed of 46 chromosomes, arranged in 23 pairs, of which 22 pairs are autonomous, and one pair represents the sex chromosomes.

The gonads produce gametes, in the case of women the ovaries produce ova, and in the case of men the testes produce spermatozoa, their union during fertilization forms the zygote. As a result of fertilization, the zygote receives an X chromosome from the mother, and either an X chromosome or a Y chromosome from the father. If both chromosomes are XX, the sex is female, and if one of the chromosomes is X and the other Y, the sex is male. The presence or absence of the Y chromosome genetically determines sex. The natural formula for women is 46 XX, and the natural formula for men is 46 XY.⁷

A study on the biological differences between men and women showed that men perform better on spatial tasks and women on phonological tasks.⁸

The brain, depending on the gender of the person, uses one hemisphere or the other, or sometimes both hemispheres, to solve various tasks. It has been proven through many studies that despite different approaches, the results can be similar, so what is specific to a man does not make him superior to a woman, and what is specific to a woman does not make her superior to a man. IQ is also not affected by these differences.

In addition to the distinct chromosomal structure, studies indicate that there are real differences between the sexes, not just biologically, but also psychologically, emotionally,

⁶ *ICD-11*, World Health Organization Geneva, p. 215

⁷ Mihait Isvoranu, *Genetics Human*, Publishing House TEACHING and Pedagogica, Bucharest, 1993, pp.90-91

⁸ Halari R, Sharma T, Hines M, Andrew C, Simmons A, Kumari V. "Comparable fMRI activity with differential behavioral performance on mental rotation and overt verbal fluency tasks in healthy men and women.", *Experimental Brain Research*, 169 (1), (2006), pp. 1-14.

and behaviorally. However, these differences, although they are part of the concept of "gender stereotypes", are not the only aspect that we have to take into account. Gender stereotypes influence the way both men and women are perceived and approached by society, but also on their own style of dialogue and socialization. Gender stereotypes also have an effect on how individuals receive and store information about others and themselves.⁹

Many families have shaped their entire existence based on gender stereotypes. It is necessary for society to go through a transgenerational labor, which will clarify the origin of the needs we have, the causes of the lacks we have and above all the qualities we can enhance through a psycho-pastoral approach. Going through such a labor we could easily notice the fact that in the lives of the children and even ours, there was and is "too much mother and too little father"¹⁰. Children, just as we have had, lack a loving intimacy with reference figures, not only with the mother, as is customary, but also with the father who can provide a different kind of love.

If the relationship with the mother is based on an essential connection, the relationship with the father must be cultivated, developed not only through words but also through physical contact, through hugs, through play, by rocking or carrying the child in the arms, by holding the child to the chest, in order to stimulate the production of oxytocin, and so the father's body understands its new role. The father protects both the child and the mother, respectively the partner, because the woman remains the man's partner and the child's mother, she retains both qualities. Balance can be achieved to the extent that there is communion, and communion involves the involvement of all parties.¹¹

Transgenerational labor has a transformative role, even in relation to gender identity. A mother who, as a girl, learned that she is less valuable than a boy, in turn can transmit this dissatisfaction to her own daughter, who, developing from the womb with the dissatisfaction related to her gender, will always seek to please her mother, or will be inclined towards behavioral disturbances. Gender identity can also be affected by the presence or absence of the father, who inspires security, protection, but also authority. For boys, the father plays a role in shaping their own masculinity by providing them with

⁹Naomi Ellemers, "Gender Stereotypes", in *Annual Review of Psychology*, 2018, p. 275

¹⁰Tia Teofil, "Paternity true: a "mountain of love" exigentia. much mother and too little bit father in the lives children ours", *Brochure*, Cluj-Napoca, 2018, p. 12

¹¹Teofil Tia, Felicia Coroian, "Orthodoxy in the face of the redefinition of the masculine and the feminine", in the *Orthodox Church and the challenges of the future*, Cluj University Press, Cluj-Napoca, 2020, p. 322

validation.¹²The father initiates his boy in specifically masculine activities, and in relation to the girl serves as a model for the formation of a set of expectations regarding masculinity, and more than that, the father validates the girl's femininity, letting her understand that it is natural for there to be differences between male and female, but that both genders are important and valuable.

Specialized literature tells us that from an early age the child adopts the set of values of the parents and through exposure to repeated behaviors internalizes the behavioral, attitudinal and personality traits of the attachment figures. Parental identification is natural, since the intimate circle formed by parents and child represents the first form of socialization encountered by the child, a small society intended to initiate the child in the art of communication and communion. Depending on age and gender, the child also shows interest in the attachment figure of the opposite sex, or in relation to the parent of the same sex, the attachment figure of the same sex will be imitated, while the parent of the opposite sex will be a source of validation. Some specialists believe that identification with one's own gender begins immediately after birth, which is due to dependence on adults.¹³

All aspects related to identity confusion can be discussed with a pastoral counselor, in order to have a clearer reading of reality, to find out to what extent man still relates to the pastoral care, but also to what extent the binary of gender roles affects family/household size, we conducted an online survey in 2023 at the level of local communities. It is not an official study, but an online survey whose purpose is strictly informative. The target group was mixed, composed of both women and men, of different ages, with different levels of education and from both rural and urban backgrounds.

The Church places the family at the center of its concerns, which has a transformative character not only internally, but also externally, being a nucleus of society. The specialized literature starts from the hypothesis that gender is a social construct, and as the first society is the family, gender norms and labels, if we take into account the definition of gender, we can say that they develop and strengthen within the family. So a healthy gender identity results from a functional and healthy family. Everything that is beneficial to man is learned from the family, but when the family is dysfunctional, the consequences are seen in the children's behaviors and in the way they read reality.

¹²Lamb, ME, *The Role of the Father in Child Development*, Fourth Edition, USA, (2004), pp.4-7

¹³Rice F. Philip, *The Adolescent: developing Relationships and Culture*, ed. Allyn and Bacon, 1990

An emotional or behavioral disorder is caused by traumatic factors, and in most cases the traumatic factors are found in the family, during childhood, from the first stages of cognitive-behavioral development. Often families are dysfunctional because the two adults who make up the family come with transgenerational baggage, with childhood traumas, which they do not heal before marriage, either because they are not aware of them, or because they do not have the necessary resources. That is precisely why pastoral counseling is important, all those who are getting married discuss with the priest, even to set the date of the wedding, the priest can take the opportunity to determine exactly if the people are ready to found a family, if they are ready to have children, if they know each other so well, the positives and the negatives. Raising a child, in the absence of transgenerational labor, can trigger a series of maladaptive behaviors, which the adult developed in childhood, as a result of unpleasant experiences, or were copied from attachment figures. They are gestural or verbal refrains that the person expresses without realizing it.

Through pastoral counseling, the priest or counselor can prevent the occurrence of dysfunctions, inspiring moral values. It is our duty, Christians, even more so priests, to protect the family. In its natural form, which today many call "traditional", but which best defines the notion of "family", the child can develop in a balanced way.

The family is the source of the individual's first relational ties, the source of the first experiences, and the first interactions. It is the optimal framework for developing communication skills, but also for reading reality, here the first dialogues are formed, here the child receives messages about the environment and about himself. It is the family that establishes a set of rules, with which, later on, the child presents himself in society. Interpersonal behavior is understood through the set of values of the family, and if the family guides its entire existence according to Christian values, according to the truth of Christ, the child will have balance and constancy, not only in terms of emotional security, but also in terms of regarding gender identity.

Gender dysphoria, regardless of the age of the individual who is diagnosed, requires counseling and therapeutic intervention. Regardless of whether we are talking about childhood, adolescence, or adulthood, the usefulness of pastoral intervention is indisputable. The advantages of a pastoral intervention program are multiple, especially from a multidisciplinary perspective. Psychotherapy specialized in gender ideology will guide the individual towards obtaining gender reassignment, towards specialists who will

act, depending on the age, either by blocking puberty or by hormonal treatments, and the consequences can be devastating.

In pastoral counseling The Human is the main working tool, we must take into account the double intention of the pastoral relationship, on the other hand we have The Human, who comes to us not necessarily out of a desire to enter into communion with God, but out of guilt or at the insistence of the family, and on the other hand the counsellor/priest, who has the intention of bringing man into communion with God. We cannot talk about sin to the man who has fallen into sin, but we must recognize his quality as a subject whose connection with God requires restoration through the birth of faith in him, as the birth of faith in him is done by relating to otherness

The pastoral intervention program proposed in this research supports people with gender dysphoria, who above all seek to be close to God's love. The program proposes an extended intervention on the family, but also an intervention based on prevention, especially in the case of young people who are about to get married and who, as is customary, ask for the priest's help before marriage. The program proposes a non-directive approach, unconditional acceptance, confidentiality, a secure space, verified and filtered information, professional, quality support and above all an approach free of stereotypes.

The tendency to stop non-conforming behaviours, the fact that no distinction was made between behavior and gender, often did not have the desired result. Girls who wear pants, girls who want to drive, girls who want to practice a certain sport, or girls who want to have a career, have been told that it's unnatural, that it's male-specific. Boys who showed "excessive emotions", boys passionate about clothing, physical appearance, decorations, raising children, were told that it was unnatural, that it was specifically feminine . The result was in many cases riot carried to the extreme. This revolt was exploited politically and economically and turned into ideology.

The need for a program of pastoral intervention is therefore imperative, the priest and counselor must know the issue of gender identity in detail, in order to be able to choose the correct counseling tools: information, communication, unconditional acceptance, bringing to the Holy Liturgy and finally the Eucharist.