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## Karen O'Donnell, Broken Bodies: The Eucharist, Mary, and the Body in Trauma Theology

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Karen O'Donnell, *Broken Bodies: The Eucharist, Mary, and the Body in Trauma Theology* (London: SCM, 2018), 231 pp. Hbk. £65. ISBN 978-0-334-05624-9.

Fusing systematic theology and personal experience, *Broken Bodies* theologically reorients its readers, shifting familiar and comfortable reference points. A bold, powerful, destabilizing and profoundly honest study, it gives to both doctrine and pastoral theology the full weight that each deserves and dissolves any barrier that may be presumed to exist between them.

Only in 1980 did the standard US manual list post-traumatic stress disorder as a psychiatric illness. O'Donnell's study may help theologians also to begin to take trauma seriously, by demonstrating how reflection on trauma may instruct us. Trauma entails ruptures in bodily integrity, in time, and in cognition and language. Recovery involves the re-establishment of bodily integrity, a reconnection with memory and narrative, and a witnessing community to hear and validate. Theology, in which 'ancient events press into present day and make their presence felt' (p 11), has much to contribute to these. However, to do so it needs to return to the body, forsaking doctrines of God grounded in impassibility and transcendence.

The principal reorientation this demands is a shift away from a theology centred on the Cross or the Resurrection to a theology grounded in what O'Donnell terms the 'Annunciation-Incarnation event'. This is where the somatic memory of trauma theology leads us, to an interval between conception and gestation that may be marked by new life or, in the events of miscarriage or stillbirth, by death. In either case, the elements of life are powerfully presented in the broken body and poured-out blood and water of the Eucharist, in which they non-identically repeat the incarnation in fragmentary form.

This hermeneutic of the 'Annunciation-Incarnation' event leads O'Donnell to recognize the ontological continuity between Christ's body and the body of Mary. In their eucharistic theologies, Andrew of Crete and Germanos of Constantinople associate Mary with the bread. Others portray Christ gaining physical substance from his mother's breast or, encouraged by the ancient belief that

breastmilk came from blood, liken eucharistic nourishment to milk. A further corollary is a theology of consecration focused on the epiclesis of the Spirit, who overshadows Mary and causes her to conceive Christ, rather than on the words of institution. These close relations between Mary and Christ's body, and Mary and the Spirit, help account for O'Donnell's siding with Cyril of Alexandria against Nestorius: for Cyril, taking Christ's divinity seriously meant recognizing Mary as *Theotokos* or God-bearer. However, O'Donnell also acknowledges Cyril's privileging of bodily integrity, clearly stating: 'Bodily division and disunity are unacceptable in this theology of wholeness' (p. 67). For this reason, it seems that Cyril may ultimately be a problematic ally for a trauma theologian, who may not wish to resolve brokenness so rapidly.

Turning to the theology of priesthood, O'Donnell views the priest liturgically acting as much 'in the role of Mary' (p. 91) as in the role of Christ. As Mary birthed Christ, the priest re-births or re-members the eucharistic elements, and like a breastfeeding mother—or wet nurse, or bottle-feeding mother—passes on the Son's nourishment to the church. Quoting Rowan Williams's statement that priesthood is concerned with the 'service of the space cleared by God', O'Donnell presents Mary as a priest serving God in the space of her womb (pp. 80, 108), finding considerably apostolic and patristic precedent for this image.

From a Trinitarian perspective, a woman who has miscarried, or is in the grips of a stillbirth, with the 'feeling of death slipping between the thighs' (p. 164), may be closer than any other human to the Father giving up his Son to death on the Cross. As Serene Jones writes, death is inside such a woman, yet she does not die. O'Donnell writes: 'If one is to take women's embodied experiences seriously, then there is an awful, tragic and wrenching sense in which, through miscarriage, women's bodies become revelatory of the Triune God. As women made in the image of God they have the profound ability to image within their own bodies the death experienced at the very heart of the Trinity. The grief of the miscarrying woman offers a glimpse into the grief of God at the Cross.' (ibid.)

As this indicates, although she contests the exclusive identification of sacrifice with the Cross, O'Donnell doesn't reject the trope of sacrifice but reconceives it in Marian terms within a context of love. For Mary, the Annunciation-Incarnation event was traumatic. When a new life suddenly appeared within her, Mary's bodily integrity was ruptured. Because of her abnormal conception, her sense of time was ruptured. When questioning the angel, she displays the rupture of her cognition and language. Yet Mary recovers from her trauma through creative transformation, receiving safe hospitality from her cousin Elizabeth and, in her Magnificat, constructing a new narrative and outlining a mission of social action. Mary is thus a mode of trauma recovery for us, as well as showing how churches may be hospitable to trauma victims.

This is a highly important creative and constructive project that could be further developed. Although the trauma experienced by Mary is uniquely generative because physically caused by Christ, there are many other biblical figures who may also be considered traumatized, such as Jesus's disciples, whose lives are ruptured by the call to follow him, and most obviously Jesus himself, before and during his passion, and most deeply on the Cross. This trauma surely extended to all his followers, whose expectations of the kind of salvation that he would bring were shattered, but especially to those who remained with him during his death. More widely, accounts of the deaths of early Christian martyrs typically amplify their traumatic dimension, and it would be interesting to examine why. Pastorally there are other sources of trauma, such as marital and relationship breakup, redundancy and injury, not to mention large-scale events such as wars and terror attacks. This project could be extended in several directions, drawing on more biblical and historical material to build further links between systematic and pastoral theology, thereby enriching both.

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