

liberalism, also seem now to be lost and bereft of some real political solutions. Would it also be possible to say that Catholicism in the modern world—particularly the conservative brand—is a bit rudderless? Hart wants to hang onto the utility of this tradition, and there is much to be admired in staking out such a position. This book is empathetic, as any good intellectual history ought to be, but it could have also been more critical. What might it mean that the options thinkers consider now include integralism and the Benedict Option? Is there a way out of secular modernity for Catholicism? In a sense, however, Hart, an accomplished and influential thinker, generously leaves such conclusions to be entertained by the reader.

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John F. Kennedy and the Politics of Faith. By Patrick Lacroix.
Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2021. viii + 263 pp. \$34.95
cloth.

Patrick Lacroix's interesting study argues that the Kennedy years represent an important, if neglected, part of what he terms "the arc of US religious history." He contends that the landscape of faith and politics was reshaped in the three years that JFK held office. For him, the years of Kennedy's presidency did not simply coincide with but rather caused the decline of old denominational animosities, and, furthermore, they encouraged "the development of new partnerships based on a shared ideological outlook" (2). Lacroix argues that the beginnings of the liberal-conservative division within many American religious denominations began during the thousand days that JFK held office and that we are still living with the consequences of this religious transformation.

Lacroix is on a mission to fill what he portrays as a significant scholarly lacuna. He observes correctly that most JFK biographers have neglected to examine the intersection of religion and politics during the Kennedy presidency. He also suggests that notable historians of American Catholicism, such as Patrick Allitt, John McGreevy, and Mark Massa have also tended to "relegate Kennedy to irrelevance by their laconic treatment of his presidency" (229). He acknowledges that some work has been done by scholars like Thomas Carty and David Allen, but he presents his book as a comprehensive account of the intersection of faith and politics throughout Kennedy's term in office.

Lacroix does not give much time to JFK's own Catholic commitments. His effort is not to explore the impact of JFK's personal religious views but rather to examine how religion and the Kennedy presidency intersected. He concludes that religion was "repurposed to promote liberal reform domestically and abroad," especially around matters like racial justice and arms control (18).

Lacroix begins his substantive investigation with a review of the religious background to the 1960 campaign and an analysis of the role of religion in that notable presidential contest. He establishes conclusively that JFK meant what he said in his famous address in Houston on September 12, 1960, when he assured the Protestant ministers that he

would adhere to a strict separation of church and state. Such a stance, of course, eventually led Billy Graham to quip that the country had elected a Baptist president.

Lacroix, however, demonstrates that matters were more complex than perhaps Billy Graham understood. He shows how the Kennedy administration worked with religious groups, including Catholic groups, in developing the Peace Corps, although the administration always emphasized that it did not favor Catholics in any way. The deliberations over funding for education and the Peace Corps clarified well that “the first Catholic president would not blindly serve the interests of his church” (72).

But Lacroix’s book argues that the story should not end with that conclusion. Instead, it elucidates that faith and foreign policy intersected often during the period from 1961 to 1963. Building on the work of historians like Andrew Preston and David Allen, Lacroix demonstrates that “the Kennedy administration evolved from reluctance to draw from U.S. religious sentiments, energies, and activism to direct engagement with Protestant and Catholic leaders as it sought to advance its foreign policy agenda” (80). Here, the influence of Pope John XXIII’s encyclicals and of the calling of the Second Vatican Council provided a more agreeable context in which JFK could operate.

While Kennedy initially had to tread carefully so as not to be seen as overly influenced by “Catholic power,” over time he allowed for some religious influence, particularly in moving to ease tensions in the Cold War after the Cuban Missile Crisis. John XXIII’s *Pacem in Terris* revealed overlapping interests between the United States and the Vatican, especially on the issue of arms control. Lacroix is persuasive on that point, although less so regarding the impact of religion in the Vietnam conflict.

Lacroix devotes a fine chapter to the mobilizing of religious groups on the civil rights issue. He promotes the familiar narrative that the Kennedy administration overcame its initial reluctance on civil rights in the breakthrough summer of 1963 so that thereafter it sought to utilize religious support to promote its civil rights agenda. There is certainly some evidence for this, but Lacroix himself admits that there is a variety of interpretations available here: “Was religious involvement in policymaking an attempt by a secular president to instrumentalize religion, or the same president’s genuine well-meaning sense that faith could and should serve the social good?” (146) The author leans to the latter. The evidence suggests more of the former.

The author brings his key arguments together in his final chapter, which presents the Kennedy years as “transformative” for American religious history. By 1963, Kennedy’s Catholicism was no longer the political liability it had been during the 1960 campaign. The incumbent had demonstrated his commitment to disestablishment and to a certain secularization through his support of the Supreme Court decisions banning prayer and the reading of Bible verses in public schools. Now the issue was increasingly liberal ideology versus a more conservative viewpoint for both Protestants and Catholics.

Lacroix admits that there were a range of other factors influencing this developing division during the mid- and later 1960s, but he holds strongly to the view that the Kennedy administration contributed notably to this major shift in the politics of American religion. Thus, JFK must be considered a consequential figure in the realignment of U.S. religion.

Perhaps LaCroix exaggerates the extent of Kennedy’s influence. Certainly, he does not sufficiently engage the persuasive arguments of Robert Wuthnow’s *The Restructuring of American Religion* (Princeton University Press, 1988), which explained the decline in denominational distinctions and the emergence of more ideological special interest groups in the 1960s as a consequence of such larger social/political forces as

the rapid expansion of higher education, the enhanced role of government, and the decline of mainline Protestantism. In this view, JFK's presidency coincided with the larger religious restructuring but did not cause or significantly influence it. Nonetheless, Lacroix's book is a valuable contribution to the literature on religion and politics. By moving the discussion away from Kennedy's personal religious views to how his administration engaged religious groups and viewpoints, he has advanced the discussion. His book illustrates that despite the enormous literature on the Kennedy presidency, there is much still to discover and debate.

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***To Think Christianly: A History of L'Abri, Regent College, and the Christian Study Center Movement.* By Charles E. Cotherman.**
Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2020. xviii + 301 pp. \$35.00 paper.

What is a book on Christian study centers doing in a journal like *Church History*? Why should scholars of American religion care about this seemingly obscure corner of campus religion? A hint at an answer can be found in the subtitle to Charles Cotherman's book, which mentions L'Abri, the Swiss headquarters of Francis Schaeffer, a godfather of the religious right, whose books sold over three million copies between 1968 and 1990. The rest of the answer can be found in Cotherman's comprehensive and deeply researched book, which brings the receipts for those with eyes to see and ears to hear.

Cotherman's study is an important chapter in the larger story of student religious life, a sector of American religion that often flies under the radar. At key moments in American religious history, student religious organizations have provided the organizational technologies (to borrow a term from the educational historian Lawrence Cremin) for movements that matter.

Without the international student networks of the collegiate YMCA, Howard Thurman and Benjamin E. Mays would not have visited Gandhi's India. Without the Methodist *motive* magazine, a generation of mainline Protestant women might not have encountered feminist approaches to Christianity, including Hillary Rodham Clinton, who kept every issue.

Like the 1930s YMCA and the postwar *motive*, the first Christian study centers were shaped by twentieth-century ecumenical liberal Protestantism. As Cotherman notes early in the book, one of the earliest examples was the Christian Faith-and-Life Community at the University of Texas at Austin. An expression of progressive Christianity, this Texas experiment kept Austin religion weird, hosting the 1961 wedding of future Students for a Democratic Society leaders Tom and Casey Hayden. During the heyday of the campus ecumenical movement, similar centers were founded at Brown, Duke, and the University of Wisconsin.

A hybrid of the campus ministry, the retreat center, and the seminar, a Christian study center combines spiritual, intellectual, and artistic pursuits, often in a brick-and-mortar home. Many, but not all, are located next to college campuses. At