

Ridiculous Argument Over God's Gender Divides German Government

A minister in Angela Merkel's government has sparked a pre-Christmas row among Germany's ruling parties by suggesting God be referred to with the neutral article "das" instead of the masculine "der".

Family Minister Kristina Schroeder made the comments when asked in an interview with German weekly Die Zeit how she explained to her young daughter the use of the masculine form for God.

"The article is not important," she responded, adding that it was fine to use "das" instead of the traditional "der" when referring to God.

The remarks were immediately denounced by members of Schroeder's own Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and its Bavarian sister party, the Christian Social Union (CSU).

"This intellectualized nonsense leaves me speechless," Christine Haderthauer, Bavarian social minister, told top-selling daily Bild.

Stefan Mueller, a CSU lawmaker, said he was "bewildered" by Schroeder's "inappropriate" comments.

When pressed on the matter at a government news conference on Friday, Merkel's spokesman Steffen Seibert backed Schroeder.

"If you believe in God, the article is not important," he said. "If you speak to God in a different way, the prayers are still heard."

Reporting by Noah Barkin. Editing by Jeremy Gaunt.

© 2012 Thomson Reuters. All rights reserved.