

Pope Francis' critique of ideological colonisation

“Ideological colonisation” is one of the recurrent terms of Pope Francis' statements. “Colonisation” means a widespread promotion of certain ideologies and an imposition of views to control people. In other words, this is “brainwashing”, or a control of the minds, propaganda, and mass re-education. Such colonisation takes place primarily in the media, but also in the sometimes veiled promulgation of laws which imperceptibly permeate all kinds of institutions and procedures. Ideology, in general terms, is a system of ideas and views for a more or less holistic interpretation and reconstruction of the world. Understood in this way, ideology does not have to necessarily be something negative, although following the experiences of the 20th century, the concept of “ideology” is often linked to evil totalitarianisms. Francis, too, when speaking of ideological colonisation, has in mind certain systems that not only convey evil content, but aspire to its total imposition.

Aid linked to ideology

During a press conference aboard a flight from the Philippines to Rome, Francis explained ideological colonisation as follows: “One enters a people with some idea that has nothing to do with the people. Possibly, it is linked to some groups, but not to the whole people, and they colonise the people with an idea that changes, or seeks to change, a certain mentality or structure”¹. The pope noted that African bishops, among others, complain about this kind of colonisation. Indeed, in 2015 the bishops of Africa and Madagascar produced a *Joint Declaration* to oppose neo-colonialism and ideological enslavement and to advocate for African development based on genuine respect. It is not uncommon for aid to Africa, including loans, to be conditional on the adoption of certain types of solutions, such as the promotion of abortion, contraception and one-sided, ideologized sex education. Various types of documents produced for Africa smuggle in or promote quite openly leftist and liberal ideologies that are alien to the vast majority of Africans².

The pope himself offers examples, also from personal experience, of charity linked to ideological colonisation. The following is one of them: “In 1995, a national education minister asked for a substantial loan to build schools for the poor. She received it on the condition that a textbook for children at a certain level of education was introduced into the schools - it was well prepared in terms of methodology - where gender theory was taught. The woman in question needed the subsidy, but it was made conditional in this way. A crafty woman, she agreed and had another textbook prepared, too; she gave both of them and in this way, she succeeded...”³. Such actions, i.e. aid linked to the imposition of a particular ideology, are very common today. Global foundations with billionaires behind them, sometimes called “philanthropists”, give money, but under conditions linked to the ideologies they want to spread.

Today, ideological colonisation is worldwide. One wants to impose certain solutions on all nations. That is why, during the above-mentioned press conference, Francis stressed: “Nations should not lose their freedom. A nation has its culture and its history; every nation has its own culture. But when there are conditions imposed by colonising empires, they try to make nations lose their identity and want to unify everything”⁴. The pope calls this type of globalisation “spherical”, as the question is that all the points should be more or less equidistant from the centre. Francis

¹ [Press conference of His Holiness Pope Francis during the flight from Manila to Rome \(19 January 2015\) | Francis \(vatican.va\)](#)

² Cf. [I vescovi africani dicono “no” al neocolonialismo e alla schiavitù ideologica \(aleteia.org\)](#)

³ [Press conference of His Holiness Pope Francis during the flight from Manila to Rome \(19 January 2015\) | Francis \(vatican.va\)](#)

⁴ Ibidem.

counters this model with the globalisation of a “polyhedron”: “each nation, each part, retains its identity and is not ideologically colonised”⁵. In other words, it is about unity in diversity, which does not subordinate anyone to a single imposed ideology, but instead seeks the common ground on which to fruitfully cooperate for the common good.

Blasphemy against God

Ideological colonisation has not just an economic and political aspect, but also a theological one. On 11 November 2017, in his homily during Mass at St. Martha's House, Francis asserted that by blurring differences and equating everyone to an idea, ideological and cultural colonisations “commit the terrible sin of blasphemy against God the Creator. Every time a cultural and ideological colonisation arrives, a sin is committed against God the Creator, because it seeks to change creation as He made it”⁶. Indeed, the account of creation we find in Genesis shows us that God creates by introducing differences into what was “disorder and wilderness”: light and darkness, earth and water, day and night, male and female, and so on. These differences create a harmonious unity without ceasing to be divergent. Ideologies, on the other hand, unify by destroying diversity.

Referring to a reading from 2 Maccabees, Francis observed that the action of Antiochus Epiphanes, called the “root of all sin” is a “true ideological colonisation, which seeks to impose pagan custom on the people of Israel”⁷, e.g. in the name of modernity. The people defend their faith and culture, as exemplified by the valiant Eleazar, who dies at the hands of his persecutors to set an example. “May his examples help us in moments of confusion in the face of the cultural and spiritual colonisation we are experiencing”⁸ – said Francis.

Eleazar was forced to eat pork. Some torturers who knew and respected him offered to help him pretend to eat pork. The aged Eleazar turned down this offer, thinking e.g. about the young: “At our age it would be unbecoming to make such a pretense; many of the young would think the ninety-year-old Eleazar had gone over to an alien religion. If I dissemble to gain a brief moment of life, they would be led astray by me, while I would bring defilement and dishonor on my old age” (2 Macc 6:24-25). Pope Francis noted that such cases of ideological colonisation have recurred many times in history, and that “there is only one remedy against this: witness, i.e. martyrdom”⁹.

Eleazar thinks about educating the young to set a good example and to strengthen them against ideological colonisation. During his audience for the World Union of Catholic Teachers in November 2022, Pope Francis spoke about the same thing. He stressed that openness to the world, to new ideas, is needed, but should not mean succumbing to ideologization. He said: “I ask you to be careful to help other teachers distinguish what is novelty that leads to human development and what is ideologization, ideological colonisation. Today, ideological colonisations are destroying human personality, and when they enter education, they wreak destruction”¹⁰.

Gender colonisation

In many of his statements, Francis indicates the colonisation by the gender ideology. In an interview for the Argentine daily *La Nacion*, published two days prior to the tenth anniversary of his pontificate, the pope observed: “At present, it is [the gender ideology] one of the most perilous

⁵ Ibidem.

⁶ [Francis at St. Martha: ideological colonisation a blasphemy against God | Niedziela.pl](#)

⁷ Ibidem.

⁸ Ibidem.

⁹ Ibidem.

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<https://www.vaticannews.va/pl/papiez/news/2022-11/papiez-do-nauczycieli-uwazajcie-na-ideologiczna-kolonizacje.html>

ideological colonisations. It goes far beyond the sexual”¹¹. Francis notes that some rather naïve people are convinced that this is the path of progress. Meanwhile, they do not discriminate between respect for every human being and the invalidation of fundamental differences. Such invalidation is very dangerous because it strikes at the essence of humanity. Incidentally, the pope confessed that he had been made aware of the danger of ideological blurring of differences years ago after reading Robert Hugh Benson's book *Lord of the World*, published at the beginning of the 20th century.

The pope spoke about gender colonisation during a meeting with bishops in Poland: “In Europe, in America, in Latin America, in Africa, in some Asian countries, we deal with a true ideological colonisation. One of them - I call it clearly by its ‘name and surname’ - is gender! [...] It is taught in school: everyone can choose their own gender. Why do they teach this? Because the textbooks are imposed by those individuals and institutions that give money. It is an ideological colonisation, supported also by very influential countries. And this is terrible”¹².

In Georgia, during an impromptu speech to representatives of local Catholic clergy, the pope called the “gender theory” an “enemy of marriage”. He spoke about a “world war” which aims to destroy marriage: “It destroys it not so much by weapons but by ideas; marriage is destroyed by ideological colonisations”¹³.

Later, Francis addressed this issue from another angle during a press conference on board a plane on his way back from Baku to Rome. He stressed that homosexuals and persons experiencing problems with sexual and gender identification must be accompanied as Christ would never have said to anyone: “Go away, as you are a homosexual?”. Yet this attitude of compassionate company has nothing to do with the “wickedness that is the indoctrination with gender ideology”¹⁴. Here the Pope gave the example of the 10-year-old son of a French acquaintance who announced that when he has grown up, he would want to be a girl. As Francis recounted: “The father realised that gender ideology was taught in school textbooks. It is against nature. It’s one thing to have this tendency, this option, and even to change one’s gender, and it’s something else to teach in school from this angle in order to change the mentality. I call it ideological colonisation”¹⁵. The Pope also recounted how he welcomed a person who had been a woman but had changed gender and, as a man, married a woman. After which he explained: “Life is life, things must be taken as they are. Sin is sin. Orientations or hormonal disorders cause many problems, and we have to be careful and not say: It does not matter; let’s have fun! No, it does matter! We have to welcome, accompany, explore, discern, and integrate every time. That’s what Jesus would do today. Please, don’t say that the Pope sanctifies transsexuals. I ask this of you! Because I read the daily headlines. You have understood very well what I said. I want it to be clear. This is a moral problem. It is a problem. It is a human problem. And it must be solved, as far as possible, always with the mercy of God and in truth”¹⁶. This statement has attracted criticism from various sides. Some accused Francis of essentially not calling a spade a spade and diluting Catholic teaching, while others accused him of not really understanding gender and the problems of LGBT+ people.

Francis also talks about ideological colonisation, including gender ideology, in a book-interview *San Giovanni Paolo Magno*¹⁷. Asked about the most unique manner in which evil today is incarnated and acts, the pope replied: “One of them is the gender theory”¹⁸. Soon, however, he makes it clear that he does not mean homosexual orientation but ideas and actions “aimed to

¹¹ [Pope: gender is one of the most dangerous ideological colonisations - Vatican News](#)

¹² [Francis responded to questions of Polish bishops \[DOKUMENTACJA\] \(deon.pl\)](#)

¹³ [Pope Francis in Georgia: a world war has been unleashed to destroy marriage - WP Wiadomości](#)

¹⁴ <https://m.niedziela.pl/artukul/24942/Zapis-rozmowy-Franciszka-z-dziennikarzami>

¹⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁷ Cf. Papa Francesco con Luigi Maria Epicoco, *San Giovanni Paolo Magno*, Cinisello Balsamo (Milano) 2020, p. 103-105.

¹⁸ Ibidem, p. 103.

destroy at the roots the creative project which God wills for each and every one of us: diversity and diversification. To make everything homogenous and neutral. This is an attack on diversity, on God's creation, on man and woman"¹⁹. Francis highlights that Christianity always prioritizes facts over ideas. Still, in "gender we see an idea which imposes itself on reality, in an insidious manner at that"²⁰.

Concerning duality?

Pope Francis' statements about ideological colonisation, and especially about gender ideology, are disliked by many, as we have pointed out. Those who occupy leftist and liberal positions believe that, despite a certain openness to LGBT+ people, the pope stops halfway and does not respond adequately to the challenges of our time. Others applaud the pope's criticism of gender ideology, but believe that, on the other hand, Francis himself undermines or even invalidates it through other statements and gestures.

In the pope's encouragement to accompany homosexual persons, some miss a clear call to conversion. They emphasise that Jesus was merciful towards sinners, but at the same time clearly called sin a sin and required that it be abandoned. He addressed the woman caught in adultery with gentleness but said to her at the end: "Go, [and] from now on do not sin any more" (Jn 8:11). Another matter of concern is the evident support which Francis grants to gender/LGBT activists. Suffice it to mention here the US Jesuit James Martin, who enjoys the pope's backing and who is viewed by many as simply a theoretician and activist of the gender/LGBT ideology. His conferences and ideas on pastoral care are perceived by many as precisely ideological and gender ideologization.

Surprisingly, Francis sent a handwritten letter to Sister Gramick to celebrate her 50 years of work with and advocacy for LGBT people. Her work was described by the Pope as carried out in "God's style". Meanwhile, Sister Gramick is the co-founder of New Ways Ministry, an organisation that received a negative review from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 1999. In 2010, the US Conference of Catholic Bishops stated that the organisation did not represent the Church's position on LGBT ideology. Indeed, its aim is to change the teaching of the Church regarding the sinfulness of homosexual acts²¹.

Pope Francis probably considers such criticisms, many more examples of which could be cited, to be unfair. He would probably reiterate what he stated in the quoted statement on the flight from Baku to Rome, that one must combine truth with mercy and that the patient company of LGBT+ people does not mean ignoring sin. Ideological colonisation, including gender colonisation exercised e.g. in schools, remains a terrible evil of our time.

¹⁹ Ibidem, p. 103-104.

²⁰ Ibidem, p. 104.

²¹ Cf. [Letter of Pope Francis to a nun running LGBT ministry \(dorzeczy.pl\)](https://dorzeczy.pl/letter-of-pope-francis-to-a-nun-running-lgbt-ministry)