

The Genesis of Gender: A Christian Theory. By Abigail Favale. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2022. 248 pages. \$17.95.

As her title suggests, Abigail Favale offers an accessible historical and theological reading of the origin of the current gender debate in *The Genesis of Gender*. Favale mixes her own intellectual conversion with a historical overview of gender theory's roots in a readable narrative that deconstructs gender theory as feminism's "Oedipal offspring" (32) and argues for a magisterial Catholic approach to embodied sexuality.

Favale constructs her narrative in a series of contrasts paralleling her conversion: a deficient paradigm followed by the magisterial answer, often read through John Paul II's work. In acknowledging the value in the myriad instantiations of feminism, she aims to build a "foundation" from which to "mine feminist thought and praxis for hidden gems and to partner with secular feminists toward shared goals" (83). Her book, mostly a critique of modern gender theory, creates this foundation by crystalizing key differences. For Favale, the primary difference is each treatment of the embodied self. While the Catholic view acknowledges the sexed body as gift, feminism's support of contraception "pathologiz[es] femaleness" (91) and sets a "default expectation of female sterilization" (103). These erode the cultural understanding of sex by trading on the "norm of male embodiment" (113), while female embodiment becomes "a purely social, ornamental" reality (114). Favale combats this ornamental womanhood by defending gender essentialism against gender nominalism. The connection between nominalism and gender theory is one of this book's highlights, given its explanatory value of conflicts within the gender debate.

When Favale dives into gender theory, briefly surveying its history of the term and current state, she makes her critique on both philosophical and aesthetic grounds, ending her chapter with a paean to the beauty of female-only spaces. While a refreshing change from the alarmism of the "bathroom wars," this section is jarring in its activist tone that veers away from the generally inviting tone of the book. More in keeping with this tone, Favale tempers her skeptical reading of mainstream responses to gender dysphoria using her own experience of body dysmorphia and postpartum depression as a parallel. This presentation manages to challenge simplistic notions of femininity, while simultaneously maintaining a commitment to magisterial views and offering a distinctive perspective in the conversation. This empathy continues as she advocates for responding to the needs of transgender people, guided by a commitment to truth and accompaniment.

Favale's book joins two growing sets of literature: attempts to create a true conversation between "truth-in-love" (202) and "love-in-

truth” (208) and critical genealogies of gender theory. Her conversations with transgender people struggling to integrate their gender and faith give her book a uniquely powerful voice. Her discussion of the role intersex reality plays in gender theory, given one of the most in-depth and sympathetic treatments provided by an apologist for magisterial teaching, is made particularly powerful by her use of Flannery O’Connor (136–139). Yet her tone elsewhere becomes incisive almost to the point of mocking, undercutting some of this power. Her excursus into Wonderland for an imagined conversation with Lewis Carroll’s caterpillar (153) represents the most egregious instance. This book delivers a coherent yet complex narrative, arguing its case on persuasive philosophical and aesthetic grounds. Content-wise, Favale tells the same story as similar works, both popular and academic. Scholars familiar with the literature will find key insightful nuggets, but no central idea to differentiate Favale’s contribution, and may wonder at her lack of engagement with many theologians in the field. She relies mostly on John Paul II (with a fascinating excursus into Hildegard of Bingen), not a bad choice given her commitment to magisterial teaching, but a limitation nonetheless. Still, Favale, a professor of English, shines as a writer and has crafted a book that is a joy to read.

Favale’s book targets popular audiences who want to understand the “gender wars,” particularly those already sympathetic to the magisterial view. Undergraduate instructors who are comfortable with its slightly polemical moments will also find it valuable in teaching theology of gender or Christian anthropology.

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Invisible: Theology and the Experience of Asian American Women. By Grace Ji-Sun Kim. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2021. vii + 177. \$28.00.

In this work, Kim argues that the experience of invisibility is a shared experience for all Asian Americans, especially Asian American women. In each chapter, she explores a different lens through which the invisibility of Asian Americans can be understood. For example, she speaks about the history of Asians in America, and how different myths, such as the Yellow Peril myth, were and still are used against Asians in America to push them into the margins of society and render them voiceless (62–64).

What is appreciated about this book is that Kim includes the ways in which certain facets of Asian culture teach Asian women to be invisible. For example, in Chapter 1 Kim explains the realities of