

the varying streams of thought in the fourth century and offer a new way of approaching the study of trinitarian doctrine.

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*Keeping Faith in Congress: Why Persistence, Compassion, and Teamwork Will Save our Democracy.* By Lois Capps. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2018. v + 152 pages. \$22.99 (paper).

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In the preface, former congresswoman Lois Capps insists that *Keeping Faith in Congress* is not “a political memoir—I honestly don’t consider my life dramatic enough to write that kind of book.” Perhaps she is being too modest because Capps has an interesting story to tell. The daughter of a Lutheran minister, she studied nursing at Pacific Lutheran University. It was there that she met her husband, Walter Capps. They began their marriage at Yale, where Walter studied for a doctorate degree in the philosophy of religion. Walter became a professor at the University of California at Santa Barbara, and Lois split her time between raising children and working as a school nurse. In 1996, he won a seat in the US House of Representative but died suddenly of a heart attack just nine months into his term. Lois ran in the special election to complete his term, and thus began a nineteen-year career in Congress. Three years into her time in Congress, her oldest daughter died of cancer, and it is clear from the book that the death of her husband and daughter in such a short time period had a profound impact on her. She even titles one the chapters “The Role of Loss.”

The reader gets a clear sense of how religion has shaped Capps as a person of faith. In addressing the losses in her life, she writes, “Without Faith, these losses would be unbearable for me.” She discusses the kneeler that she and her husband had in their home while at Yale so that they could pray together. She writes that she reads the Bible every morning. She explains that biblical examples of “servant leadership” defined how she approached her role as a member of the House of Representatives. She describes how she helped form a women’s Bible study and prayer group as a new member of Congress and became active in the Faith and Politics Institute. She regularly attended the institute’s Thursday morning “Reflections Group,” which she describes as both a “true blessing” and an “alternative” to the “more conservative Prayer Breakfast,” which meets at the same time.

Yet while we have a clear sense of how religion has shaped Capps’ life and how she saw her role in Congress, the book is lacking about how her Christian

faith informed her *political beliefs*. This would have been a welcome addition to the book. For example, she complains in the preface that Democrats “have ceded all talk of faith to conservatives” even adding that “I think an argument can be made that Jesus was a progressive in his day.” She mentions that Republican women were “more eager” to join her women’s Bible study group than Democratic women. But she doesn’t explain why her own politics as a Democrat are different. It would be interesting to know how this played out in the decisions she made as a congresswoman. For example, she mentions how her views of Planned Parenthood were informed by her time as a school nurse. She is clear that she has liberal political views about reproductive health. But as a woman of faith, why are her views so divergent from those who align themselves with the “religious right”?

*Washingtonian* magazine identified Capps as the “nicest member of Congress” four years in a row. And Capps begins her book by promising that it won’t be didactic. Maybe she is simply too nice to be preachy. But the troubled politics in the United States right now could use a good sermon.

Capps’ book would be suitable for an undergraduate library or an undergraduate course on religion and politics. Much of the book discusses the challenges she faced as a representative, such as staying in touch with constituents, setting up a good team of congressional staff, and finding allies to support favored legislation. The reader learns about issues that mattered to Capps during her time in office and how her work helped to advance those causes. Although other books such as David Price’s *The Congressional Experience* do a more thorough job of describing a congressional career, Capps’ book is much more personal and reflective in a way that undergraduates might appreciate.

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*Confession: Catholics, Repentance, and Forgiveness in America.* By Patrick W. Carey. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018. xiv + 375 pages. \$34.95.  
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In a chapter in a soon-to-be-published book on the sacrament of reconciliation, I begin by pondering why my experience of celebrating this sacrament as a priest is not as positive as my experience of celebrating all the other sacraments. Challenges to the contemporary practice of sacramental confession include differing understandings of mortal sin, insufficient catechesis and implementation of the new rites, and severe restrictions on the use of general absolution, which could help people to reflect more deeply upon