

Gender-Sensitive!

Gender from a Catholic Point of View

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Women, Men, and “Gender”: Why Are They Being Discussed Anyway?

Dear reader,

You can hardly turn the TV on, open a newspaper, or surf the Internet without immediately coming across debates on the relationship between women and men. What it means to be a woman or a man is being discussed everywhere.

These debates have found rich soil. The conception of male and female roles has changed radically in recent decades, and we are right in the middle of this transformation. We can see it in the working world, where women and men have completely different roles today; we can see it in families where fathers want to be there for their families; and we can see it in business, culture, and politics where quota regulations for women in leadership positions are being discussed. The young generation wants to live differently than how their parents and grandparents live or lived.

The so-called “gender debates” affect many areas of life directly, which explains why these debates are so often emotional. There can be no argument about that. But it does become difficult when the discussion is conducted unfairly and is therefore accompanied by threats and defamation.

This “gender-sensitive” flyer that you now hold in your hands should contribute to making the debates less emotional. We explain what “sex” and “gender” mean, what gender mainstreaming is all about, and what all of that has to do with the Christian concept of humanity.

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Sex and Gender: What do the Terms Mean?

Sex refers to the biological sex of an individual that is determined by chromosomes, hormones, and anatomy. One's chromosomal sex is formed at procreation. The internal and external sexual characteristics (anatomy) develop in the first four months of pregnancy.

There are also those who, despite this chromosome set, do not fall into either one of the two sexes – they have the physical characteristics of both sexes. This can have genetic or anatomical or hormonal reasons. In such cases, we speak of intersexuality.

Gender refers to social role, i.e., the social, cultural, political and religious determination of difference between men and women. This term is related to society's expectations concerning the "typical" relationship between women and men, such as what a society holds to be "female" or "male" clothing and outfits. The question of what jobs society ascribes, i.e., opens or closes, to men and women is important.

1. How Are Sex and Gender Related?

Recent research shows that it is difficult to describe this relationship in positive terms. From the Catholic point of view, however, there are two mistakes that need to be avoided in the discussion on the relationship of sex and gender.

- The first mistake is that of confusing (vermischen) sex and gender. This mistake is made by those who argue against the view that there is anything like gender at all. They assert that the biological sex of a woman or man constitutes and determines gender roles.
- The other mistake is to separate sex and gender from each other. This mistake is made by those who assume that gender roles can be changed without taking biological sex into account. Gender roles could be changed at will.

The Catholic position holds that sex and gender must be distinguished but not separated. They are related to each other, without being dissolved into each other: inconfusedly and inseparably.

What is Gender Mainstreaming?

Mainstreaming characterizes a strategy of action. The intention is to make a topic or theme part of everyday discourse and to introduce it into "the mainstream of political or ecclesial activity." The issue should be considered as obvious in all activities and decision-making processes.

Gender Mainstreaming is a political strategy intended to contribute to more equal opportunities for women and men. The approach originally stems from international development policy. It has been asserted since the 1970s that the inequality between women and men in the countries of the south has been a central cause of hunger and social exclusion.

Concretely, gender mainstreaming means, for example:

- P creating better general conditions in the working world in which mothers and fathers can reconcile their careers with the demands of family and volunteer work;
- P measures to get more men in caring professions and more women in leadership positions;
- P the specific promotion of girls and boys in educational careers □ in language, in proclamation, and liturgy, making sure that women and men are equally visible and addressed.

Gender Mainstreaming: Legal Anchoring

In 2008, the EU inscribed gender mainstreaming into the Treaty of Lisbon (Art. 8) as a working principle for the Union.

What Does the Christian Concept of Humanity Say?

The Christian concept of humanity clearly says “Yes” to the distinction between men and women. And it clearly says “Yes” to their equality. After all, humankind, male and female, is the image of God: “God created mankind in his image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:27). The difference in sex and gender is willed by the creator for mutual enrichment.

That is why we are required to discount class divisions and society-specific conceptions of role models: “There is neither ... slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). Disadvantaging people socially because of their biological sex is unjustified, as far as the Bible is concerned.

As a Church, we therefore advocate a non-violent interaction between women and men, equal pay for equal work, the involvement of men in family life, equal access to the labour market, and the proper esteem for all people regardless of sexual orientation.

The 2nd Vatican Council says:

“Since all men possess a rational soul and are created in God's likeness, since they have the same nature and origin, have been redeemed by Christ and enjoy the same divine calling and destiny, the basic equality of all must receive increasingly greater recognition.” (GS 29)

The Plurality of Inspirational Images of Women and Men

The history of the Catholic Church provides it with a plurality of images of women and men. These images continue to inspire today because they overcome restrictive conceptions of what it is to be a man or woman.

- Mary, the Mother of God, decided for Jesus in a risky act. Her great love song, the Magnificat, shows her to be a prophetess of justice. *This encourages women today to stand up for justice in their concrete environments.*
- Joseph was a considerate man who was assiduously committed to his family. *This encourages fathers in contemporary families to take an active role, out of love, for the children entrusted to them.*
- Mary Magdalene, the first witness of the Easter message, was passionately, deliberately, and despite all resistance, committed to the Word of God. *This encourages women to publicly intervene in the shape Church and society take.*
- Paul overcame the masculine expectations of his time when he followed the Word of God: “For my strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9). *This encourages men today to admit their weaknesses.*
- The doctor of the church Hildegard von Bingen was a leader in the Church who wielded great political influence. *This encourages women today to bring their issues and perspectives into the public space and to assume positions of leadership.*
- Thomas More renounced a brilliant career as a statesman for reasons of conscience. *This encourages men today to resist outside pressures and to inquire about the meaning of life beyond work and career.*

2. Church Activity Now: Gender-Sensitive

Women and men are witnesses to the faith for each other – in their families, careers, and volunteer work just as they are in business, culture, and politics. They stand up for the faith, but they also need a church that supports and strengthens them in their faith. The condition for this is the active regard – visible in both word and deed – for both sexes.

For this reason, the Church should act in a gender-sensitive way on all levels. It perceives the specific perspectives of men and women, brings them together into discussion with each other, and explores other options for action in the light of the Gospel.

Beyond the establishment of all roles and all standardizations, the Church should promote the notion that women and men are created in the image of God. Hence, it assists men and women in finding coherent models for themselves and their families. Plurality is the elixir of life for the Church.

The guiding principle of gender-sensitive action is:

Recognize differences but do not determine anyone on that basis.

The Second Vatican Council says:

“Every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, color, social condition, language or religion, is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God's intent.” (GS 29)

Recommendations for further reading

Franz-Josef Bode (ed.), **Als Frau und Mann schuf er sie: Über das Zusammenwirken von Frauen und Männern in der Kirche**, Bonifatius-Verlag, Paderborn 2013 (ISBN 978-3-89710-543-0)

CIDSE: **Gleichberechtigung zwischen den Geschlechtern**: Definition und Verständnis aus Sicht der CIDSE. Discussion Paper, December 2014 (link: www.cidse.org/de.html)

Deutsche Kommission Justitia et Pax (ed.), **Geschlechtergerechtigkeit und weltkirchliches Handeln: Ein Impulspapier der Deutschen Kommission Justitia et Pax** (Schriftenreihe Gerechtigkeit und Frieden Heft 104), Bonn 2004 (Link: www.justitiaet-pax.de)

Arbeitsstelle für Frauenseelsorge der DBK (ed.), **Geschlechtergerechtigkeit in Beruf und Familie für Frauen in verantwortlichen Positionen der Kirche**. Bonn 2005 (Link: www.frauenseelsorge.de)

Arbeitsstelle für Frauenseelsorge der DBK / Kirchliche Arbeitsstelle für Männerseelsorge und Männerarbeit in den deutschen Diözesen (ed.), **Gemeinsam gegen Gewalt: Eine Arbeitshilfe zum Umgang mit häuslicher Gewalt**, Bonn / Fulda 2006 (link: www.frauenseelsorge.de)

Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz (ed.), **Nicht länger Sklaven, sondern Brüder und Schwestern: Welttag des Friedens – 1. Januar 2015** (Arbeitshilfen 270), Bonn 2015 (link: www.dbk-shop.de)