

Contemporary Ideological Transformations and the Effects on the Family

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Abstract: The paper analyzes contemporary ideological transformations and their effects on the family, with a special emphasis on the relationship between new cultural paradigms and the Christian vision of the person, marriage, and family life. The study first outlines the historical and conceptual framework of these transformations, highlighting the way in which certain ideas developed in modern philosophy, sociology and psychology have influenced the redefinition of identity, social roles, and human relations. Furthermore, the research examines the distinction between the biological and socio-cultural dimensions of the person, as well as the implications of this separation for understanding human nature and family structure. From a Christian perspective, the family is presented as a space of communion, self-sacrificing love, and moral and spiritual formation, with a foundation that surpasses simple social convention. The paper also highlights the tension between the individualism promoted by some contemporary currents and the Christian conception of responsibility, complementarity, and fidelity. The main conclusion is that current ideological transformations profoundly influence the understanding of the family, but these also offer an opportunity to reaffirm fundamental Christian values and rediscover the authentic meaning of family life.

Keywords: Ideology, Family, Marriage, Identity, Culture, Christianity, Anthropology

Introduction

Contemporary society is going through a period of profound transformations, in which the traditional landmarks of identity, morality and family life are subjected to constant reinterpretations. Among the phenomena marking this change is also what is currently called contemporary ideologies on gender—a set of conceptions that propose a separation between the biological dimension of the person and their social and cultural identity.

This perspective does not merely represent a theoretical development in the field of social sciences, but has gradually become an active factor in shaping public policies, educational systems, and the global cultural discourse. By redefining fundamental concepts such as identity, freedom or equality (Petcu & Agarici, 2025a, pp. 587-606), contemporary ideologies directly influence the way human relations, social roles and family structure are understood.

In this context, the Christian family faces a major challenge. In the Christian tradition, the family is not just a social institution, but a spiritual reality, founded on the communion between man and woman, blessed by God and oriented towards love, responsibility and moral perfection (Rotaru, 2011, p. 5). Marriage is seen as a path of mutual fulfillment and spiritual growth, and the relationships between family members are based on giving, self-sacrifice and fidelity.

By contrast, some contemporary directions propose a vision of the family centered on individual autonomy and the continuous redefinition of roles and identities. This paradigm shift raises essential questions regarding the nature of the family, the purpose of marriage and the relationship between personal freedom and responsibility towards the other.

The present paper aims to analyze the impact of contemporary ideologies on the Christian family, considering both the theoretical dimension and the practical implications of this phenomenon. The endeavor does not pursue a simple opposition between two models, but attempts to highlight the tensions, challenges and possible directions of reflection in a world where the meaning of human relationships is continuously being redefined. Thus, the analysis will consider, on the one hand, the way gender and identity concepts are formulated and promoted in the contemporary space, and on the other hand, the way they interact with the Christian vision of the person, family and love (Petcu & Zaharia, 2025b, pp. 577-593).

Gender ideology – brief history and conceptual premises

The analysis of the phenomenon frequently called "gender ideology" requires, first of all, understanding the conceptual framework in which it was formulated. The distinction between biological sex and gender as a social reality constitutes a fundamental starting point. In contemporary literature, gender is often defined as the set of roles and behaviors socially attributed to individuals according to their biological sex (Council of Europe, 2011). This distinction did not appear suddenly, but is the result of a long-lasting intellectual and cultural process. Modern authors consider that the redefinition of terms and the change of language have played a major role in shaping this theoretical framework. Language not only describes social reality, but actively contributes to modeling it, being used in educational programs and public policies to influence perceptions and values (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 43). In this sense, the semantic evolution of some terms such as "equality", "diversity", or "discrimination" reflects broader transformations of the social and political discourse.

The historical origins of the ideas associated with gender can be identified in the feminist movements of the 20th century and in modern social philosophy. An essential moment is represented by the works of Simone de Beauvoir, who highlighted the socially constructed character of feminine roles (de Beauvoir, 2011, p. 287). Subsequently, in the 1960s, researchers in the field of psychology and sexology introduced more precise conceptual distinctions between sex and gender identity. In this context, authors such as Robert Stoller developed the notion of gender identity as a psychological dimension distinct from biological determinations (Stoller, 1968, p. 9). In parallel, empirical studies on sexual behavior, such as those conducted by Alfred Kinsey, contributed to challenging traditional norms and promoting the idea of sexual diversity. These studies had a major impact on social perceptions, even if their methodology and conclusions were intensely debated (Kinsey et al., 1948; Kinsey, 1953). Another controversial moment is constituted by the experiments of John Money, who tried to demonstrate that gender identity can be shaped through socialization. The analyzed cases subsequently raised serious ethical problems and highlighted the limits of these theories (Colapinto, 2000).

In the last decades of the 20th century, ideas about gender were developed within the poststructuralist and deconstructivist currents. The central figure in this process is Butler (1990, p. 32), who argued that gender is not a fixed reality, but the result of repeated social practices. This perspective led to the idea of identity "fluidity" and to the challenging of norms considered traditional. At the same time, the critical theories inspired by the Frankfurt School offered conceptual tools for the analysis of power structures and the way they influence social norms (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002). In this interpretation, concepts

such as "political correctness" and "deconstructivism" are associated with efforts to redefine language and cultural values.

A decisive moment in the development and global spread of the gender concept was represented by the international conferences dedicated to women's rights, especially the one organized in Beijing in 1995 (United Nations, 1995). Within these forums, the term "gender" was adopted in its social sense and integrated into international public policies. Subsequently, organizations such as the UN and the European Union promoted strategies for implementing gender equality, known under the name of "gender mainstreaming" (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2016). This concept involves the integration of the gender perspective in all fields of public policies, from education to legislation and economy.

The development of gender ideology cannot be separated from the strategies through which it was promoted in the public space. Some works from the Western space proposed models of gradual change of social perceptions, through media exposure, combating stereotypes and redefining cultural norms (Kirk & Madsen, 1989). In parallel, legislative transformations played an essential role. For example, the adoption of some laws against discrimination based on gender identity contributed to the institutionalization of these concepts in different states, as seen in Canada (Government of Canada, 2017). Also, linguistic changes—the introduction of new terms or the reformulation of existing ones—were an important instrument in the process of social normalization of these ideas.

The evolution of gender ideology generated numerous controversies, both in the academic environment, and in the religious and political one. Some critical perspectives maintain the existence of influences coming from modern intellectual ideological currents that would have contributed to the reconfiguration of social values (Larchet, 2023, p. 17). From the theological perspective, the debate focuses on the relationship between human nature, freedom and moral responsibility. In this framework, it is discussed whether the new conceptions about identity are compatible with religious traditions or whether they represent a rupture from them. At the same time, there are also interpretations that consider these evolutions as part of a broader process of expanding individual rights and freedoms.

The historical identification of gender ideology highlights a complex phenomenon, the result of the interaction between several fields: philosophy, sociology, psychology, politics and theology. Far from being a unitary construct, it formed gradually, through diverse and sometimes contradictory contributions. From the first feminist reflections on social roles to the integration into international policies, the idea of gender has known a significant evolution. Currently, it continues to be a subject of intense debate, reflecting the tensions between tradition and change in contemporary society.

The essential distinction: sex and gender

To clearly understand the distinction between sex and gender, it is necessary to start from the definition of these concepts. Sex usually refers to the division into two main biological categories: male and female, corresponding to men and women. These differences are based on physiological elements, such as reproductive function, bodily structure and hormonal influences. In contrast, the notion of gender is linked to the social and cultural dimension of identity. It includes behaviors, attitudes, roles and life models acquired over time, within personal experiences and the social environment. From this perspective, gender can be understood as the set of cultural traits and manifestations associated with a person (Rotaru & Oprea, 2015, p. 56). Therefore, although there are obvious anatomical differences between the two sexes, behaviors are not exclusively determined by these biological realities. To a large extent, they are influenced by the environment in which the individual lives, by social norms and by the culture in which they are formed.

Postmodern feminism starts from the idea that sex and gender should not be viewed as fixed data and evident in themselves, but as socially and discursively configured realities. In this perspective, the categories through which the feminine is defined are not considered natural, but results of cultural and linguistic processes. Furthermore, the notion of "feminine" is interpreted in relation to that of "masculine", being understood as the product of a historically constructed symbolic opposition.

In this theoretical framework, a clear distinction is produced between sex and gender. Sex is associated with the biological dimension, while gender is understood as the effect of social norms, representations and conventions. For this reason, the emphasis falls on the critique of gender structures and, sometimes, on overcoming or even eliminating them as forms imposed by society.

From a critical perspective, however, such an approach risks diminishing the importance of what makes the human person irreducible and singular, that is, the richness of their experiences, the complexity of their thinking, their aspirations and capacity for fulfillment through their own effort. Instead of prioritizing personal value, competence or real training in a certain field, this interpretation can end up excessively privileging belonging to a sexual or racial identity. In this way, the criteria of merit and preparation risk being pushed into the background.

In the Romanian academic space, there are also studies dedicated to these themes, which, in general, align with directions promoted in the dominant contemporary discourse. Some works, however, go further, formulating debatable interpretations, based on generalizations and ideological premises, often extrapolating conclusions from particular situations (Rotaru, 2014, pp. 32–44). Some of these approaches explicitly support the separation between sex, gender, and sexuality, considering them independent realities. For example, in certain recent publications it is stated that belonging to a biological category does not represent a fixed reality, but a construction that can be questioned. The authors of such works arrive at the conclusion that a person's identity cannot be explained by physical characteristics. This perspective is often criticized for its reductive character, because, in the attempt to overcome biological explanations, it ends up minimizing their role. In contemporary debates, some authors argue that social roles are not adopted solely based on inner dispositions, but function as instruments of integration into society. Within this perspective, gender identity is understood as a set of mechanisms used in social interaction, and their functionality depends on adaptation to the context.

The Istanbul Convention, also applied in Romania since 2016, introduces a definition of gender as a socially constructed reality. This approach has important implications because it suggests a reinterpretation of human identity beyond biological determinations. In some international contexts, such changes have led to controversial situations, for example, in the use of public spaces according to the declared identity (Săcrieru, 2018).

Currently, an accentuated tendency is observed to interpret numerous aspects of existence as results of social construction. However, this perspective is challenged by those who consider that biological realities cannot be ignored or completely separated from personal identity. From this point of view, it is not possible to arbitrarily assign a gender identity contrary to biological sex without generating conceptual tensions.

The global debates on this theme indicate that we are in a moment of profound change in the way human nature is understood. This transformation marks the transition towards a new anthropological paradigm, different from the one that has dominated traditional thinking throughout history. When the fact that sex and gender belong to the concrete identity of man and to his way of existing as a person is no longer understood, one reaches the confusion specific to postmodern discourses. It is possible to talk about choices, nuances or options that belong to individual expression, but these do not absolutely define the person, but at most contribute to the configuration of personality. Precisely for this

reason, the person and the personality must be distinguished without being opposed to each other: they can neither be totally identified, nor radically separated. Even if we do not enter here into a detailed analysis of these concepts, a minimum of discernment is necessary to correctly understand the problems raised in this subchapter.

From this perspective, many of the currents that have appeared starting with the second half of the 20th century can be interpreted as successive forms of an ever-expanding sexual revolution. Any revolution implies challenging and overturning some landmarks considered oppressive. In the current context, for the libertine-type postmodern mentality, the moral norms promoted by Christianity often appear as constraining, precisely because they try to protect sexuality from its reduction to the simple satisfaction of desires and, at the same time, to preserve the unity and uniqueness of the human person, as they have been affirmed throughout the Christian tradition.

It is true that technological progress and the development of medicine offer today possibilities that, in the past, did not exist, including interventions on the body and attempts to redefine one's own sexual or gender identity. However, the fact that individual will, especially when it is predominantly driven by affective impulse and less by rational reflection, can claim a certain self-definition does not mean that sex can be discussed coherently without reference to gender or that the two realities can be absolutely separated.

In this vision, sex and gender remain closely linked to each other. They belong to the concrete way in which man exists and manifests himself in the world. Not every subjective perception about oneself can change the reality of what someone is objectively. To claim that profound identity can be unlimitedly remodeled according to momentary feeling means substituting reality with an imaginary construction. However, in the contemporary discourse, it is increasingly stated that sexual orientation would be an original given, while gender, understood as a social role, could be freely chosen and modified.

Such an approach risks ignoring the fact that sexuality must be understood, in the Christian perspective, as a gift received from God. In the same horizon of meaning can also be placed the gender dimension, insofar as it expresses the way in which the person assumes their concrete existence and their place in communal life. At the bodily, physiological and biological level, man remains the same human being, the same person, called to receive and assume his sexed reality. At the same time, the roles through which he manifests himself in society must be understood as modes of integration and responsabilization, not as arbitrary products imposed exclusively from the outside (Răducă, 1992, p. 138).

Society can influence the way these roles are expressed, but it is not the ultimate instance that creates the person's identity out of nothing. Instead, people are called to harmonize their own way of being with the demands of social life, without losing the truth about themselves. When this relationship is overturned and everything becomes fluid, negotiable and subjected exclusively to individual will, one reaches a zone of illusion and utopia. In such a framework, it becomes increasingly difficult to understand the real meaning of sexuality, especially when it is detached from the openness towards procreation and from its relational and responsible dimension.

The family – principle of the communion of life

Throughout time, the family and the institution of marriage have often been viewed as almost inseparable realities. Naturally, entering into marriage has meant, in most historical contexts, the foundation of a family framework. At the same time, both can also be understood as socially modeled realities, whose meanings have varied depending on the era and the cultural context. The way they were perceived in the Jewish society of the 5th century BC does not coincide with the way they were defined, for example, in late 19th

century England. From this point of view, their interpretation as forms configured by society has a certain legitimacy (Wiesner, 2011, p. 38).

Regarding sexuality, it has generated numerous discussions, as it touches a fundamental dimension of human existence. The question arises whether it should be viewed as a disordered use of the body, oriented towards satisfaction, or whether it is part of the constitution of human nature as a gift through which the person expresses their freedom. Usually, those who assume certain practices consider them natural and justify them by reference to their own good. However, the purpose of human existence is not closure within oneself, nor the isolated consumption of one's own pleasures, but the exit from self-sufficiency through openness towards the other. Life does not find its meaning in the simple accumulation of individual feelings, ideas or experiences, but in their orientation towards giving, communion and shared life.

Today, numerous interpretations circulate regarding the family, marriage and what is sometimes called the traditional family or natural family. Many of these perspectives tend to judge their value according to their immediate utility (Căstăian, 2019, p. 22). In other words, they are considered legitimate only to the extent that they respond to some needs of the current world and can demonstrate their practical efficiency.

When presenting the Christian conception, as assumed in the Christian tradition, it must be remembered that this vision cannot be deeply understood without a real experience of Christian life. Without the exercise of living the evangelical principles, the internal unity of this perspective remains difficult to grasp. Consequently, attempts to conciliate the Christian vision of man and the contemporary formulas that reduce the relationship between persons to a civil contract or to a postmodern reading often end up in a tension difficult to overcome. The problem is also accentuated by the fact that the image of Christianity is often deformed at present. Not infrequently, elements of Christian teaching are mixed with ideas coming from non-Christian spiritual currents, which produces confusion and favors a syncretistic understanding of the entire issue.

Throughout history, Christianity has faced numerous situations in which a rethinking of the concrete way of applying its principles was necessary. Therefore, it is important to distinguish between a stable and a dynamic dimension of the teaching of faith. The stable component must not be confused with rigidity or immobility, but designates the permanence of essential truths. At the same time, the dynamic side refers to the capacity to update, interpret and make these truths intelligible in relation to the challenges of each era. It takes into account historical changes, concrete difficulties and cultural transformations, without abandoning the steadfast foundations of faith. Precisely for this reason, the Christian message has not always been easy to express in simple formulas, nor has it been correctly received.

In Christianity, the basic foundations remain unchanged. If we use, by analogy, the language of the social construct (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2009, p. 322), then we can say that love, family, conjugal union, sexuality and the birth of children are realities lived in history and in society, but they do not find their ultimate meaning only on the social plane, but in their relation to God. Their ultimate direction and their profound finality are theological. The believing man permanently orients his existence towards God and seeks to respond to personal, family, ecclesial and social difficulties from within this living and personal relationship with Him. Considering the crises that have marked recent years and continue to affect the contemporary family, an authentic understanding of the fact that the family is willed by God since the act of creation and that its true meaning consists in the unceasing return to Him becomes necessary. Therefore, the family is not exhausted in the social or communitarian dimension, but is always defined also by the vertical axis of its relationship with God. Contemporary society seems to define itself increasingly through a relativization of values, in which traditional moral norms are questioned. Instead of a generally accepted

ethics, a perspective takes shape in which each individual builds their own criteria, considered legitimate at a personal level. In this dynamic context, the question arises: what principles can authentically support the family and marriage in a reality undergoing continuous transformation?

Firstly, it is essential to remind the profound finality of the conjugal union: the spiritual and moral growth of the two partners through love (Răducă, 2026). The other dimensions – the birth of children, mutual support and the avoidance of moral wanderings – are not independent goals, but consequences of this central finality. The current image of the family, often distorted, imposes the formulation of a coherent and authentic response, which would highlight the fact that the Christian foundation of the family differs radically from the models proposed today.

In the Christian tradition, the family is founded on the work of divine grace and on the connection with God, beginning with the union of the two within the community of faith. Not infrequently, the birth of a child leads to the formalization of relationship between man and woman, resulting in the formation of a family. In such situations, it can be observed that the constitution of the family is not always the result of an initial intention, but rather the birth of a child. (Gavrilă, 2004, p. 73). This perspective can create the impression that the family is born rather from an external factor than from a conscious choice. Consequently, the family sometimes comes to be perceived as a good over which people can decide freely, in an arbitrary manner. In opposition to this vision, in Christianity marriage is seen as a sacred reality, in which God is constantly present. After their union, the two can no longer remain isolated persons, oriented exclusively towards their own desires. They become a unity, without losing their personal identity, but assuming a profound communion of will and life. From this communion authentic love is born, which manifests itself as giving and creation, especially with the coming of children (Paisie Aghioritul, 2003, p. 23). True self-knowledge also implies assuming the freedom of the other, as well as the responsibility towards the relationship built together. This means an authentic living, oriented towards the profound meaning of existence. Man is called not to lose himself in secondary things, even if they seem important, but to remain anchored in the essential.

Life lived in accordance with Christian values often involves difficulties. This is also mentioned in the apostolic teaching, where it is highlighted that assuming faith implies suffering. In a world dominated by superficial alternatives and appearances, fidelity towards profound values becomes a challenge. Not only social pressure creates difficulties, but also the inner attractions generated by the culture of the image, which can weaken the authenticity of relationships. The depersonalization of human relations, accentuated by the virtual environment, leads to an emptying of meaning of the interactions between people. Direct communication is replaced by indirect forms, which profoundly affects the quality of relationships. The question related to the possibility of a spiritual awakening remains open. Each person arrives, at a given moment, before their own conscience, being put in the situation of choosing between stagnation and transformation. The meaning of life can be discovered only in the authentic relationship between persons.

Regarding family life, several essential principles can be formulated. Firstly, each of the spouses is called to actively contribute to the good of the other, cultivating happiness and morality in the relationship. On the spiritual plane, the two are equal before God. Love, understanding and dialogue based on mutual listening are fundamental for building an authentic communion (Răducă, 1992, p. 136). Responsibilities must be assumed in a balanced way, with each individual contributing according to their capacities. Complementarity and reciprocity are essential for maintaining harmony. It is important that the relationship is not affected by resentments, as these lead to division and usually come from unresolved conflicts. An authentic Christian life naturally offers landmarks for

behavior in interpersonal relationships. The family must be a space where the inevitable difficulties of life intertwine with joy and mutual support. Hardships must not overshadow the beauty of existence, but be integrated into a broader perspective.

Another important principle is the inner ordering of desires and aspirations. Both monastic life and family life imply a specific calling and a certain inner peace. Discernment is necessary to understand the personal direction in relationships with others. In this sense, the spiritual tradition recommends orientation towards what brings inner peace, because this allows assuming responsibilities and living a balanced life. Marriage must not be reduced to the satisfaction of individual needs, because this would transform the relationship into a form of egoism. The true family implies overcoming pride and the tendency to isolation (Mihoc, 1985, p. 582).

The purpose of family life can be simply formulated: love must be oriented towards giving, not conditioned by preferences. The act of offering must spring from freedom and responsibility, not from personal interest. A family founded on spiritual values implies prayer, trust in God and collaboration between human will and divine help. There are aspects that depend on personal effort and others that must be left in God's care. Family life inevitably includes tensions and difficult moments. The spiritual tradition offers practical solutions: avoiding unnecessary conflicts, cultivating humility, appreciating the other's qualities and accepting mutual limitations. These attitudes contribute to maintaining harmony. Although these recommendations may seem difficult to apply in the current context, they express a profound understanding of human relationships. Contemporary culture promotes individualism and belonging to ideological groups, which can lead to isolation.

The family needs to rediscover gratitude, trust in God and care for others. The help given to those in need and the practice of good deeds represent essential elements of an authentic life. All these principles indicate a change of perspective: cultivating a beautiful life, pure thinking and an open heart. In the face of difficulties, support must be sought in the relationship with God (Rotaru, 2012, p.5). A slowing down of the rhythm of life is necessary, a release from the pressure of images and from the temptations that affect conjugal fidelity. Only thus can the present be lived authentically. Finally, it must be observed that these principles are confronted with current cultural trends, marked by relativism and deconstructivism. In this context, the traditional family model is under pressure, being subjected to significant transformations.

Conclusions

The analysis of the relationship between contemporary ideologies and the Christian family highlights a profound tension between two distinct ways of understanding man and his fundamental relationships. On the one hand, a vision takes shape that accentuates individual autonomy and the possibility of redefining identity according to personal experiences and options. On the other hand, the Christian tradition proposes an anthropology in which human identity is rooted in a given reality, oriented towards communion and spiritual fulfillment, bestowed by God. The impact of gender ideology on the family is not limited to the theoretical level, but manifests itself concretely in the change of social perceptions, in the modification of language and in the transformation of the legislative and educational framework. These changes influence the way family roles, the relationships between spouses and the responsibility towards children are understood.

One of the major consequences is the relativization of the family concept, which tends to be perceived not as a stable reality, but as a flexible structure, adaptable to individual preferences. In this context, marriage risks being reduced to a form of temporary association, and its sacramental and communitarian dimension is blurred. At the same time, the emphasis placed on individualism can lead to the weakening of interpersonal

relationships, since the responsibility towards the other is replaced by the concern for one's own satisfaction. This tendency affects not only the stability of the family, but also the capacity to build authentic relationships, based on giving and fidelity.

From a Christian perspective, the family remains the privileged space for the formation of the person and the living of love as sacrifice and communion. It is not a simple social convention, but a reality that reflects man's vocation to live in relationship with the other and with God. In this sense, contemporary challenges cannot be ignored, but neither assumed without discernment. The answer does not consist in a simplistic rejection of new perspectives, but in a coherent and authentic reaffirmation of fundamental values. A rediscovery of the meaning of conjugal love, of mutual responsibility and of the family's role in the formation of a balanced society is necessary. At the same time, the current context imposes a deeper reflection on the way freedom is understood and lived. Freedom cannot be reduced to individual choice devoid of responsibility, but must be integrated into a vision that takes into account the relationship with the other and the common good. In the face of cultural and ideological pressures, the Christian family is called to rediscover its identity and to assume its role as a living witness. This implies not only preserving some principles, but also living them concretely, in a credible and coherent manner.

In conclusion, gender ideology represents a real challenge for the Christian family, but also an opportunity for clarification and deepening of its own identity. To the extent that the family manages to remain faithful to its fundamental vocation, it can become a space of resistance and spiritual renewal in a world marked by uncertainty and change.

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