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Rhetoric in religion

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Joseph R. Blaney and Joseph P. Zoppetti's 2009 edited collection, *The Rhetoric of Pope John Paul II*, offers a glimpse into the ongoing legacy of Pope John Paul II in American public memory. Published four years after his death, this volume examines Pope John Paul II's rhetoric as it occurs in four contexts: media presence, social justice, political life, and theological discussions. Each context comprises one part of the collection. This review provides a summary of the volume's fourteen chapters, concluding with brief comments about Pope John Paul II's legacy in America.

The introduction to the volume, penned by the editors of this collection, seeks to understand the rhetoric of the Pope as a distinct "Roman Catholic orator" (p. ix). They understand his rhetoric as a "testament to our postmodern condition of subjectivity" (p. xi) and announce implications about how his rhetoric offered epistemic consequences for generating knowledge in his response to the issues emerging throughout his duration as pontiff. The volume recognizes rhetoric as a means to understand the work and thought of Pope John Paul II as it influenced the public domain in a globalized world. This review seeks to understand how his rhetoric contributes to his legacy within American life.

The edited book begins with a section devoted to the Pope's appearance in media venues. This section contains two chapters. The first chapter, "Papal Punchlines: Late Night Comedic Treatment of Pope John Paul II" by Brain T. Kaylor and Josh A. Compton, focuses on announcements of the Pope's death by late night TV hosts such as Jay Leno, David Letterman, Jon Stewart, and Conan O'Brien. The authors overview a variety of comedic pronouncements, some successful and others determined offensive. Their findings portrayed Pope John Paul II as a "sacred standard" for religious leaders, politicians, and celebrities (p. 19) with critical commentary instead directed at the Catholic Church or pope selection process. Ultimately, Kaylor and Compton understand this media attention as a unique form of homage to Pope John Paul II's life.

The second chapter, “*Kategoria* of Cartoons on the Catholic Church Sexual Abuse Scandal” by William L. Benoit and Kevin A. Stein, turns to political cartoons commenting on sexual abuse scandals of priests against American youth. These cartoons directed criticism to Pope John Paul II’s position as the leader of the Church at a time of widespread media coverage about the sexual abuse scandals. Their focus seeks to understand how the cartoons utilize rhetorical resources in the public interpretation of the scandal.

The second section of the book attends to the Pope’s rhetoric of social justice. This section contains chapters three through five. The third chapter, “The Rhetoric of Social Justice in Pope John Paul II’s Catechism” by Joseph P. Zompetti, addresses Catholic education through the Pope’s catechism as the Church’s “official interpretation” and teaching (p. 39). This pedagogical document over 800-pages in length is available globally after its initial release in the early 1990s. Zompetti references the catechism as the Pope’s “signature” work designed both to teach and to persuade (p. 41). Working from Kenneth Burke’s *Rhetoric of Religion*, Zompetti analyzes the catechism’s depiction of the community of persons (inclusive of Catholics and non-Catholics), the Beatitudes’ blessings for the poor, forgotten, and neglected, and the golden rule’s reminder for proper treatment of the other. Zompetti understands this document as the Pope’s profession on social justice.

The fourth chapter, “Pope John Paul II and the Rhetoric of Just War” by Craig W. Cutbirth and Megan Hogue, addresses the Pope’s opposition to American involvement in the Iraq war following the September 11, 2001 attacks. The authors articulate the Pope’s efforts to dissuade the George W. Bush administration by considering Just War Theory, first presented by Saint Augustine in the early Middle Ages, as an alternative to the fear appeals presented by American officials (p. 72). The authors note the Pope’s failure in preventing engagement with war but, nevertheless, acknowledge his efforts.

The fifth chapter, “Community Focused *Apologia* in Pope John Paul II’s Year of Jubilee Discourse” by Jason A. Edwards, identifies the Pope’s community focused apology in the Jubilee year of 2000. The Pope’s plan included Catholic scrutiny of past wrongs followed by acknowledgment of failure and apology; Edwards emphasizes the practices of memory and mortification. He analyzes the Pope’s prayer following the International Theological Commission’s research on the Church’s sins. While some deemed the apology “disingenuous” and others criticized the apology’s lack of specific information identifying particular victims, Edwards illustrates the apology’s success as a first step engagement to repair bonds with others (pp. 92–93).

The third section of the book discusses the political consequences of the Pope's rhetoric. This section contains chapters six through eight. Chapter six, "Rhetoric of Pope John Paul II's Visits to Poland, 1979–1999" by Cezar M. Ornatowski, overviews the Pope's eight visits to Poland after his election as Holy See. Ornatowski attends to the political consequences of these visits in Communist-occupied Poland and in the shaping of the Republic of Poland. Framing the visits themselves as a form of "rhetorical papacy" (p. 104), the author stresses Pope John Paul II's deep connection with Poland from his initial visit in 1979 constructing the landscape for the emerging Solidarity Movement to his final farewell visit in 2002. Ornatowski emphasizes the Pope's verbal and non-verbal rhetoric as a motivator for political action and public consequence.

The seventh chapter, "The Laying of Hands: Pope John Paul II and the Catholic Church's Political Role in Poland Pre- and Post- 1989" by David P. Burns, continues to consider the political rhetoric of Pope John Paul II in Poland. Burns acknowledges the deeply connected interplay between Church and government rooted in a longstanding Catholic identity in Poland. The chapter recognizes the influence of Pope John Paul II's rhetoric in a country that moved from Communist-occupation to participation in the European Union.

The eighth chapter, "Ideological Issues in Pope John Paul II's Messages on World Communications Day" by Kristina Drumheller and Matthew Drumheller, addresses the Catholic tradition of World Communications Day prompted by Pope Paul VI in 1963. World Communications Day began with the Vatican recognition of media's influence on social life and the various consequences of its potential use. Pope John Paul II delivered twenty-seven addresses on World Communications Day; the authors analyze four, focusing on freedom, justice, and peace (p. 184). Drumheller and Drumheller identify ideological issues within the Pope's comments that construct their critical analysis of contradictions.

The final section of the book considers Pope John Paul II's rhetoric within theological discussions. This concluding section contains chapters nine through fourteen. Chapter nine, "The Vatican's Response to the Sexual Abuse Crisis in America: An Image Restoration Study" by Joseph R. Blaney, addresses the Pope's leadership during a time of crisis in the midst of continual announcements of sexual abuse scandals between American priests and youth. Blaney turns to the Pope's address to the American cardinals as an effort of image restoration that contained strong elements of mortification amidst other elements of public apology.

The tenth chapter, "*Totus Tuus Sum*, Maria: Pope John Paul II's Framing of the Feminine Genius" by Kimberly A. Kennedy, emphasizes the Virgin Mary's influence on the Pope from childhood training to devotion as pontiff. Kennedy addresses how the Pope turns to Mary as a standard for the theology of women.

She addresses the use of framing as a way of rhetorical engagement to understand the Pope's portrayal of women and concludes by connecting the Pope's frame of femininity to feminism movements.

The eleventh chapter, "John Paul II's Papal Encyclical as Dialectic" by Dennis D. Cali, understands the Pope as "a man of contradictions" (p. 233). Cali considers the dialectics that emerge in the encyclical letters written by the Pope. His encyclical letters provide "contemplation, correction, instruction, and encouragement" in the face of assumed juxtapositions (p. 252). For instance, in *Fides et Ratio*, Pope John Paul II presents a complimentary relationship between faith and reason despite presuppositions of opposition. The encyclicals work together to form a discourse that engages dialectics in offering guiding insight amidst perceived tensions.

The twelfth chapter, "Pope John Paul II's Influence on Preaching and Parish Communication" by Christopher Layden, announces the Pope's influence on Catholic clergy. Specifically, Layden addresses the Pope's use of Luke 5:10, "Be not afraid"—from his introduction as pontiff to his later years. Layden addresses how the Pope became a teacher and example for Catholic clergy around the globe.

The thirteenth chapter, "His Final Homily: Pope John Paul II's Death as an Affirmation of his Life's Message" by Joseph M. Valenzano III, considers the final two months of the Pope's life as an active homily of his understanding of human dignity in death. Valenzano recounts the Pope's concern with the strengthening power of a "culture of death" particularly throughout the Western World; Pope John Paul II sought to be an example of "the culture of life" that counters medical treatments that discontinue life-sustaining care (p. 275). Valenzano positions the Pope's death in time with the American controversy surrounding the death of Terry Schiavo, whose husband was granted the legal right to make decisions concerning medical care. Valenzano summarizes the Pope's understanding of suffering as a counter to the position held throughout the Western World. Valenzano portrays the Pope as a representation of death with dignity and an example for discerning end of life treatments.

The final chapter, "Firm in Defense of Freedom, Family, and Christianity: Mormonism, Pope John Paul II, and the Rhetorical Other" by Phil J. Chidester, recounts the relationship between the Catholic Church and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, particularly as it emerges in references to Pope John Paul II. Chidester considers this interplay within the work of Kenneth Burke's rhetorical engagements with the other (p. 285). Chidester's focus rests on the way that Pope John Paul II navigated relationships and differences with Mormonism as a glimpse into his work dealing with religious positions outside of Catholicism.

Throughout this edited volume, Blaney and Zompetti offer insight into the power of Pope John Paul II's rhetoric throughout various avenues of social life—media, social justice, politics, and theology. The contributors to this volume offer chapters that announce the American legacy of the Pope rooted in his involvement in constructing Catholic identity in the United States and around the globe. Presenting portrayals from both supporters and critics of the Pope, this volume announces the memory of Pope John Paul II's work and influence with practical consequence for the public domain.