

The affection of the author for his subject matter comes through most clearly in his chapter on the “fittingness of Mary’s assumption.” L. says that his intention is not to prove the truth of the dogma of the assumption but its fittingness. He quotes John Henry Newman to that effect who believed that “nothing is too high for her to whom God owes His human life; no exuberance of grace, no excess of glory, but is becoming, but is to be expected there, where God has lodged Himself, whence God has issued” (131). Notwithstanding this less-than-proof purpose, L. takes three of the primordial pieces of the revelation—creation and the fall, the election of Israel, and the Incarnation of the Word—and shows how Mary’s assumption ties into one package the relevance of these central truths of revelation. It is not an odd add-on. On the contrary as the Anglican theologian John Macquarrie observes, Mary’s assumption sheds light on “the beginning of a vaster (dare we even say, cosmic or universal?) assumption” (cf. his *Mary for All Christians*, 2003).

L. is at pains to show how her assumption is an augur of where all of creation is headed, according to Paul. “The whole created world will be set free from its bondage to decay” (Rom 8:21). Mary’s bodily assumption is an eloquent piece of evidence indicating that “when the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory’” (1 Cor 15:54). Therefore her destiny prefigures the destiny of all who believe in her son. The author obviously would think it was impoverishing not to have this belief as part of one’s faith.

This belief as a dogma of the Catholic faith was not generated by the hierarchy or the papacy. It had its start in the fifth century with the faithful’s growing belief that Mary, being “blessed among women,” would include the blessing of her bodily assumption into heaven. Over the centuries that belief was continually confirmed by the devotional and liturgical life of the faithful.

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*The Power and Vulnerability of Love: A Theological Anthropology.* By Elizabeth O’Donnell Gandolfo. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2015. Pp. xi + 343. \$39.

Elizabeth O’Donnell Gandolfo asks, “What is it about human nature fundamentally that makes us capable of inflicting suffering on others and on ourselves?” (10). Gandolfo provides a unique approach by addressing this question neither through a theology of suffering, nor a theodicy, but rather through a theological anthropology.

More specifically, G. offers a theological anthropology based upon human vulnerability. For G., vulnerability is the complete opening of one’s entire being to an other. In this way, it is a location in which one encounters both the horror of violence and the spirit of hope, healing, and wholeness. She argues that vulnerability is the original condition of being human. It goes part and parcel with finitude, is not merely the consequence of oppression, nor is it punishment for sin. It is a place where human and

divine meet and, as such, is an experiential and hermeneutical key for understanding God, humankind, and the cosmos. Although G. repeatedly points out that vulnerability can be idolized with destructive consequences, she remains convinced that we must adequately understand this concept and place it at the core of Christian anthropology.

Her purpose is not merely a retrieval of vulnerability but also an attempt at sketching a larger theological vision. To this end, G.'s argument unfolds in three parts. In Part I, she offers a thorough conceptualization of vulnerability through exploring women's narratives of maternity and natality as "icons of the human condition." G. expands upon this in Part II by bringing vulnerability into dialogue with the questions of God's relationship with humankind. She offers three insightful midrashes on the maternal experience of Mary of Nazareth and these crystallize three aspects of God's trinitarian relationship with humankind: God's ultimate invulnerability, God taking on vulnerability in the Incarnation, and God the Holy Spirit accompanying vulnerable humans through trauma as Divine Love, understood as Eros/compassion.

G. concludes her study in Part III by discussing practices of embracing vulnerability without enabling one's own anxiety about vulnerability to lead to violence against another. To this end, she discusses practices of "resilience to harm" and "resistance to violence," namely: remembered suffering, contemplative kenosis, and solidarity with vulnerable others. Here, she draws deeply from the theologies of J. B. Metz and Sarah Coakley (among many others) and brings them into dialogue with the autobiographical writings of Mary Karr and Leywah Gbowee who demonstrate these practices.

G. has performed a great service in her careful retrieval of human vulnerability as foundational to Christian anthropology and using it to provide a deeper understanding of the roots of violence in the human condition. Furthermore, her pairing of experiences of maternity and natality with feminist hermeneutics casts new light on the questions of God's power, God's love, and God's presence among us. There also are two smaller details worth mentioning. First, G. roots her investigation in the lived experiences of mothering, both her own and those of others. This is an area of female experience often idealized by traditionalists and maligned by progressives but G. accomplishes a critical exploration and careful embrace of motherhood, mothering, and "other mothers." She writes, "Women's diverse experiences of maternity and natality, suffused as they are with painful ambiguities, provide particularly powerful icons of our tragic condition and the inevitability of vulnerability it entails" (34).

Second, G. adds texture and richness to the Christian understanding of the incarnation through the use of what might be called gynocentric language. Although employing gynocentric language is not the core of her project, neither is it inconsequential. For example, G. writes, "The Christ child was no imitation of human nature. He was a bona fide human baby who entered the world from a contracting uterus, through a stretching cervix, vagina, and perineum, in a vulnerable mess of mucus and blood" (231–32). In such descriptions, G. deepens not only understandings of the incarnation but also God's unique relationship with Mary and all humankind.

Despite the astute and creative work being done, at times G.'s systematic instincts lead her to extend her vision so widely that it becomes unwieldy. G. opens doors to directions that are systematically connected to her project—such as the Trinity,

salvation, sin, or God's suffering—but either closes them quickly or walks through without sufficient explanation or elaboration. This can be distracting and leave the reader wondering why she places so much on the table that she has no intention of developing in this particular work. She admits that it is impossible to adequately address each topic and integrate it fully into her theological anthropology, but this weakness remains.

All in all, G.'s book is a resounding success. This creative work deserves to be studied by a wide audience of fellow scholars, graduate students, and those seeking to better understand the foundation of the question of innocent suffering.

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*The Eucharist: Origins and Contemporary Understandings.* By Thomas O'Loughlin. New York: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2015. Pp. xvii + 229. \$120; \$34.95.

Western eucharistic theology since Trent has been focused on the limited questions of Real Presence and sacrifice, despite the 20th-century recovery of more capacious models for the Eucharist. O'Loughlin argues that this is because of a fundamental misconstrual of the Eucharist which sees it as an encounter with Christ in a special mode set apart from other human experience. The book presents a compelling alternate vision: that the early church recognized that their needs, the gifts of food and drink, and the thanksgiving rendered for these gifts to the Father, were themselves the ultimate model for Christian life.

O'L. distinguishes the "myth of monastic reform," which seeks to recover originary ideas from later deformation, and the "myth of development," which clarifies original insights through progressive reflection (93). The Eucharist, he argues, is best seen within the former model of history: the church "forgot" the meaning of the thanksgiving meal when it whittled it down to a token of bread and wine (88). While it is medieval scholasticism that comes in for the bulk of the blame of this forgetting, its roots are in the second century, where already, any eucharistic association that leads to the later division between the sacred and profane must be attributed to "the familiar shapes of Greco-Roman religion," which eventually leads to the unjustifiable and ecumenically problematic question of validity (98).

In fact, eucharistic theology is neither marked by an originary "forgetting" nor solely by theological development; instead, each generation of the church has responded to new challenges by making sophisticated and selective developments on aspects of the complex tradition they have inherited. In order to understand the ongoing hold of scholastic questions like "What is required for the Eucharist to be validly celebrated?" and thus to reach an ecumenical consensus and spiritual renewal that recovers some of the insights of the early church, we need to understand the selective memory of the churches both sympathetically and critically. Both thanksgiving to the Father and encounter with Christ are grounded in the NT sources: to say we should