

GIFT OF LOVE

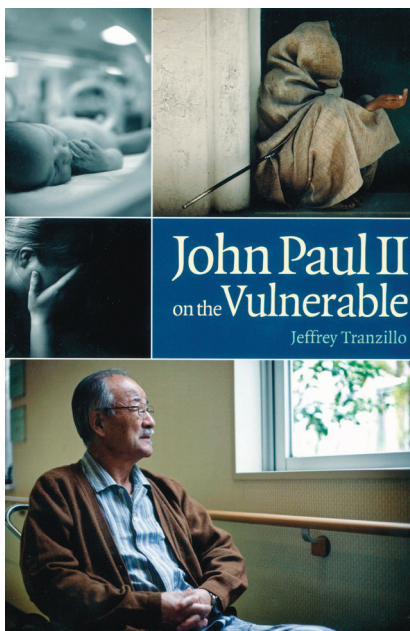
REVIEWED BY KATHLEEN A. KALB, Ph.D., RN, CNE

Motivated by the “destructive disregard for the objective truth about the personhood of the unborn” and the “pernicious claim that the weakest and most defenseless human beings serve no useful purpose and so have no place in society or in any community of persons,” author Jeffrey Tranzillo examines the life, work and writings of Blessed John Paul II through the lens of human vulnerability.

Tranzillo cuts through the philosophical and theological density of Pope John Paul II’s writings to offer a lucid and accessible introduction that highlights the dignity and personal agency of the vulnerable. He argues persuasively that, according to John Paul II, human beings, even in the earliest stages of development or under conditions of disability and decline, contribute to and enrich the human community “as a gift of love . . . to be received in love, according to God’s creative plan.”

He opens with an engaging summary of John Paul II’s life, thought and work. In it, Tranzillo describes how living “in the crucible of both personal and national sufferings” shaped John Paul’s thinking about human dignity and personhood.

Tranzillo then systematically examines the development of John Paul II’s understanding of the human person in his major philosophical and theological writings, including *Love and Responsibility*, *Person and Act*, the “theology of the body,” his social encyclicals and *Evangelium Vitae*. Focusing on the relevance of these writings to the vulnerable, Tranzillo shows convincingly that “every vulnerable person can contribute immeasurably and indispensably to



JOHN PAUL II ON THE VULNERABLE

BY JEFFREY TRANZILLO

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the human community in some way by the actions of which he or she is capable.” By emphasizing “the utter uniqueness of the person,” Tranzillo points out that those unable to even gesture or speak contribute by their act of simply being there.

By stressing “John Paul II’s conviction that the fundamental dynamism of the human person is, from the very beginning, directed toward full human expression and communion with other persons,” Tranzillo makes an original and important contribution to those in Catholic health care about what it means to advocate for, serve and act in solidarity with the vulnerable. Accord-

ing to Tranzillo, it is the vulnerable person who elicits our response to love, and it is in our “interpersonal self-giving” in relationships with the vulnerable that we are opened “to personal communion with Christ: ‘As you did it to one of the least of these brethren, you did it to me’ (Matthew 25:40).”

Finally, Tranzillo describes his study as “both an invitation and contribution” to those who are willing and able to provide “indispensable testimony in support of the objective truth about the personhood, the personal agency, and the intrinsic personal dignity of even the most vulnerable human beings.”

For anyone interested in learning more about John Paul II, Tranzillo offers a unique perspective to the life and writings of this defender of the vulnerable. For those in Catholic health care, the importance of Tranzillo’s *John Paul II on the Vulnerable* is precisely its focus on Jesus’ own healing mission and his preferential care for the vulnerable and the poor.

In a culture that focuses almost exclusively on productivity and measurable outcomes as the bottom line, Tranzillo reminds us that Catholic health care is not primarily about productivity and measurable outcomes; it is about responding to vulnerable persons and their “irrepressible need and desire to relate to the world, and, above all, to other people in knowledge and love.” Our bottom line is the human person, especially those most vulnerable.

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