

Polish Catholic Discourse on Gender Equality in the Face of Social and Cultural Changes in Poland

Authors : Anna Jagielska

Abstract : Five years ago, the word 'gender' was discussed in Poland exclusively in academic contexts. One year later, it was chosen as the word of the year and omnipresent in the Polish media. The rapid career of this word is due to the involvement of the Polish church hierarchy who strategically brought this term into relation with abortion, pornography and paedophilia. 'Gender' is more than a political slogan. It is a symbol of social anxiety and moral panic in Poland which need to be historically considered. The aim of this paper is to present selected rhetorical strategies used by the Polish Catholic clergy who strive to have an impact on the current gender discourse in Poland. In particular, the gender debate, culminated in the pastoral letter of the Bishops' Conference of Poland, will be discussed. The church's protest against the Council of Europe's Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence will be analyzed and the recent heated debates in Poland on contraception, abortion, in vitro fertilization, and sex education will be mentioned. To provide explanations on the specificity of Polish gender debates the role of the Catholic Church in the fall of communism in Poland as well as the charismatisation of Polish society by Pope John Paul II will be explained. The social constructions of communism and feminism which are manifested in both written and symbolic contracts on gender equality between the Church and the State will be demonstrated. At the end of the paper, theories about the changing role of religion in society will be applied.

Keywords : gender, Poland, religion, catholicism, feminism

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