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

**Church teachings based on an obsolete view of men and women contradict other longstanding moral teachings of the Church and have not been received by the faithful**

**Le problème de la hiérarchie catholique avec le sexe III**

**L’enseignement de l’Eglise basé sur une vision dépassée de l’homme et de la femme contredit d’autres de ses enseignements moraux et n’est pas accepté par les fidèles.**

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*This is the last in a three-part series exploring the Catholic hierarchy’s problem with sex. This part shows how Church teachings based on this view of men and women contradict other longstanding moral teachings of the Church, and have not been received by the faithful.*

[**Part I**](https://international.la-croix.com/news/the-catholic-hierarchys-problem-with-sex-part-i/8423) *looks at the Church’s outmoded understanding of the biological basis of sex itself, and what that means for beliefs about the differences between men and women.* [**Part II**](https://international.la-croix.com/news/the-catholic-hierarchys-problem-with-sex-part-ii/8425) *compares the Church’s view of men and women with the way we used to think about race, and describes it as an ideology.*

*Le premier chapitre a considéré la compréhension dépassée de la sexualité et ce qu’elle signifie des différences entre hommes et femmes ; le deuxième a mis en parallèle la vision de l’Eglise de l’homme et de la femme avec la pensée sur la race et a qualifié cette vision d’idéologie.*

The idea of innate and complementary sex differences not only fails as science and as ideology, teachings based on it contradict other longstanding moral teachings of the Church.

Catholic social teaching articulates the moral principles regarding individuals and the common good.

It puts the dignity of the human person at the center of a moral vision for society, teaches the intrinsic value of all human life, argues for the protection of human rights and the protection of the poor, defends the dignity of work and the rights of workers, and requires care for God’s creation.

La doctrine sociale de l’Eglise relie les principes moraux individuels au bien commun.

Elle met la dignité humaine au centre de la vision morale de la société, enseigne la valeur de la vie, protège les droits de l’homme, défend la dignité au travail et les droits des travailleurs et demande de prendre soin de la création.

It condemns utilitarianism, which would, for example, see a worker as a cog in a corporate profit-making machine rather than first and foremost as a human being.

It recognizes that meaning is distinct from purpose, and grants that the essential dignity of the human being rises above and beyond whatever practical use is served.

Elle affirme que la signification du travail est distincte de son objectif ce qui signifie que la dignité humaine est au-dessus et le dépasse.

Yet the ideology of innate and complementary sexual differences sees women first and foremost as bearers of children, instrumentalizing them and reducing them to their utilitarian purpose.

L’idéologie des différences sexuelles innées et complémentaires voit la femme comme d’abord « porteuse » d’enfants la réduisant donc à cet objectif.

In this view, purpose *is* meaning. It’s one thing to honor and respect a woman’s role in reproduction; it’s another thing to put it at the top of the moral hierarchy.

En ce sens l’objectif est le sens. C’est une chose de respecter le rôle de la femme dans la transmission de la vie, c’en est une autre de le positionner au sommet de la morale.

There is only one precept that belongs at the top of the moral hierarchy, and that is Christ’s primary command to love God and fellow creatures in charity.

Il n’y a qu’un sommet c’est le commandement du Christ d’aimer Dieu et son prochain.

The US Conference of Catholic Bishops website says that “We are one human family, whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences.” We would be wise to add sex (currently missing) to that list.

The ideology of innate and complementary sex differences not only contradicts Catholic social teaching, it is in conflict with the Catholic intellectual tradition, a framework we all share.

The Catholic intellectual tradition tells us that the world (including the secular West) is essentially good, because all creation is infused with the presence of the divine.

Cette idéologie est aussi en contradiction avec la tradition intellectuelle de l’Eglise qui affirme que le monde est par essence bon car Dieu est présent dans la création.

It also tells us that faith and reason should never contradict each other. The idea that faith and reason are coherent, that t*ruth cannot contradict truth* as Aquinas says, means that a truth discovered by reason cannot contradict a truth articulated by faith.

La tradition intellectuelle nous dit que foi et raison ne se contredisent pas. Qu’elles soient en cohérence signifie donc qu’une vérité découverte par la raison ne peut pas contredire une vérité articulée sur la foi.

If what we know through reason is true, it cannot contradict something we know through faith, if that is also true. And visa versa. Not only can reason be tested by an understanding of the world that flows from faith, faith can be tested by an understanding of the world that flows from reason.

Si ce que nous savons par la raison est vrai, ça ne peut contredire ce que nous savons par la foi et vice versa. La raison peut être confrontée à la compréhension du monde qui vient de la foi et la foi peut être confrontée à la compréhension du monde qui vient de la raison.

If faith and reason do contradict, then one or both are wrong, and that contradiction must be resolved, using the full scope of available evidence.

Si foi et raison se contredisent alors l’un ou l’autre est fausse et la contradiction doit être résolue par ce qui est connu d’évidence.

Just as it did with race, science is now finding that sexual boundaries are much more fuzzy than previously thought. We are only at the beginning of understanding biological sex, and there is already plenty of ambiguity. Like race, sex falls on a spectrum.

Les limites entre sexe sont plus floues qu’on ne l’imaginait, l’ambiguité les habite. Comme pour la race la vérité de la sexualité n’est pas ponctuelle mais « spectrale ».

Some people are born obviously male or female, yet carry the opposite sex’s chromosomes. The actions of genes and the effects of hormones on development also complicate the picture.

As Catholics, we are obligated by the Catholic intellectual tradition as well as common sense to pay heed to this; it is evidence that in good conscience cannot be ignored.

La tradition intellectuelle catholique, comme le bon sens, nous conduisent à tenir compte de cette nouvelle situation.

**Reception**

**Acceptation (de l’enseignement)**

The final reason why Church teachings on sex are in need of critical scrutiny is that they have not been received by the faithful; teachings on the ordination of women, birth control, cohabitation before marriage, homosexuality, divorce and remarriage, mandatory celibacy and the like are regularly ignored.

But what does it mean to receive a teaching, and what happens when teachings are not received?

L’enseignement de la sexualité par l’Eglise n’est pas accepté. Qu’est-ce que recevoir un enseignement et qu’est-ce qui se passe quand il n’est pas accepté ?

The classic book on the subject is *Receiving the Council: Theological and Canonical Insights and Debates* by the Jesuit canon lawyer Father Ladislas Orsy*.* He describes reception as the role the faithful play in receiving what authority has to say because they think it is credible and trustworthy.

For him, “The receivers are the people of God: grace-filled, intelligent, and free persons.” The point of laws laid down by authority is the acquiring of the intended *values* the laws promote through the process of reception.

He describes it as a dynamic process driven by the “desire implanted by the Creator into the human heart to seek the good.”

How? First, the faithful take cognizance of the law. Then comes the quest for understanding — what is the value that the law intends to promote? Then, the law meets the conscience of the receiver.

There, he says, “a sovereign judgment will have to be made over the law, a judgment for which the person is responsible to his or her Maker and to no one else....The gist of this doctrine is the affirmation of the primacy of conscience over the law: no Christian must hold otherwise.”

Next, “He or she is willing to act, that is, to reach out for the value that the law wants. This is, before and above all, an *obsequium* to God, ‘honoring God,’ and only secondarily an act of obedience to the law.”

Finally, the receiver acts accordingly, and this is “the implementation of the law in the world of concrete, particular, and personal events.”

Dans un ouvrage classique sur le sujet (Recevoir le Concile) Ladislas Orsy, sj, décrit la place du fidèle - intelligent, rempli de la grâce et libre - dans le processus dynamique de réception de l’enseignement car Dieu a mis dans le cœur de l’homme le besoin de recherche de la vérité.

D’abord par la recherche de la compréhension de l’enseignement, alors il peut rencontrer la conscience du fidèle.

Ensuite le jugement personnel peut advenir, jugement dont la personne est responsable devant le Créateur, personne d’autre. La conscience dépasse la loi. Alors il peut être possible d’agir en dehors de la loi.

Celui qui reçoit l’enseignement se comporte alors pour que la loi s’intègre dans le monde concret de la vie de chacun.

What does good reception look like? Father Orsy says, “When, on the wake of the reception, joy and gladness abound, the concentration on faith, hope, and love increases, and the sense of unity is strengthened, then the law is doing good service to the community.

La loi peut ainsi se mettre au service de la communauté.

For good people to have wise laws is a liberating experience.” And what does poor reception look like? “Contrariwise, if a law brings sadness and sorrow, distraction from the exhilarating experience of God’s presence, and undue preoccupation with temporal structures and institutions, it is time to question the law.”

C’est une expérience de libération. A l’opposé la loi apporte tristesse et peine, éloignement de la présence de Dieu et il est temps de s’interroger sur la pertinence de la loi.

For the past 50 years, the Church has been the poster child for the poor reception of its teachings on sexuality, all of which, it should be noted, were never discussed during Vatican II.

Pope Paul VI removed the questions of celibacy and birth control from the Council agenda altogether, and the question of women’s place in the Church and in particular the ordination of women never even made it on to the agenda. Likewise homosexuality.

Poor reception indeed. The faithful have studiously ignored the ban on birth control. They have suffered through the priest shortage, driven by the refusal to ordain women and married men.

L’enseignement de l’Eglise sur la sexualité (qui n’a jamais été débattue au Concile) est ainsi mal reçu.

They have watched parishes close, and seen the practice of faith and its evangelization compromised.

Les fidèles voient les églises se vider, la foi s’appauvrir et l’évangélisation être compromise.

An entire generation of young people have been set spiritually adrift after leaving the Church because of the injustices they see in its condemnation of homosexual acts, its stand against gay marriage, and its exclusion of so many individuals and families from the Eucharist and other sacraments because they have landed on the fuzzy boundaries of sexuality.

When it comes to sex, the pope and the bishops have botched the job. It is time to question the law. It is time for the faithful, theologians, and the clergy to take back the conversation and hold up all current teachings regarding sex to the full light of day.

Le pape et les évêques ont mal fait leur boulot ; il est temps de questionner la loi.

This starts with a comprehensive reckoning of the damage done by such teachings, and proceeds with open and honest discussion, informed by scientific evidence and the full Catholic moral tradition, with no smackdowns, no doors closed, and nothing off the table.

Then we can have the debate skipped at Vatican II, finally and fully, until Church teachings on all things sexual are no longer outmoded, no longer ideological in nature, no longer in conflict with other longstanding Catholic moral teachings, and actually received by the faithful.

Il faut mettre en place les débats qui ont été évacués de Vatican II