Daily Meditation 11-16-26
Kudos to Two American Popes for Recognizing Social Sins over Sexual Ones

Good morning.

In today's daily meditation, I am giving praise to the two American popes, Pope Francis and Pope Leo, for being explicit about how too much emphasis on sexual morality has gone and dominated much of Christian ethics for too long. Both of them are saying that the more serious ethical issues are issues of society, such as justice and injustice, environmental justice, and so forth.

And I think this is a significant break, if you will, from certainly the papacies of John Paul II and Benedict, and all those who were trying to fight the progress laid down by the Second Vatican Council by creating a backlash based on whether one believes that birth control is a serious theological issue or not.

Now I refer there to my book on the *Letters to Pope Francis,* because, in thinking over this meditation, today's meditation, I was reminded of some things that I wrote him shortly after he became pope, in this book. Let's see when it came out: 2013. And one point I made early in the book was to tell him about this poem by a Catholic poet early in the 20th century. I think it was written around 1911 or so. So I can't nail down the author.

But he wrote a poem called “Paternoster,” and he traces the history of the church for 2000 years, describing the church as a giant ship through those centuries, with lots of hurricanes and typhoons and all this, and it survived those years of rugged wildness, until in the 20th century, it smashed up against a pile of rocks and sank. And the name of the rocks was Sex.

Now this was early in the 20th century that this poet had the perception that this preoccupation with sex is going to kill religion, institutional religion. And of course, it kills it not just because it leaves out the more important issues of morality like justice and compassion and forgiveness and standing up to power and greed and so forth.

Copyright © 2026 by Matthew Fox. All rights reserved.

But also it leaves this great vacuum around the tradition of mysticism and sexuality. There's a whole book about it in the Bible called the Song of Songs. That love making is an ecstasy, is a theophany, experience of the divine. And all this gets totally forgotten or underplayed if your entire worldview is frozen on the topics of sexuality.

In my *Letters to Pope Francis* toward the end of the book, I have a chapter called "12 Steps to Rebuilding the Church." Step number two:

Cease the sick preoccupation with sexual ethics and pelvic morality. The church's record on sexual ethics seems to so many, as all talk and no action. Whether one is talking of premarital sex, birth control, homosexuality, condoms, AIDS, population explosion, pedophilia, celibacy, divorce, and remarriage, women's rights or abortion, the actions of so many priests and poets belie the constant messaging of No, No, No.

Seems to me, there's a scene to the Celtic poet I cited early in this book, "The hierarchy protesteth too much." And in many instances, for example, the cardinal of Scotland, who was the most vocal homophobe member of the hierarchy in the entire UK -- he practiced too little. It turns out that he had abused many of his priests and some nuns, and was dismissed from his position entirely. But here it was, the loudest homophobic voice in the hierarchy in those islands, was himself an abuser of men.

The medicine I proposed to Pope Francis was silence:

I think about 15 years of silence is in order for the institutional church. Just shut up about sex. People are mature and adult enough to figure out values about responsible sexuality, and that is what is at stake here. Without the constant interventions and often zealous ranting about sexual issues from the so-called celibate hierarchy, this silence would allow clerics and others to focus on other more pressing moral issues of our time, such as the shortage of work, the oppression of women and young people, the demise of our ecosystems and numerous species that are growing extinct because of harmful ways of living on the earth, and militarism, and how it robs us of money that can be used for important and needed causes, including education and relief for the misery of the poor.

Copyright © 2026 by Matthew Fox. All rights reserved.

Again, a simple teaching about sexuality should be enough for now. Practice responsible sex. For the rest, let silence reign.

I told a story about when Pope John Paul II came to the United States, many Catholics flooded to his outdoor Mass in the state of Kansas. And a reporter interviewed a 15-year-old boy who was in the crowd and was eager for the Pope to come. The reporter reminded him that the Pope is against birth control and condoms. The 15-year-old responded by saying, "What? That's impossible. What about AIDS? What about the population explosion around the world?"

And as I pointed out to Pope Francis, *This is a census fidelium talking. The opinion of the lay people. When a 15-year-old is smarter about sexual morality than a pope, it is indeed time for popes to be silent and listen deeply.*

So I think this whole topic of moving from a preoccupation with sexual morality to the real issues of our time, including the very survival of this planet, which means, of course, not only our species but so many millions of others who will go extinct on the path where we are headed, with global warming and the rest, the rising of the seas and all.

But in this context, it is a blessing that the first two American popes have spoken up, and made it pretty clear that we should not preoccupy ourselves with issues of sexuality, so much as issues of justice and injustice. And of course that includes the abuse of sexuality. They want to find some pedophilia, and the cover up of pedophilia by our institutions, not only the Epstein files but the track record of the church itself, in covering up these horrendous acts.

They are not horrendous because they're sexual. They're horrendous because they are power over the innocent. And all of us can do better than that.

Thank you. We'll see you next week.

Copyright © 2026 by Matthew Fox. All rights reserved.