

implications as the body of Christ, the body of the church is the “affirming community that makes love of self, others, and God possible” (123). She puts forward a theological anthropology and ecclesiology that is rooted in dignity and oriented towards justice, like when she argues, “All bodies across the scatter plot of sexual difference are graced when we generatively perform a more just world together” (2).

“All bodies are generative” has the potential to become a core foundation of theological anthropology and ecclesiology, just as Elizabeth Johnson’s phrase “the symbol of God functions” serves that role today. This book is not simply well researched, impeccably argued, beautifully written, and spiritually rooted, though it is all those things. Jacobs’s *Holy Body* has the potential to make a generational impact. This book should be read by every theologian.

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The Gap in God’s Country: A Longer View on Our Culture Wars. By Laurie M. Johnson. Cascade, 2024. viii + 338 pages. \$38.00 paperback.

In *The Gap in God’s Country*, political scientist Laurie M. Johnson presents a sweeping diagnosis of the political landscape of the United States, with special attention to those communities outside of large urban centers. Through historical analysis, engagement with political theory, theological study, and philosophical reflection, Johnson crafts a compelling project that invites the reader to reconsider American politics and religion. The author’s approach is pragmatic, but ambitious—as the conclusion sums up, the author’s vision “is little more, and nothing less, than a healthy community” (286).

The author’s concern for the health of society in the United States, including and especially the health of small and rural communities, is palpable throughout the book. Johnson writes not as an ideologue but as one committed to forging a balanced stocktaking. Johnson proceeds with a methodology that feels both liberating and creative, if favoring syncretic methods over deep studies of sources. Johnson acknowledges that this may feel to some readers as if certain thinkers are not given their full due, but the goal of this book is not “narrow but safe and sure scholarship” (12); it is the more difficult work of “finding common ground in a highly divisive social climate” (1).

The first chapter pulls together four of what the author calls “theory streams”: classical conservatism (especially Edmund Burke), Marxian critiques of capitalism, political theology (particularly Walter Bruggeman, Dorothy Day, and Charles Taylor, among others), and political psychology. Chapter 2 is a sweeping description of how large-scale

agricultural production has affected out-migration from rural areas, as well as cultural and religious responses to shifts in values that have accompanied it (including a sustained reflection on *Leave It to Beaver* and *The Benedict Option*). Chapter 3 builds on this, sketching a history of both automation and the enclosure of private property, presenting a rather bleak picture of the resulting cultural and political “dislocation, justified and fueled by liberal ideology, with its concomitant spiritual devastation and its ultimate fruit of global corporate capitalism” (118). The fourth chapter engages a quartet of thinkers (Carl Jung, Leo Strauss, Charles Taylor, and D.C. Schindler) to argue that the decline of rural agrarian life and public influence of religion in the United States “was not just the fault of ‘big government,’ the ‘nanny state,’ or ‘cultural Marxism’” (155), and cautions against wholesale rejection of liberalism. Chapter 5 functions as a critique of neoliberal “free to choose” ideology as it finds voice on both the political left and right; in the author’s view, it amounts to a divinization of selfishness that is both illusory and damaging to individuals and communities. Chapter 6 comprises a lucid and compelling challenge to the “grave error” (216) of much of the Christian right in the United States that reduces Christian faith to right-wing sectarian positions and fidelity to Donald Trump. Finally, chapter 7 draws significantly from Catholic Social Teaching to outline a hopeful vision of how Christianity can, despite all its historical and political entanglements, be a catalyst for positive change ordered toward the common good.

Johnson’s method of drawing from diverse sources to craft a vision that transcends entrenched socio-political divides is praiseworthy. To be sure, at times I found myself wishing for deeper engagement with one or another intellectual tradition (for example, when Johnson speaks of the “Benedict option,” the text includes little engagement of any sources from within the Catholic Benedictine tradition), but given the author’s stated task, this is a relatively small gripe. The author’s treatment of American Christianity can also want for some nuance at times, as it is not always clear whether Johnson means to speak of *all* Christianity, Christian evangelicalism, Roman Catholicism, or something else, but given the generally broad strokes the project takes as its method, this also need not detract from the project as a whole. The fruit of the text comes together in striking fashion in the eighth chapter (“Conclusions”), and it is worth tabling some narrow academic concerns in order to share in the author’s vision.

Johnson’s text is ultimately approachable and ideologically challenging. The book is unshy about critiquing real problems found in ideas across the religio-political spectrum while still drawing from the best these ideas have to offer. This book would be of particular interest to those who are tired of ideological and academic

entrenchment, and it would be very useful in courses on contemporary American society and religion, Christian social ethics, and current politics in the United States. It will give many of its readers pause, but it rewards sustained engagement with an impressive vision of what community life could be if Americans collectively share a will to shift it together toward the good.

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Modern Catholic Family Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretations. Edited by Jacob M. Kohlhaas and Mary M. Doyle Roche. Georgetown University Press, 2024. xii + 281 pages. \$49.95 paperback.

Modern Catholic Family Teaching is an excellent compendium of analysis and commentary on a selection of Roman Catholic magisterial documents addressing gender and sexual morality, marriage and family life, children and education, and the social mission and support of families. It is required reading for anyone studying theological anthropology, sexual ethics, gender, family, and moral theology in the Catholic tradition.

Each chapter in *Modern Catholic Family Teaching* is an analysis of a relevant document or the sources for this documentary tradition. Chapters are organized chronologically under sections named for the pope seated at each document's publication, with added chapters on homosexuality and the sex abuse crisis under the section on John Paul II. The volume begins with Leo XIII and *Arcanum Divinae Sapientiae* and finishes with Francis and "Male and Female He Created Them," a document of the Congregation for Catholic Education (now part of the Dicastery for Culture and Education). The analyses of these documents, the historical context provided, and the commentary offered are all excellent and even-handed. The volume is similar in structure to the earlier *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretations*, edited by Kenneth Himes in 2004 (and updated in 2018), also published by Georgetown University Press.

The opening chapters provide context for Catholic family teaching, focusing on scripture, natural law, ecclesiology, history, and race. These would be excellent reading for any college-level introductory course on sexual ethics or modern Catholicism that wanted short primers on, for example, the interpretation of scripture in the Catholic tradition, magisterial authority, and modern interpretations of natural law. The chronological chapters on specific documents would function well as a spine text for an upper- or graduate-level course on family or sexuality in theology.