

God Land: A Story of Faith, Loss, and Renewal in Middle America

Lyz Lenz

Indiana University Press (Aug 1, 2019)

Hardcover \$22.00 (168pp)

978-0-253-04153-1

Lyz Lenz's *God Land* is a nuanced examination of the political, personal, and religious complexity of middle America.

Beginning with Lenz's own faith-filled dream of a new church (one which ended up dissolving) and the challenge of compromising in an ending marriage, the author's personal story is the impetus for her research. It comes to mirror religion's broader fragmentation.

Lenz's marriage broke apart in the wake of the 2016 election, but just like the division that took over the nation, the break only revealed trouble that had been there all along. The divisive nature of faith and politics in contemporary America is what this book is about, and its message is vital: the divides we create are dangerous, and faith that claims to bring people together often leads a ferocious charge to division.

Showcasing a deep understanding of middle America that's devoid of stereotypes, platitudes, and weak generalities, this journalistic narrative is populated by a wide range of voices who put a face on the hurt, confusion, fear, hope, and healing of everyday Americans. Their experiences suggest that people should come together—in faith, across differences, and with persistence.

Though the book is liberal in tone, it does not aim for political movements, but rather for open-handedness, generosity, working against authoritarianism, and thinking beyond orthodoxy. The pain it captures is heart-wrenching, but it still brims with hope. Stories of generosity (a gift from a stranger) and resilience in faith (Lenz and her ex-husband trying out around twenty churches in a handful of years) speak to paths forward and the possibility of healed divisions.

God Land is a courageous narrative account of the religious and political divides that threaten to rip America down its middle.

MELISSA WUSKE (July/August 2019)

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