

“For all the ‘John Paul II Catholics’ who have found the pontificate of Pope Francis to be trying times, here is a carefully reasoned and deeply pious invitation to see Francis differently. It should be welcomed by all who do not like the idea of trying to be more Catholic than the Pope. Jeremiah Barker does us a great service in this book, which will stand as one of the most insightful assessments of Francis’s theology.”

—**PHILLIP CARY,**

editor, *Pro Ecclesia: A Journal of Catholic and Evangelical Theology*

“In a deeply polarized age where convinced positions tend to harden rather than listen, this *Song of Three Popes* is listening to the notes, augmenting the harmonies, and monitoring the dynamics of the melody, inviting Roman Catholics who uphold orthodoxy to do so with open ears. Catholic social teaching is well worth rescuing from the politics of the culture wars. This proposal offers a sound alternative.”

—**ELLEN CHARRY,**

emerita professor of theology, Princeton Theological Seminary

“Through the distorting lens of American politics, Pope Francis is often cast as an opponent to his predecessors, rather than their faithful heir. Jeremiah Barker’s rich and insightful book shows this to be a profound misreading. Compellingly written and theologically profound, *Cosmic Chastity* beckons us away from the siren call of technocratic consumerism to hearken to a different melody: the song of creation-as-gift, one sung by Francis, Benedict XVI, and John Paul II in seamless harmony.”

—**ABIGAIL FAVALE,**

professor, McGrath Institute for Church Life, University of Notre Dame

“For many, Pope Francis is an enigma. But in the spirit of Ignatius of Loyola, Jeremiah Barker reminds us that charity would rather discover a good interpretation than condemn, and that the hermeneutics of continuity is a guide to reading well. That sort of charity is commendable, and Barker’s readers will be well-served to read along with him.”

—**R. J. SNELL,**

editor-in-chief, *The Public Discourse*

“It’s safe to say Catholics in North America have had a complicated relationship with the papacy of Pope Francis. In this book, Jeremiah Barker resurrects some of the under-appreciated aspects of Pope Francis’ theology and witness. By highlighting the commonalities between Pope Francis and his predecessors, Barker offers a vision of stewardship, justice, and chastity that should challenge and compel Catholics across the ideological aisle.”

—**PATRICK T. BROWN,**

fellow, Ethics and Public Policy Center

“The pope is the vicar of Christ. Faithful Catholics receive the pope’s magisterial teaching in a spirit of acceptance and docility. However, too many Catholics regard the pope as just another political figure of the right or the left, whose teaching is judged from one’s perspective in the culture wars. Jeremiah Barker presents the teaching of Pope Francis as authentic Catholic doctrine, completely consistent with the teaching of Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI. A masterful and necessary book!”

—**THOMAS BETZ, OFM CAP,**

pastor, Saint John the Evangelist Catholic Church, Center City Philadelphia

“Jeremiah Barker persuasively shows the consistency of Pope Francis’s theological and anthropological approach—especially to ecology and marriage—with that of his two predecessors. Barker does this with an authoritative but open reading of both familiar and less well-known texts from the three popes. Perhaps even more impressive is Barker’s own description of the pontifical understanding of the great modern conflict between what he evocatively calls ‘cosmic chastity’ and ‘technocratic lust.’”

—**EDWARD HADAS,**

author of *Counsels of Imperfection: Thinking Through Catholic Social Teaching*

“Jeremiah Barker preaches an all-too-rare message: the fullness of the gospel, with all the sharpness of its challenge to our contemporary way of life. For those weary of the constant attempts to assimilate Church teaching to one agenda or another, Barker’s book and the deep faith at its roots is just the remedy.”

—**ZENA HITZ,**

author of *Lost in Thought: The Hidden Pleasures of an Intellectual Life*

Cosmic Chastity in an Age
of Technocratic Lust
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The Legacy of John Paul II and Benedict XVI
in the Francis Papacy: The Theological, Ethical,
and Spiritual Heart of Their Social Message

JEREMIAH BARKER



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A SONG OF THREE POPES
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For my Madonna House family and our guests.

For Ma, Da, Jonny, Carrie, Clara, Felicity, Aminata, Rafe, and River.

For St. Joseph of Nazareth.

For Sts. Joachim and Anne
and the Apocalypse between them.

We ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by men and hating one another; but when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us . . .

—TITUS 3:3–5A RSV

Ours is a tragic century where men are faced with tremendous decisions that shake the souls of the strongest. This is also the age of neuroses, of anxiety, of fears, of psychotherapy, tranquilizers, euphorants—all symbols of man's desire to escape from reality, responsibility and decision-making. This is the age of idol-worship of status, wealth and power. These idols dominate the landscape like idols of old: they are squatty and fat. The First Commandment once again lies broken in the dust. The clouds of war, dark and foreboding—an incredible war of annihilation and utter destruction—come nearer. Dirge-like symphonies surround us and will not let us be.

What is the answer to all these darkneses that press so heavily on us? What are the answers to all these fears that make darkness at noon? What is the answer to the loneliness of men without God? What is the answer to the hatred of man toward God?

—CATHERINE DOHERTY, *POUSTINIA*

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Preface

To My Fellow “JP2 Catholics”

“WHEN YOU WANT TO get to know a sports car, you’ve got to get inside it, and drive it fast.” This is what R. R. Reno, editor of *First Things*, said to a group of Catholic students who were just beginning their studies at Princeton in the fall of 2012. Reno was using the image of “getting to know a sports car” to illustrate what it means to think critically from within a tradition, as opposed to maintaining an allegedly “neutral” and “academic” distance from the truth claims of an inherited tradition. Only by way of tradition are we equipped with a grammar to think critically about our own tradition and other traditions, Reno was proposing. If you want to think critically about your own tradition, Reno was saying, don’t stand away from it at a “safe,” “objective” distance, as though that’ll enable you to think more critically about it. No, get inside of it, and “drive it fast.”

After the talk, I made a point of speaking with Reno, whom I had already been following as an eager disciple for several years. I told him about my long-standing existential struggle concerning whether to turn “Romeward.” I had just enrolled as an MDiv student at Princeton Theological Seminary, largely on the basis of what Reno had written in the pages of *First Things* about its place in the pantheon of theological “Schools of Thought.” Reno had proposed that Princeton Seminary was the best place to study Protestant dogmatics,¹ and so I went in order to deal with the question of whether to embrace Protestantism or become Catholic. After an engaging chat, the conversation came to a natural close, we exchanged farewells, and I turned for the door. “Jeremiah,” Reno called to me as I was just about to step out onto the porch, facing Mercer

1. Reno, “Schools of Thought,” para. 28.

Street. I turned to look back at him. “Don’t stay in the antechambers of the Church for too long.”

When the First Sunday of Lent came around that spring, I underwent my “first scrutinies” as a part of the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA) program in Princeton University’s Catholic chaplaincy. The next morning, as I was eating waffles with my friend Vevian Zaki in the seminary cafeteria, she looked down at her iPhone and said to me with alarm, “The pope is resigning!” I didn’t believe her. Vevian knew how much I loved Benedict.

That Lent was the Lent between two popes, the Lent of my scrutinies, the Lent of farewell to a beloved proclaimer of the gospel at the helm of Peter’s bark. It was likewise the Lent in which the next pope—Francis—won my heart, and there he struck a symphonic chord. From everything I saw and heard, Francis was rocking it as pope, meeting the needs of a besieged global flock.

By the first autumn of his papacy, Francis was already ruffling some feathers among many of my fellow Catholics involved with Princeton’s Catholic chaplaincy, where I had begun serving as coordinator for the “Grad Fellowship” group. While many of my fellow Catholics committed to orthodoxy perceived dissonance in the Francis message, I was hearing something very different, something that came to my ears as music, music in deep harmony with the song I had already learned to love, the song JP2 and Benedict had long been singing.

During Benedict’s papacy, his first volume of *Jesus of Nazareth* captured my imagination, and has since maintained its claim upon my heart. The text is dear to me, as it presented anew to my searching soul the figure of the protagonist of the four Gospels. One of the sections of that volume that continually comes to mind is the chapter in which Cardinal Ratzinger—elected as Successor to Peter in the midst of drafting that very volume—enters into conversation with Rabbi Jacob Neusner,² author of *A Rabbi Talks with Jesus*. In Neusner’s book, the rabbi enters into a dialogue with Jesus of Nazareth as he is presented in Matthew’s Gospel.³ In his own book, Pope Benedict in turn joins Rabbi Neusner and Jesus, among the crowds at a mount in Galilee, where Jesus delivers an extensive sermon, popularly known as the Sermon on the Mount. Following

2. Benedict, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 103–22.

3. See Neusner, *Rabbi Talks with Jesus*, 7–11.

the sermon, as Neusner and Jesus make their way down the dusty roads of Palestine toward Jerusalem, the theologian in the shoes of the fisherman—Benedict XVI—comes alongside Jesus and Neusner, joining in on their conversation. Neusner, for his part, expresses his admiration and astonishment at the words of the new teacher from Nazareth.⁴ Yet, he concludes at the end that he cannot follow this compelling rabbi, for his teachings are, he says, a departure from the faith of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob, Leah, and Rachel. Ratzinger and Neusner cordially, but decisively, part company: Neusner, on a path more faithful—he firmly believes—to the teachings of Moses, and Ratzinger, for his part, in company with Jesus. Precisely in this following of the rabbi from Galilee, Benedict believes he is following the one whose teaching fulfills the law of Moses and that in this following he is incorporated—as a gentile—into the very family of Abraham.

This conversation between the professor-pope and the professor-rabbi—each in conversation with the carpenter-rabbi—in the pages of *Jesus of Nazareth*, has since served as a model for me. Neusner and Benedict each take seriously the claims of their counterparts, seriously enough to recognize what is distinctive in their respective claims. This is anything but a dialogue built upon the cordiality of relativism. The cordiality is rooted in the mutual desire for truth. My professor Phillip Cary exhorted his students to appropriate postmodern “hospitality” in this very way. That is, we must be hospitable enough to really welcome and orient our conversation partner to our own turf, our own home, with its own distinctive sets of claims, axioms, judgments, and proposals. I hope that in the following pages, I can make a contribution to this style of conversation—a style of engaging in vibrant dialogue with mutual respect rooted in conviction.

In the pages of *Commonweal* magazine, Massimo Faggioli has characterized American Catholicism as the global center of opposition to Pope Francis, and characterized *First Things* as the main intellectual organ of that opposition.⁵ This volume is a response to the *First Things* editor-in-chief, Dr. Reno, whom I’m conceiving of as this book’s primary conversation partner. It’s a student’s first response to the professor in a classroom discussion, as it were. And in his response to the teacher’s lectures, this

4. Benedict, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 114; Neusner, *Rabbi Talks with Jesus*, 155–61.

5. Faggioli, “Whose Rome?,” para. 1.

student zeroes in on what he's identifying as the theological, ethical, and spiritual core of the social message of Francis and the two previous popes. The topic of conversation is the legacy of JP2 and Benedict in the Francis papacy. I call that legacy by a single name—*cosmic chastity*, the meaning of which we'll be exploring throughout the rest of this book.

To get a sense of what I'm after, imagine, if you will, that Reno is teaching a class on "The Church and Society Today." Let's say that a number of Reno's lectures for the class include commentary on Pope Francis in relation to current societal trends and in relation to the teaching of the two previous popes. Imagine that I'm one of Professor Reno's students in the back row, a student who to a great extent is a disciple of Reno the theologian. I conceive of this book as a friendly conversation in which I seek to bring to the attention of those listening in on my rebuttal to Dr. Reno a vision of *Catholic social teaching as an integral whole*, rooted as it is in the Church's theological tradition, in direct opposition to what I'm calling *technocracy's regime of lust*. The vision of Catholic social teaching of which I speak is one with a rich theological inheritance. It has been advocated by JP2, Benedict, and Francis together, each of whom draw upon the heritage of that teaching going back to Leo XIII and beyond into the Church's past—a past of long-standing resistance to lust's tyranny.

What initially won this student over to Reno—what compelled him to follow his lead in thinking theologically and in interpreting the signs of the times—was Reno's compelling way of reading the Bible. Reno's eager back-row student has hung on to every word of Reno's series preface to the *Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible*, as though it were his own personal mandate. Over and against the modern "consensus that classical Christian doctrine distorts interpretive understanding,"⁶ Reno proposed that doctrine is, in truth, "a clarifying agent, an enduring tradition of theological judgments that amplifies the living voice of scripture."⁷ In opposition to the view that "a noncommitted" reading of Scripture is "the way toward objectivity," Reno boldly observed that "an interpretation unprejudiced" simply invites "the languid intellectual apathy that stands aside to make room for the false truisms and easy answers of the age."⁸

Reno is a representative spokesperson for a vibrant, socially engaged Catholicism that roots itself in orthodoxy. With him I see many

6. Reno, series preface to the *Brazos Theological Commentary*, 11.

7. Reno, series preface to the *Brazos Theological Commentary*, 11.

8. Reno, series preface to the *Brazos Theological Commentary*, 11.

conversation partners whom I seek to engage here through my dialogue with him: Raymond de Souza, Ross Douthat, Douglas Farrow, Matthew Schmitz, George Weigel, and Julia Yost among them, each prominent contributors to the intellectual-social formation of North America's core faithful, and each of whom have found themselves in a position to resist forces of liberalization, secularization, and relativism within and outside the Church in what many call the "culture wars." Each of these theologically informed North American Catholic social commentators are a delight to read and to listen to, each in their own distinctive ways. Among these conversation partners, Reno has been the most formative for me, and is therefore the one I have to reckon with the most in my own heart, in discerning a way of moving as a Catholic in the public square today.

My own steps have taken a distinctive turn away from Reno, particularly with respect to a hermeneutics of the Francis message. Whereas Francis is dismissed by Reno as having entered into a peace pact with the liberal elite, he models for me a way of moving boldly as a Catholic in the public square today. Reno's reading of Francis is a reading I regard as false and misdirected. I've become convinced that Francis's lead takes us in the right direction. But that direction is something that Reno hasn't managed to perceive in his reading of Francis. What Francis actually directs us toward is what I seek to explicate in this book. And I'm convinced that we can clearly perceive what Francis is pointing the way toward if we give him a fair and more thorough hearing on his own hermeneutical playing field; or, to switch metaphors, if we give him a more thorough hearing in what I refer to in this book as the *amphitheater of Catholic social teaching* in which Francis sings his song, according to the acoustical structure of that body of the Church's theological teaching to which Francis submits and to which he consistently appeals.

What I put forward in these pages is an introductory presentation of the theology and accompanying ethos and spirituality of cosmic chastity that grounds the body of the Church's social doctrine as it is presented by Francis and the two previous popes. With respect to interpreting the Francis message, this book offers an alternative hermeneutic to the one exemplified by much of Reno's commentary on Francis in the pages of *First Things*. By way of presenting *cosmic chastity* as the singular social message of the JP2, Benedict, and Francis papacies, I place Francis's thinking in close association with that of the two previous popes. This book, then, doesn't primarily argue for a hermeneutic of continuity; it executes and exemplifies a hermeneutic of continuity.

With respect to how to read the signs of the times, this student in the back row of Reno's classroom is fundamentally a disciple of JP2 and Benedict, two of *the* great heralds of the Catholic faith in his lifetime and in the lifetime of his fellow classmates of committed millennial Catholics. The student writing this volume looks to JP2 and B16 as heralds of Catholic orthodoxy, heralds of the glad tidings of Jesus Christ in the contemporary world, as the Moses and Elijah of Catholic social teaching as it pertains to the present moment. These two figures—this student believes—show the way of moving as a Catholic in the public square. The pressing concern of Vatican II—that of the Church's mission in the modern world—was the concern that animated the missionally driven hearts of these two ecclesial giants when they served as young theological advisors at the council, and throughout their subsequent scholarly and pastoral careers. In a decades-long fraternal collaboration, these two dogmatically rooted Vatican II rock stars forged the way for a New Evangelization and lit the fire of a culture of life in the dark night of a culture of death. As collaborative shepherd-intellectuals and formators of a new generation of the core faithful, they were keenly on guard against the ideological wolves that threatened their ecclesial flock, ever prone as this flock was to wander straight into an ideological den of beasts.

My fellow committed Catholic "classmates" and I are largely formed by JP2's robust Marian spirituality, his zeal for evangelization, and his vision of sexual chastity in an age of endemic and systematically fed sexual lust. We are likewise very much children of Benedict's christocentricity, his love for the liturgy, and his commitment to the Word of God. We are especially formed by JP2's and B16's outspoken commitment to orthodoxy and moral truth in a relativistic age. And Francis, according to my portrayal of him in this book, follows very closely in their footsteps. What impresses this back-row student about JP2 and B16 is very much what impresses him about Francis.

By way of this text, I seek to explain what I'm hearing in the message of Francis and the two previous popes. As many faithful North American Catholics look to JP2 and Benedict as allies in their struggles for social and political influence, and as this book presents JP2 and Benedict as allies of Francis's social concerns, the theological rationale of JP2's and Benedict's social teaching will serve—in this text—a mediating function between *Francis* on the one hand and faithful *conservative North American Catholics* on the other. Both Francis and the core faithful of his flock in North America claim an alliance with JP2 and Benedict, but the

relationship between Francis and a significant portion of the core faithful is characterized by tension. Many faithful Catholics perceive Francis as possessing what seem to be undeniable and obvious weaknesses—not just his alleged propensity for doctrinal sloppiness (remarks on airplanes, the “infamous” *AL* footnote, his nonresponse to the *dubia*) but also some of his purportedly preposterous appointments and fellow travelers (e.g., Cardinal Paglia and the JP2 Institute). Though this book is not itself polemical in character, as it does not set out to directly dismantle every suspicion of Francis one by one and explain his every move, it does offer a reckoning with these apparent weaknesses on Francis’s part, and it does so by presenting the theological, ethical, and spiritual heart of the Francis message, in the light of which his words and actions can be thoroughly comprehended and in a way that I think can awaken an enthusiasm and support for Francis on the part of those zealously concerned for the preservation and promulgation of the orthodox faith today. Once we can see Francis in the same theological, ethical, and spiritual space as JP2 and Benedict, it will be easier, I suggest, to see him in relation to the concerns that animate the faithful Catholics who are concerned that Francis is a threat to orthodoxy. My hope is that any JP2 Catholics reading this book can walk away from the text with a sense that the heart of the Francis message is something that they can get behind, something that calls for a serious and much-needed societal conversion. Indeed, it’s my hope that readers will find in Francis, by way of this text, an enlightening guide through the confusing and tumultuous landscape of our day, as I have found him to be in my own life as a millennial Catholic who considers himself a child of JP2 and Benedict.

I would like to identify at the outset an aspect of the papal trio’s social teaching that runs as a red thread throughout this volume’s theological, ethical, and spiritual meditation on the singular message of the three popes, particularly as it manifests itself in the message of Francis. This book harps strongly upon cosmic chastity’s demand upon the human heart to make a definitive gift-of-self according to a theology of creation-as-gift, in direct opposition to the lustful urgings of our consumeristic, relativistic, and technocratic society. That is to say, this book harps upon cosmic chastity’s vision of sexuality, marriage, family, and vocational commitment as part of a larger logic of integral ecology according to a theology of creation-as-gift in thorough opposition to relativism, technocracy, and consumerism. An integral vision of sexuality, marriage, family, and vocation as part of a larger logic of integral ecology is a vision

that interprets human sexuality as fundamentally about *making a definitive gift-of-self*. Human sexuality is conceived of in this book as itself a revelation of creation's built-in demand upon the human heart that we do everything in our power to find a way of making a gift of ourselves. Hence, *the demand* (that we strive to make a gift of ourselves) and *the icon of that demand* (human sexuality, expressed primarily in marriage and family as well as in vocational commitment in consecrated life and holy orders) stand in opposition to the same evil triplets which in turn conspire *against* chastity and *for* lust, namely, relativism, technocracy, and consumerism.

According to this book's hermeneutic, Francis's *LS* is read as a companion encyclical to Benedict's *CV*. Both sound an insistent indictment upon business as usual in a culture that finds itself in the clutches of the market's rationale of use and abuse of the world's people and things. The singular *CV-LS* social platform of Benedict and Francis in the JP2 tradition of social thought calls for serious social change—change that many people today, conservatives and progressives alike, intuitively know we need. There is an intuitive sense among many millennials and Gen Zers that there is a serious problem with business as usual in the global market. That is to say, there is a widespread conviction in society today that there is a serious problem with how we manage (or mismanage) our household as a society, in how we manage (or mismanage) our common home.

For the papal trio and the radical left, our household mismanagement is largely a matter of ecology and economics. And for the papal trio, our economic and ecological crisis of household mismanagement is deeply related to our society-wide misunderstanding of the micro-household, and particularly, our misunderstanding of the bedroom, of the marriage bed, of family, of sexuality, of our bodies in relation to other bodies, as well as our misunderstanding of the integral relation between the sacred matter of the body and the marriage bed on the one hand and, on the other hand, household management as a whole—on micro and macro levels. The very concern which unites the papal trio's concern with the fundamental concern of the radical left—the shared papal and leftist objection to the neoliberal logic of the market and the shared papal and leftist concern for the environmental crisis—is for the papal trio deeply connected with a false understanding of sexuality, which has duped much of the political left, and which, I dare say, has duped much of the political right, as well. The ecological crisis, the economic crisis, and the crisis in

sexuality is, for the papal trio, a singular crisis in failing to perceive the implications of the Christian doctrine of creation-as-gift.

The problem with business as usual in the liberal market, which is a problem with our societal practices of household mismanagement, is fundamentally about our need for the virtue of chastity over and against the vice of lust. And in using the terms “chastity” and “lust,” I mean to apply them in the broadest sense, with meaning inclusive of but not restricted to their explicitly sexual aspects. The problem with business as usual, I suggest, is that it lacks the criteria of love rooted in truth, a love which is inherently chaste—which is what Benedict called for in *CV*, and what Francis has consistently called for after him. The problem with business as usual in society today is that it is governed by the technocratic paradigm, which in turn is harnessed to feed the lusts of our hearts. The technocratic paradigm feeds into our disordered desires, and further deforms our hearts, furthering the disorder of our already-disordered impulses. And the prophetic outcry of the Francis papacy, in deep continuity with the message of the two popes before him, is fundamentally an outcry against this paradigm with the lusts that it feeds upon and which it feeds.

In much of popular discourse today, the distinction that is thought to be of import is the distinction between liberal and conservative. And by way of popular (mis)perceptions, we drag our discussions about what the popes have to say into the superficial spats of the culture wars that divide social perspectives into these two categories. I propose *another divide, one that I think is more fundamental, more important, and more relevant to a Catholic worldview*, namely, the divide between the rationale of technocratic lust on the one hand, and the rationale of cosmic chastity on the other. With respect to this divide, Francis stands securely alongside the two previous popes, singing a prophetic song of truth, justice, love, and peace, a song that shall ultimately prevail—eschatologically speaking—over the dissonant clamor of technocracy and lust.

Jeremiah Barker

Combermere, Ontario

Solemnity of St. Joseph, Husband of Mary, 2023

Tenth Anniversary of the Beginning of the Francis Pontificate

Acknowledgments

THOSE WHO HAVE SHARED a home with me, in work and recreation, have given me a glimpse of what it is to love chastely. This began with the faith and the love for the Church I received from my parents. It likewise began with my older brother Jonathan, apart from whom everything about me and this book is inexplicable. This book is a fruit of an extensive, vibrant conversation we've been having our whole lives, and which became a conversation with our brothers in spirit Adam Beach and Joshua Lore. Austen Detweiler likewise became a key part of this conversation in the early years of Francis's papacy. This conversation's development owes a great deal to the integrated sexual ethic that Phillip Cary, Christopher C. Roberts, and R. J. Snell were passing on to their eager searching students at Eastern University and Villanova.

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9. Col 3:3.

Abbreviations

- AL* *Amoris laetitia*. Pope Francis. Apostolic exhortation. The Vatican, March 19, 2016. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia.html.
- CA* *Centesimus annus*. Pope John Paul II. Encyclical letter. The Vatican, May 1, 1991. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_01051991_centesimus-annus.html.
- “CM” “Colombo to Manila.” Pope Francis, interviewed by Jerry O’Connell. “Press Conference of His Holiness Pope Francis Onboard the Flight from Colombo to Manila.” The Vatican, January 15, 2015. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/january/documents/papa-francesco_20150115_srilanka-filippine-incontro-giornalisti.html.
- “CR” “Czech Republic.” Pope Francis. “Address of Pope Francis to the Bishops of the Episcopal Conference of the Czech Republic on their ‘*Ad Limina*’ Visit.” The Vatican, February 14, 2014. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/february/documents/papa-francesco_20140214_ad-limina-rep-ceca.html.
- CV* *Caritas in veritate*. Pope Benedict XVI. Encyclical letter. The Vatican, June 29, 2009. https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html.
- EG* *Evangelii gaudium*. Pope Francis. Apostolic exhortation. The Vatican, November 24, 2013. <https://www.vatican>.

- va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html.
- EV* *Evangelium vitae*. Pope John Paul II. Encyclical letter. The Vatican, March 25, 1995. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae.html.
- FC* *Familiaris consortio*. Pope John Paul II. Apostolic exhortation. The Vatican, November 22, 1981. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio.html.
- “FMW” “A Future More Worthy of the Human Person.” General audience. January 24, 2001. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/audiences/2001/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_20010124.html.
- FT* *Fratelli tutti*. Pope Francis. Encyclical letter. The Vatican, October 3, 2020. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html.
- HV* *Humanae vitae*. Pope Paul VI. Encyclical letter. The Vatican, July 25, 1968. https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_25071968_humanae-vitae.html.
- LE* *Laborem exercens*. Pope John Paul II. Encyclical letter. The Vatican, September 14, 1981. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091981_laborem-exercens.html.
- “L&E” “Latvia and Estonia.” Pope Francis. “Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Bishops of the Episcopal Conference of Latvia and Estonia on their ‘*Ad Limina*’ Visit.” The Vatican, June 11, 2015. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/june/documents/papa-francesco_20150611_adlimina-lettonia-estonia.html.
- LR1* *Love and Responsibility*. Karol Wojtyła. Translated by Grzegorz Ignatik. Boston: Pauline, 2013.

- LR2* *Love and Responsibility*. Karol Wojtyła. Translated by H. T. Willetts. San Francisco: Ignatius, 1993.
- LS* *Laudato si'*. Pope Francis. Encyclical letter. The Vatican, May 24, 2015. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.
- LUD* *Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future*. Pope Francis. In conversation with Austen Ivereigh. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2020.
- "M&F1" "Male and Female, Catechesis I." Pope Francis. "The Family: Male and Female (I)." General audience. The Vatican, April 15, 2015. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2015/documents/papa-francesco_20150415_udienza-generale.html.
- "M&F2" "Male and Female, Catechesis II." Pope Francis. "The Family: Male and Female (II)." General audience. The Vatican, April 22, 2015. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2015/documents/papa-francesco_20150422_udienza-generale.html.
- MW* *Man and Woman*. Pope John Paul II. *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*. Translated by Michael Waldstein. Boston: Pauline, 2006.
- OA* *Octogesima adveniens*. Pope Paul VI. Apostolic letter. The Vatican, May 14, 1971. https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_letters/documents/hf_p-vi_apl_19710514_octogesima-adveniens.html.
- PC* *Patris corde*. Pope Francis. Apostolic letter. The Vatican, December 8, 2020. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_letters/documents/papa-francesco-lettera-ap_20201208_patris-corde.html.
- PP* *Populorum progressio*. Pope Paul VI. Encyclical letter. The Vatican, March 26, 1967. https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_26031967_populorum.html.

- RH *Redemptoris hominis*. Pope John Paul II. Encyclical letter. The Vatican, March 4, 1979. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_04031979_redemptor-hominis.html.
- RN *Rerum novarum*. Pope Leo XIII. Encyclical letter. The Vatican, May 15, 1891. https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum.html.
- RSV Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition, copyrighted 1965 and 1966 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. *The Navarre Bible: New Testament, Compact Edition*, Scepter: Princeton, 2001.
- SC *Sign of Contradiction*. Pope John Paul. New York: Seabury, 1979.
- SRS *Sollicitudo rei socialis*. Pope John Paul II. Encyclical letter. The Vatican, December 30, 1987. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30121987_sollicitudo-rei-socialis.html.
- SS *Spe salvi*. Pope Benedict XVI. Encyclical letter. The Vatican, November 30, 2007. https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20071130_spe-salvi.html.
- TOB *Theology of the Body*. Pope John Paul II. *The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan*. Reprinted translations of *L'Osservatore Romano*. Boston: Pauline, 1997.
- VS *Veritatis splendor*. Pope John Paul II. Encyclical letter. The Vatican, August 6, 1993. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_06081993_veritatis-splendor.html.
- “WMF” “World Meeting of Families.” Pope Francis. “Meeting with Bishops Taking Part in the World Meeting of Families, Philadelphia.” The Vatican, September 27, 2015. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/september/documents/papa-francesco_20150927_usa-vescovi-festa-famiglie.html.

INTRODUCTION

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Introducing Cosmic Chastity

*Why Interpreting the Popes from within the Culture Wars
Doesn't Work, and an Alternative Hermeneutic That Does*

THE PROBLEM WITH PAPAL HERMENEUTICS in North America today is that we easily fall into the trap of reading the popes as if they're players in a game they're not actually playing. Or, to return to the metaphor of music: Reno, as a papal music critic representative of many a faithful Catholic, thinks that Francis is singing from a dated 1970s hymnbook.¹ I am proposing an alternative reading of the Francis soundtrack. Francis is singing, I am convinced, from the perennial prophetic hymnbook of Catholic social teaching. The song of Francis's papal message, which has a particular resonance in this progressive millennial moment, is structured by the philosophical and dogmatic pattern of the social teaching of JP2 and Benedict, and has no resemblance to the shallow moral relativism

1. In 2013, Reno was still presenting Francis as merely *perceived* by *National Catholic Reporter* and *Huffington Post* as singing from their hymnal. See Reno, "How to Limit Government," sec. "Popes and Interviews," paras. 9–13. By the time of "Crisis of Solidarity" (November 2015), "Francis's Improv Theology" (June 2016), para. 10, "A Militant Church" (July 2017), "Building Bridges," (November 2017), "Failing Papacy" (February 2019), and "Francis Stands Firm" (February 2020), Reno has become more direct in characterizing Francis as a cliché-laden ally of the liberal elite. Reno's reflection on Francis's alleged defense of "Bourgeois Religion" in December 2017 is particularly biting. If there's one article in response to which I seek to offer an alternative hermeneutic of the Francis message, it's this one (Reno, "Liberal Tradition, Yes; Ideology, No," sec. "Bourgeois Religion," paras. 6–8).

of old liberal Catholics who get a kick out of distributing condoms and celebrating mass around a coffee table with pita bread and wine in a mug.

Whereas the words of JP2 and Benedict were regularly mined for ammunition on the part of the right against the left, Francis leaves very little ammo for the right, providing arms, it seems, for the right's most rabid opponents. Indeed, from the perspective of those most worried about Francis, it seems that he is driven by the very impulses that drive those popularly derided as "social justice warriors" in their "neo-Marxist" fight for truth and justice. For many Francis critics, it is taken for granted that those are accurate descriptions for the important social dynamics at play in our world, and therefore, it is taken for granted that the bishop of Rome is "categorizable" in relation to those very dynamics—either for or against millennial "social justice warriors" (SJWs) and the boomer Woodstock idealists.² Francis is indeed dismissed as an ally of today's "SJWs" by many of North American Catholicism's ardent defenders of orthodoxy, who likewise take it for granted that this is a legitimate label for progressives and not just a polemical slur at the ready in the auto-suggest ammo magazine of online conservative social commentators. Francis sounds like one of these radical leftist democratic socialists and Black Lives Matter activists, or like one of their boomer predecessors at Woodstock, according to the categories appealed to on a popular level on the "conservative" side of the culture wars. For much of his papacy, Francis has been portrayed by both sides of the culture wars as something of a Bernie Sanders of Rome. And depending on whether Bernie is a symbol of progress or regress, Francis, too, is a symbol of the same. During his first presidential campaign (for the 2016 election), Bernie even found it expedient to make regular appeal to the figure of Francis, and made a point of shaking his hand in the Vatican during the height of the campaign season. And that's what worries the "conservative" culture warriors. Francis seems a little too cozy with the left.

What is needed is a more serious and attentive theological engagement of Francis's teaching in direct interaction with that of JP2 and B16, in view of the thoughtful concerns of Francis's sharpest critics. It is the aim of this book to begin taking some steps toward meeting that need. This student in the back row of Reno's class raises his hand to speak, concerned that many of his classmates are ill-equipped to receive—in the message of Francis—the best transmission on offer of the JP2-B16

2. See Reno, "Failing Papacy," para. 12.

message into this present cultural moment. This student's classmates are ill-equipped to receive a message that he thinks is very important for us to be hearing at this moment in history, a message that stands up boldly against the forces of technocracy, relativism, and the commercial logic.³

I'm making a distinction here between my *conversation partners* (represented primarily by Professor Reno) on the one hand and my *audience* on the other, my fellow "classmates" in the lecture hall of North American Catholicism, listening in, as it were, as I respond to the professor's commentary on the current pontificate. It is for this audience of faithful Catholics who are ambivalent about Francis that I want to articulate the theological social vision at the core of the papacies of JP2, Benedict, and Francis, and which, when identified, brings to light the profundity of the message of the Francis pontificate.

My audience for this book, whom, as I have said, I envision as "classmates" listening in on my response to Professor Reno, are devoted Catholics who have a beautiful culturally formed "instinct" for sexual chastity, formed as they have been by JP2's theology of the body. Their hearts have been formed to cherish various key aspects of the message of JP2. These young Catholics have an innate fidelity to B16, given his obvious connection and continuity with JP2. They are now left with very little to say about Francis, with an ambivalence toward him, with a big question mark regarding this papacy, and lacking an appetite for the culture wars and for the spats in the press and on online platforms. They are unequipped to navigate the varying claims about the meaning and message of this pontificate. They feel the bite of an aggressive anti-Christian culture, and they want a pontiff who stands up for the truth of the faith in the face of aggressive secularization.

A primary question for this student in Reno's "course" on Catholicism and society today is whether the content of Francis's message is to be dismissed as strung-together dated clichés from the seventies,⁴ contribut-

3. As Benedict states, "Economic activity cannot solve all social problems through the simple application of *commercial logic*." Economic activity, Benedict insists, "needs to be *directed towards the pursuit of the common good*, for which the political community in particular must also take responsibility . . . [G]rave imbalances are produced when economic action conceived merely as an engine for wealth creation, is detached from political action" (CV, sec. 36). Emphasis in quotes are original, unless indicated otherwise.

4. See Reno, "Francis Stands Firm," para. 4, where Reno identifies in JP2 and Benedict the same weakness for dialogue that characterizes Francis. For Reno's take on why Francis's appeals to dialogue and bridge-building are untimely, see also Reno,

ing to a process of liberalization and secularization in the Church by way of a confusing refusal of precision (like the project of the loosey-goosey rule-breaking Jesuits at Creighton University with whom Reno has come to associate Francis),⁵ or if Francis's message is to be embraced as belonging to the same genre of robustly orthodox prophetic social criticism proper to JP2 and B16.⁶ To which intellectual family tree does Francis's message belong? Reno associates Francis's message with the former, while his student in the back row associates it with the latter. Part of what I'm hoping readers of this book will come to see is that connecting Francis with the two previous popes gets him right in a way that connecting him with loosey-goosey liberalizers gets him wrong.

If we take it for granted that JP2 and B16 more or less had an alliance with the cause of the religious right in North America, and if the religious right is under fire in the Francis pontificate, then we take it for granted that Francis is an enemy of the very causes for which JP2 and B16 fought. This is a taken-for-granted story line with which many of my Catholic classmates are familiar. It's precisely this story line that I seek to deconstruct in this book, and in opposition to which I seek to tell the narrative in an alternative manner, in a manner truer to the categories that matter to the Church's social doctrine. In the assessment of some of my classmates, however, the story of the popes since the opening of Vatican II can be told in the following way: we had a Democrat in the Chair of Peter in the person of John XXIII, followed by the Republican Paul VI (whose Republican platform was particularly clear in his preemptive strike against the HHS mandate in the encyclical *HV*), followed by a movie star Republican JP2 (who with Ronald Reagan smashed the left, the communist regime, and the pro-choice caucus in one fell swoop), followed by the alt-right Republican B16, who in turn was followed by the return of the Democratic Party—with a socialistic vengeance!—to the Throne of Saint Peter in the person of Jorge Bergoglio.

Associating John XXIII and Francis with the Left in today's culture wars and Paul VI, JP2, and B16 with the Right is a caricature of what I take to be a popular narrative to which many of my *classmates* are susceptible, not the professor. But Reno is not clarifying for my classmates the distinction between the wars fought between Left and Right on the

"Building Bridges," para. 4, and Reno, "Crisis of Solidarity," para. 2.

5. See Reno, "Failing Papacy," para. 10, for the ambiguous "pastoral approach" of the Jesuits whom Reno knew at Creighton.

6. See Reno, "Francis's Improv Theology," para. 10.

one hand and, on the other hand, the war that John XXIII, Paul VI, JP2, B16, and Francis have each been fighting together as a singular force, joined as they are against a common opposition. And for what are these warriors fighting, from the perspective of Reno's back-row student? And against what do they stand in opposition? They're fighting on behalf of *cosmic chastity* over and against the *technocratic lust* that reigns supreme in society today.

This book arises from the conviction that the ways in which JP2 and B16 were confused as allies with American conservatism is as misleading, unclear, and confusing as any misapprehension of Francis's orthodoxy. As I don't have a stake in reacting against a liberal Catholicism that is dying out anyway, the bigger threat, in my view, sociologically, for the North American Church, is that we fall into a right-wing tribalism—and I love that Francis resists precisely that, all the while offering a viable and robustly Catholic alternative to the liberal and conservative sides of the culture wars.

Reno, highly critical of Francis, has called for a redemption of hints and suggestions of a cogent argument in the Francis message.⁷ I reappropriate Reno's call as a call for me to draw out or highlight what I take to be the underlying rationale of the Francis message. That underlying rationale is strikingly similar to that of the two previous popes, and I'm surprised that Reno is missing it. This one student of Reno is in fact inspired by Francis's call and teaching, and it is the aim of this book to draw out what inspires me, and to identify what I hope Reno and my classmates don't miss in the Francis message. But as things stand, I think Reno is missing it, and is telling the Francis story in a false and misleading manner.

The Francis story as I perceive it and as I tell it in these pages is a story of proclaiming the message of cosmic chastity. "Cosmic chastity" is a name I assign to a theological perspective to which Francis subscribes and which precedes him. In accordance with this all-encompassing theology of creation-as-gift, if creaturely existence means existence-as-gift (mirroring the trinitarian interpersonal Existence-as-Gift), then my relationship to the gift and the dignity inherent to the gift has to be safeguarded by chastity, so as to honor the meaning of creaturely existence in relation to the Creator, and so as not to dishonor the meaning

7. Reno identifies a need for theologians to "apply themselves to redeem the hints and suggestions of a cogent argument" in *LS* specifically (Reno, "Weakness of *Laudato Si*," para. 30).

of creaturely existence, and thereby dishonor the Creator. Technocratic unchastity, or lust, refers to a posture that does not safeguard the dignity of creation-as-gift. Such unchastity, or lust, expresses itself across every sector of social life. It is precisely an all-encompassing technocratic *lust* that JP2, Benedict, and Francis have together opposed in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

Cosmic chastity calls us to overcome what is derived from what JP2 refers to as *lust in its three forms*.⁸ That is, cosmic chastity stands over and against the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. A chastity that is cosmic, I propose, can be spoken of in terms of *chastity in its three forms*—chastity of the eyes, chastity of the flesh, and the humility of life, by which I mean a posture of love informed by an understanding of the truth of the meaning of our own creaturely status in relation to the Creator and in relation to the rest of creation. Cosmic chastity, i.e., chastity in its three forms, stands in corollary distinction from lust in its three forms. The posture of chaste love is the posture proper to the true, just, and loving humility of grateful creatures who know themselves to be the recipients of the gifts of the Creator who bestows gifts upon us in utter gratuity. The call to cosmic chastity in society is a call to overcome, in particular, aspects of human behavior arising from lust in its three forms as lust in its three forms manifests itself by way of what Pope Francis calls *the technocratic paradigm*. The technocratic paradigm fuels lust, and lust fuels the technocratic paradigm. Cosmic chastity, on the other hand, gets at the splendor of truth as perceived in every aspect of life in the light of the gospel.⁹

8. *TOB*, 10.29.1980. This *L'Osservatore Romano* English translation of the Italian word *concupiscenza* as “lust” is translated by Waldstein as “concupiscence.” Whereas Waldstein, for good reason, establishes a technical distinction between concupiscence and lust, for the purposes of this book I use the word “lust” more broadly in reference to both the notion of *concupiscenza* as well as the notion of *lussuria* and *lussurioso* (Waldstein consistently translates the latter two words as “lust”). For an explanation of Waldstein’s nuanced translation of these words in comparison with the *L'Osservatore* translation, see Waldstein, introduction to *Man and Woman*, 13. “Lust in its three forms” is translated by Waldstein as “*the threefold concupiscence*” (*MW*, 46:1).

9. My use of the word “chastity” here is akin to that of Walker and Caldecott. Walker explains Caldecott’s contextual understanding of chastity thus: “By setting chastity within the solemn play of conjugal communion, Caldecott recovers the true splendor of sexual purity” (Walker, foreword to *Not as the World Gives*, xvi). For Caldecott, Walker explains, “chastity . . . both shapes and reflects the luminous pattern of all truly human polity” (Walker, foreword to *Not as the World Gives*, xvi). For Caldecott, “personal purity, social justice, and worship coinhere” (Walker, foreword to *Not as the World Gives*, xvi).

Presenting a snapshot of Catholic social teaching as articulated by the papal trio is the fundamental goal of this book. It is my hope that the theologically rooted social vision promoted by the papal trio will find a more prominent place in the hearts of some of my fellow “JP2 Catholics” who read this book, as it has begun to find a more prominent place within my own heart, thanks to the papal trio’s teaching. This book, then, can be conceived of as an introduction to Catholic social teaching at large, as it draws upon JP2, Benedict, and Francis as primary sources for presenting that teaching, by way of engaging some of their encyclicals, exhortations, books, homilies, audiences, addresses, and interviews.

This book arises from a conviction that the JP2-B16 social message is inherently and fundamentally an *ecological* message. The ecological context of every facet of JP2’s and B16’s message is something we’re not paying enough attention to in North America, I think. And this is a big part of why we’re not perceiving what Francis is fundamentally up to in his pontificate. The real social project of the Francis pontificate, I contend, is to present the Christian moral vision with the cosmic backdrop of a theology of creation, as JP2 and Benedict had done. This theology of creation, we shall see, is integral to an eschatology, cosmology, and anthropology to which the Church testifies “in order to help people to live their lives in the dimension of authentic meaning,” as we shall explore in the coming pages (to reappropriate Renato Martino’s description of the aim of articulating the Church’s social teaching).¹⁰ This holistic theology of creation demands of us a posture of *cosmic chastity*, a posture whose meaning will become clearer as we engage the social vision of the papal trio. It’s a vision that includes within its purview the demands of truth, justice, and love. Central to this posture of cosmic chastity is a posture that honors the dignity of the human person, the dignity of humanity as a whole, and the dignity of creation at large, by way of adhering to the demands of truth, which include the demands of justice and love.

The vision of cosmic chastity espoused by Francis and the two previous popes is an extension of JP2’s theology of the body to the whole material creation. JP2 provides a grammar for this extension in his all-encompassing theology of creation-as-gift, which serves as the cosmic backdrop for his anthropology and theology of the human body. A theology of creation is the presupposed context for a theological anthropology of the human body and sexuality.

10. Martino and Crepaldi, “Presentation,” para. 3.

It is in the context of reverence proper to an authentic integral ecology that JP2 spoke of environmental stewardship. He consistently spoke of environmental stewardship in terms of the truth of the meaning of creation, and in terms of the imperative of just and charitable relations among human beings and on the part of humanity in relation to the cosmos at large. In his “Meditation on Givenness,” JP2 observes that

nowadays, we often speak of “ecology,” i.e., concern for the natural environment. The foundational basis for such ecology, however, is the mystery of creation, which is a great and incessant stream of giving all the goods of the cosmos to man—both those goods he encounters directly as well as those he only discovers through research and experiments utilizing the various methods of science. Man knows more and more about the riches of the cosmos, but at the same time he sometimes fails to recognize that these come from the hand of the Creator. However, there are times when all men, even nonbelievers, glimpse the truth of the givenness of creation and begin to pray, to acknowledge that all is a gift from God.¹¹

The *truth of the givenness of creation* is the fundamental truth of cosmic chastity, at the center of the ethos, spirituality, and theology of cosmic chastity. The recognition of this truth is a recognition required for the development of an ethos of cosmic chastity in human hearts and in the heart of society. The truth of the givenness of creation is the foundational truth underlying an ethos of chastity, and is very much the underlying truth for an anthropology and ethos of sexual chastity in particular, which is at the heart of a theological ecology. This truth of the givenness of creation is what demands of us an ethos of chaste love. In what I’m calling JP2’s critique of technocratic lust, he lamented the tendency of members of society today “to see no other meaning in their natural environment than what serves for immediate use and consumption”¹²—and this applies to human bodies, to the fruits of the land, to the work of our hands, and to every facet of the earth’s ecosystems and the universe at large. JP2’s “call for a global ecological conversion”¹³ is based upon his theology of creation, and upon his understanding of humanity within creation. For JP2, our relationship with the rest of the cosmos must be determined by an anthropology and cosmology rooted in truth.

11. JP2, “Meditation on Givenness,” 872–73.

12. *RH*, sec. 15; quoted in *LS*, sec. 5.

13. *LS*, sec. 5, citing JP2, “God Made Man,” sec. 4.

“Cosmic chastity” is a name I’ve assigned to a notion according to which the cosmos, by its very nature, makes demands upon us. It demands that we bow our heads to its true meaning as cosmos. The truth of the cosmos demands that we render to every bit of God’s creation what is its due, and thus render to the Creator what is his due, in a posture of what Wojtyła calls “justice toward the creator,”¹⁴ according to the integral meaning of the cosmos as a whole and of each of its parts. The very nature of creation is such that creatures contain within themselves the demands of justice. From this perspective, the cause of justice pertains as much to ecology as it pertains to anthropology, within a vision according to which an authentic ecology depends upon an authentic anthropology and vice versa. JP2’s anthropology (and notably, his theology of the human body) belongs within a larger theology of creation, his *theology of the cosmic body*.¹⁵

Immediately following his last visit with JP2—on the eve of JP2’s death—Joseph Ratzinger gave a speech at the Benedictine convent of Subiaco.¹⁶ There, Ratzinger sounded a call for men and women of our day to follow the example of St. Benedict of Norcia, who showed “the way that leads on high, beyond the crisis and the ruins” in “a time of dissipation and decadence.”¹⁷ Consistent with the overall message of Catholic social teaching, Ratzinger discussed in this context both the “great dangers” and “the great opportunities for man and the world” in these times.¹⁸ In this address that Ratzinger gave at the threshold of his papacy, without using the term, he clearly presents the technocratic paradigm as *the* major threat to the common good in contemporary society.¹⁹ For Ratzinger, the figure of St. Benedict served as an icon and model for the very theological, ethical, and spiritual vision that I’m calling the vision of “cosmic chastity,” the vision which he advocated throughout his papacy under the patronage of St. Benedict.

14. LR2, 209–61. This is the title of *Love and Responsibility*’s fourth chapter in the Willetts translation. Ignatik translates it “Justice with Respect to the Creator” (LR1, 193).

15. For the relationship between ecology and Catholic social teaching at large, see Schindler, “Habits of Presence,” 575.

16. Peter Seewald recounts this address in relation to JP2’s death and Ratzinger’s subsequent election and papal ministry in Seewald, *Benedict XVI*, 2:249–52, and Seewald, *Light of the World*, 5.

17. Ratzinger, “Europe’s Crisis of Culture,” 326.

18. Ratzinger, “Europe’s Crisis of Culture,” 335.

19. Ratzinger, “Europe’s Crisis of Culture,” 325–36.

The notion of cosmic chastity found within the thinking of Pope Benedict rests upon his insistence—which he shares with JP2—that we must ensure that the natural environment receives the respect that is its due, according to the truth of its being.²⁰ For Benedict, it is precisely “the notion that there are no indisputable truths to guide our lives”²¹ that has resulted in the degradation of both the natural environment and the social environment. Benedict insists that “the misuse of creation begins when we no longer recognize any higher instance than ourselves, when we see nothing else but ourselves.”²² The environmental crisis, for Benedict, is a consequence of a relativistic outlook, and as such is a part of the crisis in truth.

Another central icon of cosmic chastity alongside St. Benedict is the image of St. Francis of Assisi, which Pope Francis places before our eyes in the pages of *LS*.²³ According to Pope Francis, St. Francis’s “response to the world around him was so much more than intellectual appreciation or economic calculus, for to him each and every creature was a sister united to him by bonds of affection. That is why he felt called to care for all that exists.”²⁴ St. Francis’s love was a chaste love which extended to the entirety of the cosmos, on all levels, both macro and micro. The Benedict-Francis call for a deepened respect for the environment, i.e., their call for cosmic chastity, is based upon a steadfast insistence on justice, a single-minded refusal of injustice, and a resolute allegiance to the truth of the meaning inherent to creation according to its very being.

20. D. C. Schindler, citing Ratzinger, explains that for the ancient Greeks, God was “the ultimate principle of order, and they saw nature—that is, the given intelligibility, beauty, and goodness of things—as the place wherein divine order culminates . . . When the Greeks called the world ‘*kosmos*,’ meaning ‘jewel’ or ‘ornament,’ they were setting into relief both this essential order and its divine provenance. Divine order, the presence of the gods, shines forth in the resplendent goodness that inheres *in* things” (Schindler, “Work,” 4–5). My use of the word “cosmos” presupposes this notion.

21. *LS*, sec. 7. This is Francis’s own paraphrase of an insight he attributes to Benedict. Francis cites Benedict, “Bundestag Address.”

22. *LS*, sec. 6, citing Benedict, “Bolzano.” As Benedict put it on that occasion, “The brutal consumption of Creation begins where God is not, where matter is henceforth only material for us, where we ourselves are the ultimate demand, where the whole is merely our property and we consume it for ourselves alone. And the wasting of creation begins when we no longer recognize any need superior to our own, but see only ourselves” (see Benedict, “Bolzano,” paras. 23–25).

23. *LS*, secs. 1–2, 10–12, 66, 87, 91, 125, 218, 221.

24. *LS*, sec. 11.

As Pope Francis warns, we mustn't allow ourselves to stand by as "silent witnesses to terrible injustices" in the face of "environmental deterioration . . . caused by . . . selfish lack of concern."²⁵ In the opening of his encyclical *FT* as well as in the opening of his encyclical *LS*, Pope Francis points to St. Francis as a figure who reminds us of the truth of who we are within the context of creation.²⁶ Much of what ails the world today, we see in the teaching of Pope Francis, has to do with the fact that we have forgotten this truth. St. Francis is an icon of one who stands in relation to the cosmos as "a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us."²⁷ St. Francis models for us, then, the chaste alternative to the posture of possessive lust that dominates our use of created materiality today.

In the teaching of Francis and the two previous popes, creaturely existence means existence-as-gift. This means that my relationship to the gift and the dignity inherent to the gift has to be safeguarded by chastity, so as to honor the meaning of creaturely existence. Technocratic unchastity, or lust, refers to a posture that does not safeguard the dignity of creation-as-gift, specifically by way of a technocratic approach to creation. This technocratic approach is inherently unchaste in that it "exalts the concept of a subject who, using logical and rational procedures, progressively approaches and gains control over an external object," to use Pope Francis's description of the technocratic paradigm in *LS*.²⁸ This "control" is a mechanistic control that refuses to bow before and collaborate with an external object according to its nature and meaning as gift, and rather manipulates it according to the lusts of the human heart disfigured by sin, reduced as we so often are to the falsifying category of mere *consumer*. In systemic technocracy, we turn our brothers and sisters—and we ourselves are turned into—mere *commodities* and mere *consumers* to consume and be consumed in the mechanisms of a "free" market.

Reverence for the cosmos, in the shared vision of JP2, Benedict, and Francis, is inseparable from reverence for truth. A commitment to truth includes a commitment to the correct teaching concerning the meaning of the cosmos. That is, a commitment to truth entails a commitment to a true ecology. That's why this book dwells so extensively upon the papal

25. *LS*, sec. 36.

26. *FT*, secs. 1–4, 48.

27. *LS*, sec. 1.

28. *LS*, sec. 106.

trio's commitment to *truth* as a key aspect of their teaching on cosmic chastity. Bowing our heads in submission to the truth of the meaning of the cosmos in the nitty-gritty details of social life is an integral aspect of a practically applied allegiance to the truth at large, which transcends my own subjectivity as an individual, and includes truth as it pertains directly and specifically to me in particular as a subject.

If we look at the societal landscape through the lens of the social teaching of Francis and the two previous popes, the significant social divide, as I have already suggested in the preface, is not between liberal and conservative, but between technocratic lust and cosmic chastity. Each chapter of this book presents a particular angle on the contest in society today between the vice of lust on the one hand and the virtue of chastity on the other, each vying to gain the upper hand of allegiance in our hearts. Each chapter draws attention to this contest by zeroing in on particular aspects of cosmic chastity as alternatives to particular aspects of technocratic lust. Each chapter allows JP2, Benedict, or Francis (and some chapters combine two or all three of them) to take the lead by way of their ethical social teaching and integral theological vision and spirituality.

Part 1 of this book, consisting of chapters 1–3, presents the framework of the theologically rooted social teaching of the papal trio, zeroing in on the role of truth, justice, and charity²⁹ in relation to marriage, family, and Christian vocation at large as the primary context in which chaste love is to be lived out in society. Chaste love is primarily expressed by way of self-gift in the context of family life. Self-gift in family life is an integral aspect of humanity's overall vocation within the cosmos as *liturgists* leading all creatures in a song of universal praise to the Creator. In chapter 1, I present the papal trio's song of cosmic chastity in opposition to the din of technocratic lust by way of presenting JP2's and Benedict's vision of justice and charity rooted in truth over and against technocratic lust's inherent falsehood, injustice, and failure in charity. Chapter 2 presents Francis's call to vocational commitment, particularly his call for young adults today to take the risk of marrying and having children. I present Francis's vision of family as the locus point in society for the exercise of the very notions of justice and charity rooted in truth, in opposition to the fear of commitment so prevalent in the hearts of young men and women raised in the shadow of relativism's regime. It is

29. In this book, the terms "love" and "charity" are used interchangeably.

this regime of relativism that makes up the conditions for the festering of the technocratic rationale in the hearts of young adults who, though called to give themselves away in the form of a definitive vocational commitment, have become de-capacitated in their ability to do so. Chapter 3 goes on to present the papal trio's liturgical ontology as an alternative to the outlook of the culture wars and as an alternative to the endemic economic injustices proper to the neoliberal commercial logic.

Chapters 4–6 make up part II of this book, and keep firmly in view the book's main presupposition that the real divide in society today is between the harmony of cosmic chastity on the one hand and the cacophony of technocratic lust on the other, not between liberalism and conservatism. The discord of technocratic lust is part of the discord of the culture wars, as both sides of the culture wars have been dragged into the rationale of technocracy, and tend to carry out these wars according to its dissonant reasoning. In chapter 4, I locate Benedict and Francis in the tradition of Henri de Lubac and Romano Guardini, who engage in a genre of cultural warfare altogether different from what is found in popular culture today. Chapter 5 presents the papal trio's socially radical and distinctively Catholic song of justice and charity in economics and particularly, in a vision of work, while chapter 6 returns to the theme of vocation, i.e., Christ's call to make a gift of ourselves—as one of the main acoustical features of the amphitheater of Catholic social teaching in which the papal trio sings, focusing on JP2's and Francis's reflections on Christ's call to young adults in the US. In this context, we hear the harmony between JP2's and Francis's *call to chaste love by way of vocational commitment* in following Christ—precisely as social beings called to an utterly dispossessive love.

Part 3 of this book zeroes in on how the papal trio's song is a song of truth in direct opposition to relativism, beginning with chapter 7's examination of Francis's strategically fought war on relativism's dictatorship. There, we'll hear how Francis contributes his own tenor line to the harmony of truth sung with JP2 and Benedict, each against relativism's disharmony and discord. We continue, in chapter 8, with an examination of JP2's and Francis's ardent commitment to and harmony with the melody of moral truth, and at last end with chapter 9's survey of Francis's integral ecology and theology of marriage and family.

The notion of “cosmic chastity” as a singular term identifying the singular theology, ethos, and spirituality of the social-ecological “song” that Francis and the two previous popes “sing” initially began to take

shape within my heart when I encountered the notion of “cosmic tenderness” and “cosmic gentleness” introduced by Catherine Doherty in her spiritual classic, *Poustinia*.³⁰ While Doherty never used the term “cosmic chastity,” she articulated the notion I’m getting at in her presentation of the Russian *poustinik*—a desert dweller devoted to a life of prayer and service³¹—who is animated by *a love for all that is* according to an ethos of that fruit of the Spirit, gentleness, which along with the other fruits of the Spirit stands in distinction from what St. Paul calls the “works of the flesh”—immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, and carousing.³² The *poustinik* was for me, then, the initial icon of cosmic chastity as the notion began to take shape in my heart. The figures of St. Benedict and St. Francis, as presented by their papal namesakes, as icons of cosmic chastity—began to transpose themselves upon my heart along with the figure of the Russian *poustinik*, who beholds before his chaste gaze all that proceeds from the hand of God as gift.

The popes going back to Leo XIII, like Doherty, proposed the very notion of cosmic gentleness and tenderness in their social teaching as they navigate the multitude of challenges and opportunities characteristic of what Doherty referred to as “our growing, changing, technological, urban civilization.”³³ Doherty’s presentation of the *poustinik*, then, played a key role in providing the acoustical hermeneutical context in which I began to hear the harmony of the song of the three popes.

30. Doherty, *Poustinia*, 76–77. Catherine likewise connects the notion of “cosmic charity” with the spirituality of the *poustinik* (143).

31. See Barker, “Poustinik Option.”

32. Gal 5:19–23 RSV.

33. Doherty, *Poustinia*, 3.