**The Catholic hierarchy’s problem with sex — Part II**

**A debunked, ideological view of men and women**

**Le problème de la hiérarchie catholique avec le sexe, II**

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September 18, 2018

*This is the second in a three-part series exploring the Catholic hierarchy’s problem with sex.* **Part II** *compares the Church’s view of men and women with the way we used to think about race, and describes it as an ideology.*

*Cette deuxième partie met en perspective la vision ecclésiale de l’homme et de la femme et la manière de penser la notion de race, et montre qu’il s’agit d’une idéologie*

[**Part I**](https://international.la-croix.com/news/the-catholic-hierarchys-problem-with-sex-part-i/8423) of this series explored the Church’s outmoded understanding of the innate differences between men and women, embodied in the idea of the feminine genius. It turns out that this idea of innate sex differences is strikingly similar to how we used to think about race.

Nous avons vu dans le chapitre I que l’idée des différences innées entre homme et femme est étrangement semblable à celle que nous utilisons pour parler de race.

The traditional view of race held the following: there are a finite number of separate, natural races; there are clear, scientific ways to distinguish them; there is a fixed racial essence that each member of a race possesses; and race can predict individual behavior.

La vision traditionnelle de la race suppose qu’il y a un nombre fini de races, qu’il y a des caractères attachés à chacune d’entre elles et que chacun possède et que la race prédispose au comportement individuel.

It was also assumed at the time that separate and distinct races were a part of the fabric of God’s creation, and society was morally obligated to defend that separation.

Elle affirme que les races sont une marque de la création divine et que la société est moralement obligée de défendre cette séparation.

Marriage between the races was illegal, and ministers who presided at such ceremonies were often prosecuted. This idea of innate differences was pervasive until after World War II, and was discredited only after its embrace by Nazism to justify the superiority of the Aryan master race.

L’idée des différences innées n’a été abandonnée qu’après la seconde guerre mondiale le nazisme l’ayant utilisée pour justifier la supériorité de la race aryenne.

In the U.S., interracial marriage was only finally decriminalized in 1967 with the Supreme Court decision *Loving v. Virginia.*

The traditional view of race is now considered deplorable; the secular West, including the Church, no longer buys into it. Today we know that racial boundaries are fuzzy and that there is no absolute way to demarcate one race from another.

Cette vision traditionnelle est déplorable et est abandonnée par tous.

Even obvious characteristics such as skin tone fall on a continuum, with the line between races often drawn both arbitrarily and differently in various cultures.

Racial boundaries have shifted over time as well; the Irish in nineteenth century America were not considered “white,” as demonstrated by cartoons portraying Irishmen as monkeys.

We also know that there is no evidence of a fixed “racial essence” and no evidence that racial characteristics can predict individual behavior. Furthermore, the use of race as a reason to compel or exclude is thoroughly unacceptable.

Il n’y a pas d’évidence d’une quelconque « essence raciale » qui prédirait le comportement individuel. Exclure au nom de la race est ainsi inacceptable.

Yet if we flip out *race* in this traditional view and replace it with *sex,* what we get is something very close to the Church’s view of men and women.

Changeons le mot “race” et remplaçons le par “sexe” et nous obtiendrons quelque chose proche de la vision de l’Eglise.

This view holds that there are only two sexes; that there are clear ways to distinguish them; that there is a fixed “sexual essence” which each member of the sex possesses; and that sex predicts individual behavior.

In this view, humans are either men or women, and there is no possibility of fuzzy boundaries between the two. Biological sex creates a distinct “sexual essence.”

Elle affirme qu’il n’y a que deux sexes, qu’il sont aisément reconnaissables, qu’il y a une « nature sexuelle » fixe que chacun possède et que le sexe prédit le comportement. Il n’y a pas de limite floue entre eux, le sexe biologique crée la nature sexuelle.

Women, because they are women, have particular characteristics that men do not. They are the maternal ones; they are more nurturing, more sensitive and intuitive, and have other distinctive qualities that make them different from and complementary to men.

Sex both predicts and constrains individual behavior, and it’s fine to compel or exclude based on it. This view of men and women as innately different and complementary is a part of the fabric of creation and the foundation of the family, and must be defended, particularly against the onslaughts of the secular West.

Le sexe prédit et fixe le comportement, il est facile donc d’exclure à partir de lui. Le sexe, marque de fabrique de la création, fonde la famille et doit être défendu comme tel, contre l’occident laïque.

But what if, in this case, the secular West got it right and the Church got it wrong? It wouldn’t be the first time.

L’occident aurait-il raison et l’Eglise tort ?

The Church no longer condemns democracy, freedom of speech, freedom of religion, historical analysis, ecumenism, literary criticism of the Bible, or the study of the early Church Fathers, as it did in the early 1900s. The historical record is rich with teachings that have quietly (and rightly) been abandoned.

L’Eglise ne condamne pas la démocratie, la liberté de parole, la liberté de religion, l’analyse historique, l’œcuménisme, la critique littéraire de la Bible ou l’étude des premiers Pères comme elle le fit au début des années 1900.

What if, in fact, sexual boundaries are actually somewhat fuzzy, just like racial boundaries? What if sexual traits do fall on a continuum?

Mais que dire des limites entre sexes qui sont floues comme le sont les limites entre races ?

What if biology, genetics, and neuroscience now paint a much more complex picture of sexual boundaries, with individual humans sharing some bits of each sex? What if “sexual essence” may only be true in general?

Que dire alors que la biologie décrit une réalité bien plus complexe, chaque humain possédant des morceaux de chaque sexe ? Que dire si la nature sexuelle n’est vraie qu’en général ?

What if men and women are not always complementary, and what if sexual characteristics in fact do not predict individual behavior? What if receptivity, sensitivity, generosity, and maternity are admirable human qualities rather than exclusively feminine ones?

Que dire si homme et femme ne sont pas toujours complémentaires et si le sexe ne décrit pas exactement le comportement de chacun ? Que dire si la sensibilité, la générosité, l’ouverture aux autres et le sentiment de maternité sont d’admirables qualités humaines plutôt que des traits exclusivement féminins ?

Then the Petrine and Marian dimensions break down, and Church teachings on all things sexual, based on the idea of innate and complementary sex differences, including its teachings on homosexuality, the ordination of women and the like, are all seriously flawed.

Alors les enseignements pétriniens et mariaux sont sérieusement ébranlés.

Conservatives often criticize Catholic outreach to the gay community because it privileges pastoral concerns over Church teachings. This is a valid criticism; pastoral outreach should be in harmony with Church teachings.

But there are some very good reasons to think that the teachings themselves are the problem, not the pastoral outreach, and thus are in need of critical scrutiny and re-evaluation.

Besides its obvious similarity to a now-discredited view of race, Church teachings based on innate and complementary sex differences are problematic for other reasons.

A côté de son évidente proximité avec la vision raciale discréditée, l’enseignement de l’Eglise basé sur les caractères sexuels innés et complémentaires pose problème pour d’autres raisons.

**Ideology**

**Idéologie**

Disconnected from sex, the metaphors of the Marian and Petrine dimensions are a lovely and authentic articulation of the various ways in which the Church fulfills its mission in the world. They certainly work as poetry. But they fail as ideology.

Les images pétriniennes et mariales séparées de la notion de sexe restent une base solide de la manière dont l’Eglise accomplit sa mission dans le monde. En tant qu’image poétique cela fonctionne, en tant qu’idéologie cela ne fonctionne pas.

Pope Francis hates ideologies; he calls them brutal and detached, “divorced from the people themselves,” and disconnected from the lives people actually live. He says they “coerce reality to fit an idea, which turns people into instruments.”

He rails against those seeing everything “through the prism of their ideologies.” During an October 2013 sermon, Pope Francis made this point: “The faith passes, so to speak, through a distiller and becomes ideology. And ideology does not beckon [people].

François n’aime pas les idéologies. Il fulmine contre ceux qui voient tout qu’au travers de leurs idéologies.

In ideologies there is not Jesus: in his tenderness, his love, his meekness. And ideologies are rigid, always. Of every sign: rigid. And when a Christian becomes a disciple of the ideology, he has lost the faith: he is no longer a disciple of Jesus, he is a disciple of this attitude of thought.”

Jésus n’est pas un idéologue : il est aimant, humble et plein de tendresse ; les idéologies sont toujours rigides. Quand un chrétien devient idéologue, il perd la foi, il n’est plus un disciple de Jésus mais de un disciple de ses propres pensées.

This is exactly what happens when the Church teaches that men and women must be seen as innately distinct and complementary, and enforces that difference by blocking access to the sacraments (e.g., the Eucharist, marriage, ordination).

The ideology of innate and complementary sex differences refuses to recognize the obvious and overwhelming variation among individuals, and is disconnected from the circumstances in which so many members of the faithful live their lives.

C’est ce qui se passe quand l’Eglise, au nom de l’inné, ferme l’accès aux sacrements (eucharistie, mariage, ordination) et qu’elle ne reconnait pas les différences entre les individus, se refusant à regarder comment les fidèles vivent leurs vies.

It attempts to coerce our very messy reality into a rigid, abstract ideal, prescribing certain obligations and excluding others. And it punishes those individuals whose lives don’t match the characteristics it constructs, especially those on the fuzzy boundaries of sexuality.

Traditionally, the Catholic moral context for looking at any issue is always to start by looking at the concrete, lived experience of individual humans, not by looking at some abstraction.

As Pope Francis said in his homily to priests at the Chrism Mass before Easter, 2018, “Closeness is also the key to truth; not just the key to mercy, but the key to truth.

Can distances really be shortened where truth is concerned? Yes, they can. Because truth is not only the definition of situations and things from a certain distance, by abstract and logical reasoning.

It is more than that. Truth is also fidelity. It makes you name people with their real name, as the Lord names them, before categorizing them or defining ‘their situation’.”

As we shall see in [**Part III**](https://international.la-croix.com/news/the-catholic-hierarchys-problem-with-sex-part-iii/8426), Church teachings based on this view of men and women also contradict both Catholic social teaching and the Catholic intellectual tradition, and have not been received by the faithful.

Comme nous le verrons dans la troisième partie les enseignements de l’Eglise basés sur cette vision de l’homme et de la femme contredisent son propre enseignement social et sa tradition intellectuelle et ne sont pas acceptés par les fidèles.