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SARAH COAKLEY
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SARAH COAKLEY – A SYMPOSIUM

GÖSTA HALLONSTEN

This issue of *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift* contains the papers given at the Sarah Coakley symposium held at the Centre for Theology and Religious Studies, Lund University on April 15th 2009. The order of presentation during the symposium is followed. By courtesy of Dr. Coakley we are able to include also her responses to the papers given by other contributors to the symposium. Hence, the issue could be read, not only as an introduction to Sarah Coakley's theology, but as a witness to the reception of her theology in Sweden as well.

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Introduction to the symposium

Two Cambridges dominate the academic career of Sarah Coakley: Cambrige U.K. and Cambridge, Massachusetts, the site of Harvard University. She studied at both places and earned her doctorate at Cambridge, U.K. After teaching positions at the University of Lancaster and Oriel College, Oxford, Sarah Coakley was appointed professor of Christian Theology at Harvard Divinity School in 1993. From 1995 she was the Mallinckrodt professor of Divinity at Harvard, only to return to her original Cambridge as Norris-Hulse professor of Divinity in 2007. In 2006 she was awarded a Doctorate in Theology, *honoris causa,* by the Faculty of Theology, Lund University.

On a personal note, I would like to mention that I first met Sarah Coakley and her husband James F. Coakley, when my wife and I visited Britta and Krister Stendahl at their home in Boston in 2003. The decease of Krister Stendahl last year and the founding of a Krister Stendahl chair of theology of religions at this faculty have reminded us of the extent to which our compatriot was known and appreciated throughout the world. That Krister Stendahl was an important figure in the promotion of Christian Theology at the rather secular Harvard University is clear to me. He was also behind the appointment of Sarah Coakley to Harvard Divinity School and supported her all along. This symposium should therefore be seen also as a tribute to his memory.

What are the characteristic features of the theological work of Sarah Coakley? To most of us clearly feminism and gender theology has acted as the main entrance to her thought and this is clearly adequate. One might refer here to her widely read *Powers and Submissions. Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender* (Oxford, Blackwell 2002). Yet, a *caveat* should be put forward immediately. Professor Coakley cannot easily be classified as a feminist theologian in the "traditional" sense. And also, wherever you enter into her writings, you will rather soon encounter different strands of theological thought that according to conventional wisdom could not as easily be combined as the Anglican priest and theologian Sarah Coakley do this. Yet, the famous comprehensiveness of the Anglican tradition is combined here with German *akribia*, resulting in a thoroughly systematic effort to think through Christian faith from a great variety of perspectives – the *théologie totale* that professor Coakely will refer to in today's lecture. In this connection it is especially striking that Sarah Coakley wrote her dissertation on the German liberal theologian Ernst Troeltsch, the title of which is *Christ without Absolutes: A Study of the Christology of Ernst Troeltsch* (Oxford, O.U.P. 1988). As she has told Rupert Shortt in the interview book *God's Advocates: Christian Thinkers in Conversation* (London, Darton, Longman & Todd 2005) she had been influenced in her youth by the debate on John Robinson's famous *Honest to God,* and by the liberalism that reigned at Cambridge in her undergraduate years. Yet, the fascination with Troeltsch was not only dictated by the honest historical questioning of Christian doctrines by this great German scholar. As she concedes in the interview, the

troeltschian approach as a matter of fact did not leave much of the Christ of faith. In Troeltsch, though, she found also a fascination with 'mysticism' and an emphasis on the social and cultural forms of Christian doctrine. Those topics run all through the story of Coakley's theology. What is so striking, further, in this systematic theologian, is the emphasis on prayer, especially contemplative prayer, and also on practice as a locus for doing theology. Desire, this basic theme of Christian mystic tradition – known especially through the interpretation of the Song of Songs – figures prominently in professor Coakley's theology. Desire is what characterizes human beings in relation to each other and especially in relation to God (see e.g. "Pleasure Principles: Toward a Contemporary Theology of Desire", *Harvard Divinity Bulletin*, Vol. 33, No. 2, 2005). The 'erotic' language of mystic theology is indispensable in voicing what goes on in contemplative prayer, in the submission of human beings to the Creator. Un-anticipated things tend to happen in this connection, however: God suddenly appears as the desiring lover seeking out the human soul at every cost. The vulnerability that so often has been associated with the female and human in contradistinction to the male and divine turns out to be a characteristic feature of God. Gender stereotypes are being transformed here, human beings also undergo transformation, and the very concept of God that is so often taken for granted is being transformed. Prayer, desire, transformation – Sarah Coakley's engagement with Christian mystics from Gregory of Nyssa to St. Therese of Avila and John of the Cross is a fascinating, recurring theme throughout her theology.

This can be seen even in her contribution to the volume *Pain and its Transformations: The Interface of Biology and Culture* (co-ed. With Kay Shelemay, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University press 2007). Her article is entitled: "Palliative or Intensification? Pain and Christian Contemplation in the Spirituality of the Sixteenth-Century Carmelites" (pp.77-100). This engagement with interdisciplinary work is a prominent feature in her academic work. In addition to the book on Pain she has edited conference volumes on *Religion and the Body* (Cambridge, C.U.P. 1997), *Re-thinking Gregory of Nyssa* (Oxford, Blackwell 2003) and *Re-Thinking Dionysius the Areopagite* (Oxford, Blackwell 2009). In preparation are further volumes like: *Spiritual Healing: Science, Meaning and Discernment* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans 2009) and *Evolution, Games and God: The Principle of Cooperation* (Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press 2009/10). The latter volume is the result of a research project together with the Austrian biologist Martin A. Nowak and sponsored by the Templeton Foundation (cf. "God and Evolution: A New Solution", *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* Vol. 35, No. 2 & 3, 2007). To continue along those same lines, the bibliography of professor Coakley entails a vast number of articles, which shows the many-sided interests and knowledge of this theologian. Having training in analytic philosophy, it comes as no surprise that she has been involved in discussions with Richard Swinburne, William Alston, i.a. on such topics as e.g. the resurrection of Christ ("Response to William Alston", in eds. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall and Gerald O'Collins, *The Resurrection,* Oxford, O.U.P. 1997) and the understanding of trinitarian theology ("'Persons' in the Social Doctrine of the Trinity: A Critique of Current Analytic Disussion", in eds. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall and Gerald O'Collins, *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Doctrine of the Trinity,* Oxford, O.U.P. 1999). She has also treated analytical philosophy of religion from a feminist perspective, a task for which she is exceptionally well prepared (cf. "Analytic Philosophy of Religion in Feminist Perspective: some Questions", in *Powers and Submissions*). Looking at her website of Cambridge University you realize that the emphasis of Sarah Coakley's present teaching and research interests is clearly on philosophical theology and the role of philosophy in systematic theology. I dare not continue mention all fields in which she holds an expertise or every issue that figures in her writings.

Coming to a close of this rather fragmentary presentation of the theology of Sarah Coakley I'd like to return to gender theology and to the central role of the doctrine of the Trinity in her thought. The first volume of four in her designed systematic theology, which is expected to be published this year, is entitled: *God, Sexuality and the Self: An Essay 'On the Trinity'*. This title hints at two prominent features of the theological work of professor Coakley. First, she affirms the common interest of

all feminist theologians of whatever brand towards ”a critical analysis of the patriarchal bias of the traditional Christian symbol system” (”Feminist Theology” in eds. James C Livingston and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, *Modern Christian Thought: Volume Two: The Twentieth Century,* Minneapolis, Fortress 2000, p. 438). She continues: “Once this is acknowledged, no retreat is possible: there is simply a choice between a range of differing methodologies…” (ib.) Although one might concur to Mark Oppenheimer that “Sarah Coakley reconstructs feminism”(http://www.religion-online.org), the emphasis is as much on feminism as on reconstruction. Yet, and this is the second point I wanted to underscore, Sarah Coakley not only reconstructs feminism, she retrieves Christian tradition - or possibly we should say reconstructs it – in an intriguing way that entails a good deal of turns and moves that will surprise readers of any sort. After all, the claim of our distinguished guest is to develop a *théologie totale.* Hence the fundamental question of today’s lecture “Is there a Future for Gender and Theology?” On Gender, Contemplation, and the Systematic Task”.

For a full bibliography of Sarah Coakley’s published works see:
http://www.divinity.cam.ac.uk/faculty/coakley.html

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Is there a Future for Gender and Theology?

On Gender, Contemplation, and the Systematic Task

SARAH COAKLEY

'Is there a future for gender and (systematic) theology?' One might well wonder, and that for more than one reason. On the one hand, 'feminist theology' of the 1970s and '80s is widely seen, now, as having effectively exhausted its ecclesiastical potential (a matter we could discuss); and gender studies, manifestly alive and kicking in contrast, is predominantly secular and often actively anti-theological in tone. Not for nothing, therefore, has Pope Benedict XVI recently issued a charge against it. My answer to my own question, however, will - of course - be 'yes': there *is* a future for gender and systematic theology; but to get to how and why, I shall first have to rehearse a number of (very good) reasons why it is often held these days that systematic theology is itself a doomed undertaking; and why its classic blindness to questions of power, gender and sexuality makes it seemingly oxymoronic positively to promote a *systematic* theology engaged with such issues. So what I shall be arguing today is something – perhaps - a little surprising. My claim will be that *only* systematic theology (of a particular sort) can adequately and effectively respond to the rightful critiques that gender studies and political and liberation theology have laid at its door. And *only* gender studies, inversely, and its accompanying political insights, can thus properly re-animate 'systematic theology' for the future.

Now the combination of these particular two sides of my argument is admittedly unusual. It is customary, as just noted, for post-modern gender theorists (insofar as they have dealings with matters of religion at all) to be extremely sceptical about the project of 'systematic theology'. It is perhaps even more common, conversely, for systematic theologians to be dismissive, even derogatory, about theologians interested in feminism or gender (consider Pannenberg, Jüngel, Jenson, Gunton). It is rare indeed – although not completely unknown – for male systematic theologians of any stature to take the category of gender as even a significant *locus* for discussion; and when they do, they tend to import a gender theory from the secular realm without a sufficiently critical *theological* assessment of it (consider von Balthasar and Moltmann). I shall be concerned to show why this false disjunction between systematic theology and gender studies needs not so much to be overcome, but rather to be approached from a different, and mind-changing, direction. A robustly theological, indeed precisely *trinitarian*, perspective on gender is required, not one that merely smuggles secular gender presumptions into the divine realm at the outset. It is the very threeness of God, I shall argue, transformatively met in the Spirit, which gives the key to a view of gender that is appropriately founded in bodily practices of prayer. That 'particular sort' of systematic theology I propose, then (and here is the major *novum* I lay before you), must involve the purgative contemplative practice of silence as its undergirding point of reference - an ascetic activity which is peculiarly equipped to search and transform, over the long haul, the arena of sexual (and indeed all other) desires. It thus involves an understanding of theology in progressive transformation - *in via* as we might say - and one founded not in any secular rationality or theory of selfhood, but in a spiritual practice of attention that mysteriously challenges and *expands* the range of rationality, and simultaneously darkens and breaks one's hold on previous certainties. A theology that starts from, and continually returns to, this practice is one that in no way can sidestep the urgent exigencies of questions of desire, but one that also knows the dangers of any merely mindless activation of them. This is, as I have described my method elsewhere, a 'total theology' (*théologie totale*, in the spirit of the French

Annales school '*l'histoire totale'*); not because it is 'totalizing' in a political sense we shall shortly discuss - *au contraire* -, but because it attends, contemplatively, to every level of a doctrine's instantiation and outworking, and every manifestation of that doctrine's range in the realm of human expressions and the academic disciplines.

So much by way of brief introduction. I want to move now to the first major undertaking of this paper – a brief examination of the three most significant contemporary critiques, as I see it, of the very idea of 'systematic theology'. Note that for these purposes I propose to define 'systematic theology' thus: it is an *integrated* presentation of Christian truth, however perceived (that's what 'system' here connotes); *wherever one chooses to start has implications for the whole, and the parts must fit together*. However briefly, or lengthily, it is explicated (and the shorter versions have, in Christian tradition, often been at least as elegant, effective and enduring as the longer ones), 'systematic theology' attempts to provide a coherent and alluring unfolding of the connected parts of its vision.

Why is systematic theology distrusted?

Why, then, is systematic theology deemed contentious in our own post-modern age, even as it – paradoxically – enjoys a notable period of revival? Why is 'order' so often perceived as a front for abuse, and 'system' as an assumed repression?

Three, often interlocked, contemporary forms of resistance to systematic theology can readily be identified, and cumulatively they might seem to be powerful. No one here will be unfamiliar with these critiques, and so I shall outline them only briefly. After I have done so, I shall return to the issue of desire which animates my systematic project, and show how these problems connect to it.

The first resistance to systematic theology resides in the philosophical critique of so-called 'onto-theology': it claims that systematic theology falsely, and idolatrously, turns God into an object of human knowledge. The second resistance arises from the moral or political critique of so-called 'hegemony': it sees systematic theology (amongst other discourses that provide any purportedly complete vision of an intellectual landscape), as inappropriately totalizing, and thereby necessarily suppressive of the voices and perspectives of marginalized people. The third resistance is the French feminist critique, arising from a particular brand of Lacanian psychoanalytic thought. It accuses systematic thinking (of any sort) of being 'phallocentric', that is, ordered according to the 'symbolic',[1] 'male' mode of thinking which seeks to clarify, control and master. It is thereby repressive of creative materials culturally associated with 'femininity' and the female body, which are characteristically pushed into the unconscious.

I shall need to look briefly at each of these stringent criticisms in turn, but with a particular eye to assessing how they might be answered with the aid of the insights of my contemplative *théologie totale*. For let me suggest that the very act of contemplation - repeated, lived, embodied, suffered - is an act that, by grace, and over time, precisely inculcates mental patterns of 'un-mastery'[2], welcomes the dark realm of the unconscious, opens up a radical attention to the 'other', and instigates an acute awareness of the messy entanglement of sexual desires and desire for God. The vertiginous free-fall of contemplation, then, is not only the means by which a disciplined form of unknowing makes way for a new and deeper knowledge-beyond-knowledge; it is also the necessary accompanying practice of a theology committed to ascetic transformation. When one looks at the three resistances to systematic theology I have just outlined, one can already note how revealingly themes of knowledge, power and gender are entangled and woven into these three objections. One begins to glimpse why it is that issues of sexuality, desire and gender cannot by mere *fiat*, or simple denial, be dissociated from the claim to be able to con-

[1] Meaning, in Lacan's use of this term, something like 'clear', 'analytical', 'demonstrable'.

[2] I coin this term deliberately, to distinguish it from Milbank's and others' 'non-mastery'. The desire not to 'master' cannot be summoned by mere good intention or fiat. It is a matter, I submit, of waiting on divine aid and transformation, a transcendent undoing of manipulative human control or aggression.

tinue the task of systematic theology. It is no good *denying* the force of our three critiques. One cannot simply look away.

Answering the charges against systematic theology: a response from the perspective of théologie totale

1. That systematic theology should be perceived as necessarily engaged in a false reification of God, first, is the accusation made when systematics is seen as implicated in a form of 'onto-theology'. But what exactly does this accusation mean? The charge of course goes back to Heidegger's claim that Greek philosophical metaphysics was already engaged in an inappropriate attempt to explain or capture the divine, the ultimate Cause, and so to reify, and banalify, 'being'; and, further, that classical and scholastic Christian theology, in its dependence on Greek metaphysics, unthinkingly extended such a trait into its projects of philosophical and systematic theology. Even Thomas Aquinas - as we well know in these halls - has been (falsely) accused of such an 'onto-theological' error.

But the mistake in the charge itself, of course, is that it has failed to understand the proper place of the apophatic dimensions of classic Christian thought itself. Once there is a full and ready acknowledgement that to make claims about *God* involves a fundamental submission to mystery and unknowing, a form of unknowing more fundamental even than the positive accession of contentful revelation, the 'onto-theological' charge loses its edge. Indeed, one might say it becomes a mere shadowboxing. For 'God', by definition, cannot be an extra item in the universe (a very big one) to be known, and so controlled, by human intellect, will or imagination. God is, rather, that-without-which-there-would-be-nothing-at-all; God is the source and sustainer of all being, and, as such, the dizzying mystery encountered in the act of contemplation as precisely the 'blanking' of the human ambition to knowledge, control and mastery. To know God is unlike any other knowledge; indeed, it is more truly to *be* known, and so transformed.

So, if the 'onto-theological' charge misses its mark, is its accusation simply 'much ado about nothing'? Not at all; for its concerns rightly chide those forms of theology which show an inadequate awareness of the *sui generis* nature of the divine, and of the ever-present dangers of idolatry. In short, systematic theology without appropriately apophatic sensibilities is still potentially subject to its criticism. The question then presses: what constitutes such an 'appropriately apophatic sensibility'? Can this be gained simply by taking thought (or, rather, by taking thought and then negating it)? Or is it that this first accusation against systematic theology has rightly isolated a deeper problem than that of mere intellectual or semantic hygiene - that is, the modern problem of the dissociation of theology from *practices* of un-mastery?

It is here that one of the key dimensions of my proposed *théologie totale* becomes crucial. As I have already suggested – and this is clearly a bold claim – systematic theology without contemplative and ascetic practice is void; for theology in its proper sense is always implicitly *in via*. It comes, that is, with the urge, the fundamental desire, to seek God's 'face' and yet to have that seeking constantly checked, corrected and purged. The mere intellectual acknowledgement of human finitude is not enough (and in any case is all too easily forgotten); the false humility of a theological 'liberalism' which remakes God as it wishes under the guise of 'Kantian' or neo-Kantian nescience is equally unsatisfactory; it is the actual *practice* of contemplation that is the condition of a new 'knowing-in-unknowing'. It must involve the stuff of learned bodily enactment, sweated out painfully over months and years, in duress, in discomfort, in bewilderment, as well as in joy and dawning recognition. Apophatic theology, in its proper sense, then, can never be mere verbal play, deferral of meaning, or the simple addition of negatives to positive ('cataphatic') claims. Nor, on the other hand, can it be satisfied with the dogmatic 'liberal' denial that God in Godself can be known *at all*: it is not 'mysterious' in *this*

(Kaufmanian) sense.[3] For contemplation is the unique, and wholly *sui generis*, task of seeking to know, and speak of God, unknowingly; as Christian contemplation, it is also the necessarily bodily practice of dispossession, humility and effacement which, in the Spirit, causes us to learn incarnationally, and only so, the royal way of the Son to the Father.

The first, 'onto-theological', objection to systematics therefore does still have continuing point, even as one answers it. It serves as a reminder that the problem of idolatry is an enduring one, and that it can never be dealt with by mere mental *fiat* or a false sense of intellectual control. It draws attention, too, to the fact that not all theology adequately reflects on its apophatic duties: insofar as it fails in them, it is indeed implicated in 'onto-theological' temptation. Finally, it hints therefore also at the need to make important distinctions between different levels, or types, of approach to doctrinal truth. That is, there are different ways in which doctrines can be purveyed, whether by symbolic power, indirect allusion, or analytic clarity; but not all of these remind one effectively of the apophatic necessity in any attempt to speak truly of God. One of the rightful requirements of systematic theology, then, is for it to indicate what sorts of 'forms' it is using, and for what purpose, and how such forms relate to intentional practices of un-mastery. Only thus can one consciously guard against the 'onto-theological' danger.

2. The second charge against systematic theology is less to do with technical issues of speech about God, and more about falsely generalizing strategies of power. The social theorists who have decried 'hegemony' (I am thinking of Gramsci, Foucault, and behind them Nietzsche) are rightly calling attention to ways in which powerful discourses, especially ones that aspire to a total picture, can occlude or marginalize the voices of those who are already oppressed, or are being pushed into a state of subjection. 'System' here tends to connote 'systemic' oppression, deep-seated political violence or abuse; 'hegemonic' discourses – consciously or unconsciously - seek to justify such oppression. Does systematic theology do this too?

The short answer, again, is that it certainly can do, and most manifestly has done in many contexts in Christian tradition. Liberation theology, in all its guises, witnesses to the felt perception that classic, official church theology (systematic or otherwise) has often failed in any sustained theological response to problems of social and political oppression. And that 'gender', 'race' and 'class', amongst other categories related to such oppression, are still matters not generally discussed in systematic theology, is a telling comment on the state of the undertaking. So long as such topics are excluded *a priori* from systematic theology's *loci* for discussion, or pushed aside as irrelevant to theological truth, the charge that they are being occluded from theological sight will continue to have point.

But the method of *théologie totale* is again of crucial significance here, and this for at least two reasons. First, the ascetic practices of contemplation are themselves indispensable means of a *true* attentiveness to the despised or marginalized 'other'. It is easy, from a privileged position, to be morally righteous about justice for the oppressed, whilst actually drowning out their voices with the din of one's own high-sounding plans for reform. Likewise, there is much talk of the problem of attending to the otherness of the 'other' in contemporary post-Kantian ethics and post-colonial theory;[4] but there is very little about the intentional and embodied practices that might enable such attention. The moral and epistemic stripping that is endemic to the act of contemplation is a vital key here: its practised self-emptying inculcates an attentiveness that is beyond merely good political intentions. Its practice is more discomforting, more destabilizing to settled presumptions, than a simple intentional *design* on empathy.

Secondly, the method of *théologie totale* (as I have already hinted) is not only founded in ascetic practices of attention, but rooted in an exploration of the many mediums and levels at

[3] I have in mind here the early work of Gordon D. Kaufman, *God the Problem* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard UP, 1972).

[4] Yet there is very little religious interest in post-colonial theory, which is ironic given its claim to speak for deeply religious populations.

which theological truth may be engaged. It is in this sense that it deserves the appellation *totale*: not as a totalizing assault on worldly power, but as an attempt to do justice to every level, and type, of religious apprehension and its appropriate mode of expression. Thus it is devoted precisely to the excavation and evaluation of what has previously been neglected: to theological fieldwork in a variety of illuminating social and political contexts (not merely those of privilege, in fact especially not); to religious cultural productions of the arts and the imagination; to neglected or side-lined texts; and to examination of the differences made to theology by such factors as gender, class, or race [all these relate to chapters in my forthcoming systematic project]. In short, *théologie totale* makes the bold claim that the more 'systematic' one's intentions, the more necessary the exploration of such dark and neglected corners; and that, precisely as a theology *in via*, *théologie totale* continually risks destabilization and redirection. In an important sense, then, this form of systematic theology must always also remain, in principle, *unsystematic* – if by that one means open to the possibility of risk and challenge. This playful oxymoron ('unsystematic systematics') applies just to the extent that the undertaking renders itself persistently vulnerable to interruptions from the unexpected - through its radical practices of attention to the Spirit.

3. And that point forms a natural transition to the third, and last, charge made against systematic thinking: that it is intrinsically 'phallocentric' (that is, that it operates intellectually in a mode symbolically linked to the male body); and that it is inherently repressive of 'feminine' imagination, creativity, or of the destabilization of ordered thinking that may arise from the unconscious. This objection will make little sense unless one is familiar with the thought-forms and presumptions of French post-Freudian psychoanalytic theory; and thus one's immediate response to this last critique must be that it precisely *begs the question* of one's assumed theory of gender (an issue I am about to tackle in the last part of this lecture). However, there is something irreducibly important at stake in this charge: it concerns the embodied nature of all theological thinking.

For this last critique starts from the assumption that there is a distinctively 'feminine' mode of reflection (the 'semiotic' in Lacanian terminology), which is linked to the female body and female sexuality, and incapable of capture – without destructive 'phallocentric' distortion – in *clearly enunciated* forms. To attempt systematics in such forms would thus be an intrinsic offense to 'feminine' sensibility, and would crush the creative destabilizations that are unique to the realm of the semiotic. This particular understanding of the gender divide, we might note, can come in more-or-less hardened forms of dogmatism. The more subtle exponents of this school of thought by no means intend an essentialist view of gender (which would link female bodies inexorably and normatively to certain kinds of creative, but non-analytic, thought). Instead, feminist writers such as Luce Irigaray wish to draw attention to the undeniable cultural dominance of 'male' thinking, and its repressive and distorting effects on both women and men: if the so-called 'feminine imaginary' is accorded no worth, they argue, then psychic life remains distorted and stultifying for all.

The main problem with this line of thought, however, is that it risks reinstituting the problem it seeks to resolve. If the gender division is so strongly bound to genital shape and symbolism, and so disjunctively construed, then a pessimistic ideology tends to dominate: the so-called 'feminine imaginary' can never, it is averred, be brought into effective play in the realm of existing systematic discussion. Instead it has to found its own, distinct, form of discourse. It is as if such pessimism, and such dogmatized gender dualism, re-consigns the 'feminine' to an eternal marginalization, ironically recreating the conditions of powerlessness from which it arose. Semiotic explosions may become the only means of redress: at best they are the deliciously subversive *ripostes* of the marginalized (noises off, as it were), but never harbingers of actual psychic or social change.[5] Systematic theology, on

[5] I present this critique in more detail in 'Feminism and Analytic Philosophy of Religion', in ed. W. Wainwright, *The Oxford Handbook to Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford, OUP, 2005), 494-525. But here I am more forcefully driving home the point that any attempt to fix our three problems by purely human or

this view, remains an irredeemably 'male' undertaking.

But it is to address such a false disjunction as this that the contemplative method of *théologie totale* is, once again, attuned. As the latter part of my lecture will now seek to display, it is possible to acknowledge the full *theological* significance of bodily and gendered difference (in a sense to be discussed), but to avoid the stuckness of a theory in which the so-called semiotic realm fails in any substantial or transformative impact on the systematic. For the contemplative method of *théologie totale* of course already welcomes what is here called the semiotic at more than one level: it welcomes it in the very act of contemplation, in which practices of unknowing precisely court the realm of the unconscious; and it welcomes it in the arts, as a way into those levels of doctrinal truth, via the imagination and aesthetic artifacts, that more drily intellectual theology often misses. What this third critique of systematics has so rightly seen, then - that gender and bodily difference cannot be irrelevant to systematics - is capable of a different response than the dismissive one that it itself envisages.

The tangled root of desire

I have now surveyed the three major contemporary objections to systematic theology, fully acknowledging their force. But I have also suggested that a contemplative approach to systematics, by virtue of its very practices of unmastery, is alone capable of addressing the deeper issues raised. Indeed, if I am right, it can change the terms of the debate in such a way that seemingly irresolvable dilemmas in secular approaches to these problems may be fruitfully addressed.

For we now see that these three objections to the task of systematic theology turn out to have a shared, or at least tangled, root. Each presumes that the systematician idolatrously *desires* mastery: a complete understanding of God, a regnant position in society, or a domination of the gendered 'other'; and each presumes that the same systematician will thereby abuse his knowledge, his power, or his 'male' mode of thinking, for purposes of intellectual, social or sexual dominance. The deeper issues, then, involve the insidious entanglement of knowledge, power and gender. But their shared root, let me now suggest, is the yet deeper problem of *desire*. It is the idolatrous desire to know all that fuels 'onto-theology'; it is the imperious desire to dominate that inspires 'hegemony'; it is the 'phallocentric' desire to conquer that represses the 'feminine'. To speak theologically: *unredeemed* desire is at the root of each of these challenges to the systematic task. It is to this deeper problem that we must now attend.

I said at the beginning of this paper that systematic theology cannot credibly go on without urgent attention to matters of desire, sex, sexuality and gender. I am now in a better position to say why this might be so, and how these particular issues might themselves be ordered and rooted - in the category of desire itself. On the one hand (the theological side of the matter), the contemplative task, which rightly sustains systematics, is itself a progressive modulator and refiner of human desire: in its naked longing for God, it lays out all its other desires – conscious and unconscious – and places them, over time, into the crucible of divine desire. (Sexual desire, from this contemplative perspective, is thus drawn into an inexorable tether with all other desires, judged by its approximation, or lack thereof, to the purity of divine charity: the ontology of divine desire, we might say, is more fundamental, because uncreated, than the realm of created, human, longings, which nonetheless ultimately owe their existence to God.) On the other hand (the cultural side of the matter), the tumultuous obsessions of a secularized and sex-saturated culture, and the current political intensities of debates over gender and same-sex desire, make it imperative for the systematician to give theological thematization to these divisive and contested topics.

So, as a hinge to the last part of the paper, I now want to place before you my specifically *theological* hypothesis about gender; and it is this. Not only is divine desire more fundamental than human sexual desire, I argue, because it is

secular powers tends either to re-summon the temptation to false mastery, or to relegate the abused and unrecognized back to the alternative realm of the 'semiotic'.

its ultimate incubus, source, and refiner; but also, and by the same token, that same divine *desire is more fundamental than gender*. The key to the secular riddle of gender can lie only in its connection precisely to the doctrine of a desiring, trinitarian God.

Why does gender matter?

But wait a minute, before we go any further: what *is* gender, in any case, and why does it matter? To contemporary secular theorists of gender, first, it matters intensely, of course, since for them it is the powerful symbolic means by which culture slices humanity normatively into *two* (and only two), and thereby imposes, by continually repeated rituals of reinforcement (both conscious and unconscious), an oppressive and restricted form of life on those who do not fit the binary alternatives. Gender is – on this view – implicitly linked to oppression. Only 'performative' acts of public dissent from the so-called 'gender binary' may hope to shift its cultural hold.[6]

To biblical fundamentalists and conservatives, by contrast, and especially to the anti-gay lobby, gender 'matters' no less intensely: not only is 'heterosexuality' read as normatively prescribed by the Bible, but a particular, subordinationist, understanding of the relation of female to male is seen to follow as well.

There is another possible theological approach to gender, however, which by no means decries biblical authority, indeed still takes it as primary; but it sets the exegesis of complex scriptural texts in full relation to tradition, philosophical analysis, and ascetic practice. Here gender 'matters' primarily because it is about *differentiated, embodied relationship* – first and foremost to God, but also, and from there, to others; and its meaning is therefore fundamentally given in relation to the human's role as made in the 'image of God' (Gen. 1.26-7). Gender 'matters' to systematic theology, too then, insofar as it is a crucial dimension of its *theological* analysis of the human: to fail to chart the differences and performances of gender would be to ignore one of the most profound aspects of human experience, whether it is felt as joy or as curse. Where this approach differs from secular gender theory, let me now suggest, is in three crucial areas which transform its capacity to deal with seemingly insoluble dilemmas for the secular realm of discussion.

Whereas secular gender theory argues, and agonizes, about how it can shift and transform cultural presumptions about gender that are often unconsciously and unthinkingly replicated, a contemplative theology *in via* has at its disposal, first, theological concepts of creation, fall and redemption which place the performances of gender in a spectrum of existential possibilities *between* despair and hope. What one might call the fallen, 'worldly' view of gender relations is open to the future, and to change; it is set in an unfolding, diachronic narrative both of individual spiritual maturation and of societal transformation.[7]

Secondly, and correlatively, a theological view of gender thereby also has an eschatological hope, one that it sees not as pious fiction or wish-fulfillment, but as firmly grounded in the events of Christ's incarnation and resurrection. Gender, in the sense just given, is ineradicable (I am always, even after death - assuming I believe in that possibility - a particular sort of 'differentiated, relational' being); but gender is not unchangeable: it too is *in via*. What is fallen can be redeemed and sanctified - indeed rendered sacramental by participation in Christ. In this sense, gender may be seen not merely as a locus of oppression but just as much as the potential vehicle of embodied salvation.

Third, then, and most importantly, gender is understood differently for a contemplative asceticism precisely because it claims through its

[6] Such is the view of 'heteronormativity' found in the work of Judith Butler.

[7] I have argued elsewhere (in 'Deepening "Practices": Perspectives from Ascetical and Mystical Theology', in eds. D. Bass and M. Volk, *Practising Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 2001), 78-93) that gender is characteristically viewed differently at different periods of personal maturation, and even more at different phases of spiritual maturation if transformative ascetic practices are undertaken. Secular gender theory attends all too little to this diachronic complication.

practices of devotion to encounter and embrace a holy *reality*, a reality revealed as three (yet thereby transformative of any two)[8]. What contemporary gender theory jargonistically calls 'performativity' and 'ritualization' – whether as reiteration of a repressive gender régime, or as a 'destabilization' of it – finds its *theological* counterpart in the *sui generis* 'performances' of contemplation. These performances, however, are not, primarily intended as acts of resistance to worldly oppression (although I believe they give courage for such!); and nor are they therefore merely human strategies of resistance. Rather they are acts of 'submission' to a unique power-beyond-human-power – and, as such, are of course already 'gendered', in a particular and unique sense – gendered in relationship to God. What makes *this* gendering 'different' from worldly gender, then, is its being rendered labile to the logic and flow of trinitarian, divine desire, its welcoming of the primary interruption of the Spirit in prayer, and its submission to contemplative unknowing so that the certainties of this world (including the supposed certainties of fallen gender) can be re-made in the incarnate likeness of Christ. Gender (embodied difference) is here not to be eradicated, note, but to be transformed; it still 'matters', but only because God desires it to matter and can remake it in the image of his Son.

Gender, the Trinity and Incarnation

Threeness and twoness. Let me reflect a little more at the close of this paper on the symbolic significance of these numbers for Christian doctrine, but also for gender. I can only spell out baldly here a thesis that may seem unfamiliar and strange, but which again takes its cue from the particular vantage point of the practice of 'un-mastering' prayer.

I have argued elsewhere, and do again in more detail in my forthcoming systematics, that prayer (and especially prayer of a non-discursive sort, whether contemplative or charismatic) is the only context in which the *irreducible* threeness of God becomes humanly apparent. It does so because – as one ceases to set the agenda and allows room for God to be God - the sense of the *human* impossibility of prayer becomes the more intense (see Ro 8. 26), and drives one to comprehend the necessity of God's own prior activity in it. Strictly speaking it is not I who autonomously pray, but God (the Holy Spirit) who prays in me, and so answers the eternal call of the 'Father'. There is, then, an inherent reflexivity in the divine, a ceaseless outgoing and return of the desiring God; and insofar as I welcome and receive this reflexivity, I find that it is the Holy Spirit who 'interrupts' my human monologue to a (supposedly) monadic God;[9] it is the Holy Spirit who finally thereby causes me to see God no longer as patriarchal threat but as infinite tenderness; and it is also the Holy Spirit who first painfully darkens my prior certainties, enflames and checks my own desires, and so invites me ever more deeply into the life of redeemed Sonship. In short, it is this 'reflexivity-in-God', this Holy Spirit, which makes incarnate life *possible.*

So when, from this perspective in prayer, I count three in God, the Holy Spirit cannot be a *mere* 'third'. The Spirit cannot be an add-on, an 'excess', or a 'go-between' to what is already established as a somehow more privileged dyad (the 'Father' and 'Son'). Instead, the Holy Spirit is intrinsic to the very make-up of the Father/Son relationship from all eternity; the Spirit, moreover, is that-without-which-there-would-be-no-incarnated-Son at all, and – by extension - no life of Sonship into which we, too, might enter by participation. The Spirit, then, is what interrupts the fallen worldly order and infuses it with the divine question, the divine lure, the divine life.

So this irreducible threeness in God cannot be insignificant for the matter of gendered twoness, since the human is precisely made 'in God's (trinitarian) image', and destined to be restored to that image. It must be, then, that in this fallen world, one lives, in some sense, *be-*

[8] I shall explain the relation of 'three' and 'two' in the next section. The metaphysical realism in my approach is important: it is not we who fix this problem of fallen gender; rather, it is God.

[9] It is important to underscore that this 'interruption' does not bludgeon or suppress the human, but 'comes to our aid'.

tween twoness and its transfiguring interruption; so one is not, as in secular gender theory, endlessly and ever subject to the debilitating falseness of fallen gender, fallen twoness. In contrast, in Christ, I meet the human One who, precisely in the Spirit, has effected that interruptive transfiguration of twoness. He has done so by crossing the boundary between another 'twoness' more fundamental even than the twoness of gender: the ontological twoness of God and the world. In crossing that boundary in the incarnation, Christ does not re-establish the boundary as before, but nor – significantly - does he destroy it; rather, we might say that he 'transgresses' it in the Spirit, infusing the created world anew with divinity. And just as, in the Spirit, he crosses that ontological twoness transformatively, but without obliteration of otherness, so – I now suggest, and analogously – the interruptive work of the trinitarian God does not *obliterate* the twoness of human gender, either, but precisely renders it subject to the labile transformations of divine desire. Whatever this redeemed twoness is (and there are remaining mysterious dimensions to this question), it cannot be the stuck, fixed, twoness of the *fallen* 'gender binary'.

So one might say that there are two different sorts of 'difference' that the fundamental doctrines of Christianity (Trinity and Incarnation) hold before one, as symbolically and theologically relevant for the 'differences' of gender. One is the 'difference' of the three in God – different but *equal*, a difference only of relation and not of distinct activities or powers. The other is the quite different 'difference' between God and the world, a fundamental line of ontological difference that has been crossed and overcome in the Incarnation, yet also not obliterated. The Christian tradition has, of course, been constantly tempted to figure the difference of gender straightforwardly on the latter difference: to align 'masculinity' with God and 'femininity' with the world (and so to subordinate women to men, whilst tacitly undermining their status as fully redeemed). More recently, some feminist theology (one thinks especially of Elizabeth Johnson here) has attempted – in reaction - to model gender on the former difference – straightforwardly to *emulate* a trinitarian 'equality-in-difference'. The position proposed here is that neither of these more familiar alternatives is possible, nor even obviously mandated by the complex authorities of Scripture and tradition. Rather, in the case of human gender there is a subtle transformation of both models caused by their intersection: the 'fixed' fallen differences of worldly gender are transfigured precisely by the interruptive activity of the Holy Spirit, drawing gender into trinitarian purgation and transformation. *Twoness, one might say, is divinely ambushed by threeness.*

This is *not*, I must strongly underscore in closing, a theory of a 'third gender', or a theory either of the insignificance, or of the obliteration, of gender. On the contrary, it is a theory about gender's mysterious and plastic openness to divine transfiguration.

Conclusions: Is there A Future for Systematic Theology and Gender?

We now know why my answer to this question is 'Yes'. Not only *is* there a future, but there *must* be; without it systematic theology evades, or represses, some of the most troubling personal and political issues of our day and renders theological anthropology arid and disembodied. But – as I have argued I hope persuasively today – our thoughts about gender must be recast in the light of the logic of the trinitarian and incarnate God, and remoulded in the crucible of contemplation. In the 'impossibility' of the prayer of dispossession, in which the Spirit cracks open the human heart to a new future, divine desire purgatively reformulates human desire and the problems of gender are mysteriously recast. It follows that all the other problems of power, sex and gender with which contemporary theory struggles so notably cannot be solved, I dare to say – whether by human political power, violent *fiat*, or even subversive deviousness or ritualized revolt - without such prior surrender to the divine.

Some other related writing, for reference:
Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self: An Essay 'On the Trinity'* (Cambridge, CUP, forthcoming, 2009/10)

____________, co-ed. with Charles M. Stang, *Re-Thinking Dionysius the Areopagite* (Blackwell, Oxford, 2009, also available as *Modern Theology* October 2008)
____________, 'Pleasure Principles: Toward a Contemporary Theology of Desire', *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* Autumn 2005, 20-33
____________, *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender* (Blackwell, Oxford, 2002)
____________, 'Fresh Paths in Systematic Theology: Sarah Coakley', in ed. Rupert Shortt, *God's Advocates* (London, Darton, Longman and Todd, 2005), 67-85

SAPPHO I SVERIGE
Sophia Elisabet Brenner 1659–1730

Symposium den 26–28 augusti 2009
Hörsalen, Språk och litteraturcentrum,
Helgonabacken 2, Lund.

Sophia Elisabet Brenner är det tidigmoderna Sveriges första kvinnliga författare av betydelse. Under mer än femtio år var hon verksam som poet, berömd långt utanför Sveriges gränser för sin lärdom och sin diktning på olika språk.
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Response to Sarah Coakley

ANTJE JACKELÉN

Dr. Theol. Antje Jackelén is bishop of Lund and formerly professor of systematic theology at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago. Among her publications is Time and Eternity: The Question of Time in Church, Science, and Theology, Templeton Press 2005. She is presently the president of ESSAT, The European Society for Science and Theology.

Thank you so much for a very inspiring lecture. You have put a thought-provoking question before us: Is there a future for gender and for systematic theology? No doubt, this is a seminal question to pursue, since gender studies and systematic theology each are facing their own challenges and a good relationship between the two does not come naturally for many representatives of either field. In fact, gender theorists and systematic theologians have often been quite dismissive of each other, and in many places they continue to be so. At the same time, both these areas of research and teaching are troubled by difficulties.

Gender theory has not exactly failed, but not really succeeded in convincing the theological and ecclesial establishment of its value and relevance, and maybe even less of its urgency. In some respects, gender studies appear to be in a situation comparable to that of ecumenism – the enthusiasm of the fresh starts of the post-war and post-Vatican II era has widely vanished, and some achievements have been renounced.

Systematic theology, in turn, has been facing significant resistance from various directions. I will mention only three of them. Postmodern sensitivity has questioned the legitimacy of any system: systems are perceived as totalizing, hierarchical, intolerant, Western, eurocentric, suppressive – you name it. Systematic theology has internalized much of that assessment in its critical appraisal of onto-theology. Second, in the academic context of religious studies, systematic theology is time and again charged with being biased, confessional or otherwise wanting in regard to the scientific standards of separating the descriptive from the normative. Finally, even among theologians in general – priests and students – systematic theology is far from being recognized as a stimulus and presupposition for creative and constructive theological thought and for the ministry of the church. Having taught both German and systematic theology I recognize a common pattern: systematic theology is often perceived of as the grammar of theological language, and students more often than not come with the prejudice that grammar is difficult, abstract, boring, impossible to understand and invented for the sole purpose of having you make mistakes. In other words, systematic theology is not automatically seen as an asset, let alone as a necessary tool to bring the wealth and beauty of a language to flourish.

With this background in mind, I share Sarah Coakley's ambition to facilitate a good future for both gender studies and systematic theology. Her plan for making that future happen entails a claim that is bold indeed: *only* systematic theology can respond adequately and effectively to gender studies, and *only* gender studies including the political insights gained by it, can re-animate systematic theology for the future.

In principle I don't mind following her along this way of reasoning. However, I must also flag for a little bit of scepticism toward the "onlys" – I think that fruitful developments tend to be more complex and pluralistic than the word "only" would suggest. For example, I would include a more general transdisciplinarity, such as the dialogue between theology and science, among the potentially re-animating processes for systematic theology.

In this context, I also need to clarify that my own definition of systematic theology differs somewhat from Coakley's. She defines systematic theology as an integrated and coherent presentation of Christian truth. I define it as critical and self-critical reflection on the contents and

effects of religious traditions, in our case Christian traditions. Coakley's definition minds and cares explicitly for the qualities of a system as a whole, while mine focuses more on the process of reasoning, its situatedness and the significance of a system's ruptures rather than its integrity. Given this point of departure, I must admit to being intuitively inclined to feel resistance to an enterprise that goes by the name of *théologie totale*, even with the qualifier that "totale" here does not mean "totalizing" in a political sense or in the philosophical sense of the Western Enlightenment.

Nevertheless, this said, I do not think that our definitions of systematic theology are mutually exclusive. Rather, they focus on a tension that could be beneficial for the future of theology. I see this tension as the corollary of the insight that intense focus on ruptures runs the risk of leaving us with fragmentation only and that too much emphasis on an integrated system runs the risk of not doing justice to alterity. Within the framework of this beneficial tension I am therefore willing to embark with Coakley on her project of exploring a robustly theological, trinitarian perspective on gender, appropriately founded in bodily practices of prayer. The program is exciting: Systematic theology should not just import secular theory but submit it to deliberate theological refinement. As in all dialogues, mutuality is required, although not always taken for granted. A secular context tends to expect systematic theology to listen and learn rather than to consider and contribute – turning mutuality into a reality yet to be claimed.[1] Theology, in turn, needs transformation through bodily practices of contemplative prayer, according to Coakley. In this respect, gender is both assisting transformation and subject to transformation, since this kind of prayer will transform all desires, including sexual desire.

We can currently observe a growing interest in religious and existential questions in Western secularized countries, while at the same time self-proclaimed humanists are attacking both obscure and more enlightened strains of spirituality with the same vitriolic aggression. This context certainly calls for the critical and self-critical reflection on the contents and effects of religious traditions which systematic theology can supply. Without it, religious traditions will be left with a lack in both intellectual honesty and constructive and creative thinking. But we also need convincing, intellectually sound and physically wholesome theological practices. Without these, we would fail the marks of existential honesty and spiritual credibility. Coakley's program holds the promise of responding well to these needs, inviting positive consideration and thorough discussion.

She suggests that ascetic contemplation be seen as a remedy against the charges pressed against systematic theology. Silence is part of what Coakley presents as the major novum she is laying before us. It certainly sounds like a novum when launched in a Western European university setting. Yet, we know that in a wider context, this way of doing theology is not without parallels. It reminds me of Eastern Orthodox theology and its striving for the unity of thought and liturgy as a communion of mystery and rationality; Eastern Orthodox theology has included embodied practice of prayer even without being touched by modern Western gender theories.

Coakley rightly draws our attention to the apophatic dimension in classic Christian thought. With this, I agree fully and wholeheartedly. Even in the most brilliant theological concept there remains an apophatic surplus. That is why, to say it in Coakley's words, to know God "is more truly to *be* known, and so transformed." Repeated, lived, embodied and suffered contemplation leads to what she ingeniously calls the "un-mastery" of our knowledge as an act of grace and divine transformation that lifts theologians beyond the desire to manipulate, control or condemn. Besides and beyond being a subject of knowledge, God remains "dizzying mystery". If this approach can combine all the riches of the Eastern Orthodox tradition with the achievements of Western theology and gender studies while avoiding the weaknesses of all three, it holds great promise indeed.

The sceptic, however, will raise two concerns at this point. First, if systematic theology without contemplative and ascetic practice is void, as

[1] Cf. Antje Jackelén, "What Theology Can Do for Science." *Theology and Science*, 6/3 (2008). 287-303.

Coakley claims, does this then entail that "real" theology can be done by practitioners of the faith only? Experience suggests that theology done by non-believers very well can fly, even though it may have difficulties in landing, as it were. Systematic theology as a *theologia regeneratorum* will – I am afraid – come across as an unwarranted narrowing of a field that needs to be broad and diverse. Furthermore, the advancement of this theological profile is likely to jeopardize the character of systematic theology as an academic discipline pursued in the setting of a secular university. There is an added value to being part of a secular academic setting, which I would hesitate to put at risk. Can't systematic theology be a theology *in via* or maybe better, a *theologia viatorum*, even without express contemplative and ascetic practice? (But then, of course, I am a Lutheran believing and trusting in God's work in both 'kingdoms'!)

Second, how will a *théologie totale* avoid falling prey to a new monism? Can we ever retreat behind the insight that we need theolog*ies* rather than one theology in our attempts to say something intelligible and credible about that-without-which-there-would-be-nothing-at-all? I believe that the apophatic surplus pertains not only to theological thinking, but also to ascetic practice; the latter cannot serve as an altogether reliable means of proper humility, epistemic and otherwise. For even ascetic practice is not immune to cataphatic expansionism; in and of itself it is not a safeguard for maintaining the apophatic surplus.

Surely, the point of ascetic contemplation cannot be to create a guarantee against totalizing assaults. The point must be that there are no such guarantees, only attempts at practices that can keep systematic theology *in via* – moving with and through every level and type of religious apprehension and expression and developing a special preference for the dark and neglected corners of theological exploration, as Coakley puts it. Therefore, the appeal that systematic theology always must remain unsystematic is really much more than a play with words.

Un-mastery hence appears to recommend itself as a criterion for an adequate systematic theology in our days, since time and again we have realized that it is precisely the attempt at mastery that has led systematic theology into directions that are neither viable nor desirable. But how exactly can one account for un-mastery? Is there a way of measuring the level of success in un-mastery? This does not seem an easy question to answer: it tends to be more complicated to assess undoing than doing, because to an inexorable extent, the undoing is dependent on the doing.

Since I don't feel in a position to solve this issue, I will follow Coakley in her turn toward what she identifies as the root of the problems facing systematic theology, namely "unredeemed desire." Lifting up desire as the driving force and connecting our desire for God with all other desires is an exciting turn – even in Lund, where we have travelled a long way since the days when eros was all-bad and agape was all-good. Theologians cannot deny it: All too often, desire has ended up together with sin, chaos, disorder and evil things in opposition to God – and thus left theology either speechless or moralizing in the face of much desire. Grounding sexual desire in divine desire takes things in a different direction. The claim is that divine desire always transcends human desire and transforms it without turning longing human beings into – with a quote from Anders Nygren "a tube, which by faith is open upwards, and by love downwards … merely the tube, the channel through which God's love flows."[2] Contrary to Nygren's agapeic cosmos of tubes, the messiness of desires is well worth theological engagement. Disentanglement is hardly a realistic option, but handling the messiness certainly is a qualifying piece of work for systematic theologians.

The question of the relationship between sexual desire and desire for God, by the way, is by no means new – of which the tragic love story of the great theology teacher Abelard and the bright Heloise is a famous case in point. Reading the letters the two lovers exchanged nearly 1000 years ago, as they were separated from each other by the walls of a monastery and by the castration of Abelard is moving: Heloise's testimony of her unfulfilled longings, her confession that she longingly thinks of physical love

[2] Anders Nygren. *Agape and Eros.* London: SPCK, 1953. 735.

in the middle of holy mass, and her struggle with a God whom she cannot love spiritually because she has been bereaved of the experience of human love.[3] Abelard's long and somewhat wooden theological explanations, meant to help her reach a state of sublime harmony, barely conceal his own emotional investment behind a thin veil of male self-composure; he desperately tries to make the case that the tragedy that hit them was just divine punishment for the sake of their salvation. It is hard to present this attempt as a model for sound systematic theology, let alone good pastoral care.

In attitudes toward entanglement and messiness I see an affinity between Coakley's approach and one of the favourite terms I have used in my own work, namely *differentiated relationality*. One may say that the grounding of our human desires in divine desire brings into fruition the differentiated relationality that marks creation; it does so by opening up secular gender theory existentially (offering an alternative to heteronormativity), eschatologically (turning gender into a vehicle of embodied salvation), and theologically (expanding and transforming twoness).

Creating openness is the relevant common pattern here. Openness also is the very hallmark of the Holy Spirit – as Coakley beautifully puts it: "The Spirit, then, is what interrupts the fallen worldly order and infuses it with the divine question, the divine lure, the divine life." I have wondered for a long time why it is that systematic theology in general so often has neglected the Holy Spirit, turning it into a link between the two main characters of the Trinity, either as a static bond or busy running errands between the Father and the Son and possibly the world. It seems that the order of the articles in the Creed have blinded both theology and the pedagogy of faith communication to the fact that there are other possibilities than always starting with the Father/Creator, then moving to the Son and finally lumping the Holy Spirit together with all the rest. I am still looking for a convincing theology and pedagogy of faith that starts with the Holy Spirit – making the point that it is the Holy Spirit who is at work in the most dramatic crossing of borders that can be imagined: the incarnation as the transgression of the border between God and world.

What Coakley is suggesting amounts to a theology that resembles an ellipse. Its two focal points are: the Trinity as a threefold openness on the one hand and contemplation as the crucible that moulds closed systems into the dynamics of a differentiated relationality on the other. She envisions that this will allow for the sought-after un-mastery by way of dispossession, which serves as a presupposition for true subversiveness in gender theory.

Expressed in more general terms, this is a program for a theology that brings mystery and rationality into communion, offering nourishment that is appealing both intellectually and spiritually. Is that what we need?

Let me close by answering this question with a reference to a novel by Paulo Coelho, namely his *The Witch of Portobello* (2007), which I think captures the blend of our context quite well – a mixture of intellect, spirituality, desire, gender and asceticism.

The main character of the novel is born in Sibiu, Transylvania by a Roma mother. She is adopted by a wealthy Lebanese couple. After a childhood in Lebanon she comes to London as a refugee. Well established there, she works as a real estate broker in the Middle Eastern desert landscape. Athena, as she calls herself, is a pilgrim, albeit of a special kind. As a believer she is rejected by the established church; she is excommunicated when she gets divorced. The intelligent and gifted young woman then slides into an alternative spirituality: dancing sessions leading to trance, dramatic initiation rites, clairvoyance, and a meshing of identity with the so-called 'great mother'. Established Christian teaching comes across as being a lot more about opposing and prohibiting things than about affirming people and desires. It is portrayed as both intellectually and spiritually dissatisfying. Witchcraft presents itself as an attractive alternative: it promises freedom beyond all rational, spiritual and gendered straitjackets.

I think the Brazilian author Coelho portrays the European wrestling with its intellectual and spiritual heritage quite well. We need to ac-

[3] James Burge. *Heloise & Abelard. A New Biography.* Harper San Francisco, 2006. 205.

knowledge that making things intellectually fit is necessary, but not sufficient. In the end, intellectual coherence will only reach halfway. People want and need to see that things fit spiritually, too. Athena, an intelligent person, enlightened about her desires and in search of wholeness, will find much traditional systematic theology repellent. Will she feel better served by Sarah Coakley's program? There is a fair chance that the answer is yes; for she would understand what it means that "final 'erotic' fulfillment demands … asceticism …a submission of 'desire' in which gender binaries are curiously upended, and the self at its deepest level transformed and empowered by the divine."[4]

[4] Sarah Coakley. *Powers and Submissions.* Oxford: Blackwell. 2002. 167.

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Sarah Coakley symposium – reflections

PHILIP GEISTER

Dr. Theol. Philip Geister is director of the Newman Institute for Catholic Studies in Uppsala and a Jesuit priest. He has published Aufhebung zur Eigentlichkeit : zur Problematik kosmologischer Eschatologie in der Theologie Karl Rahners, Uppsala 1996.

Thank you, professor Coakley, for a challenging and insightful presentation. I have to admit that I am – as a systematic theologian – impressed by your radical theological approach to the question of gender. As a Jesuit, however, I felt equally inspired by the spiritual dimensions of your theology. There are some striking similarities between the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits and your theological method on which I briefly would like to comment at the beginning of my reflections.

The Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola constitute a method that is supposed to help individuals to find God's will and to do it. The origin of Ignatius' rather systematic approach to spiritual life is a personal life crisis he went through as a young man. This crisis is not completely different from the one that Martin Luther experienced and it took place only a few years later. What for Luther was the quest for a merciful God was for Ignatius the question how to find God's will for his life. Both Luther and Ignatius wanted to find religious assurance in the depth of their personal spiritual experiences. And both were convinced that what was revealed to them in the darkness of their personal crisis was *more* than just a personal experience. Their personal spiritual encounter with God had deep implications for how Christians in later generations would experience God.

The Spiritual exercises are an attempt to recreate the experiences of the life crisis of Ignatius – so to say "under controlled circumstances". The dynamic of the process of these thirty days is that the encounter with God leads to a change of life and this change of thoughts, acts and attitudes opens the retreatant's eyes to God's will. Ignatius is convinced that there is an inner connection between prayer, discipline of life and the ability to know God and recognize God's will. Here, professor Coakley, I found the first similarity between the spirituality of Saint Ignatius and your *théologie totale*, a theology that is no intellectual abstraction but deeply connected to prayer and asceticism. Theo-logy, speaking about God, will hardly be authentic when it is not enlightened by knowledge of God. As you convincingly argued, quite a lot of misinterpretations in the field of religion would be shown to be pointless if the theologian would keep in mind the transcendence of God as it is experienced in prayer. But there is no prayer without self-knowledge and there is no self-knowledge without discipline. That these virtues ought to be part of the life-style of any person who wants to encounter God is a thought that I find enlightening both in your lecture and in the theology of the "Spiritual exercises" of Saint Ignatius.

There is another similarity that strikes me. It is the focus on "desire". Ignatius is convinced that following the deepest desires of the heart will guide the person who makes the retreat to God. The crucial psychological disposition during the process of the Spiritual exercises is called "consolation". "Consolation" is an experience of satisfaction, joy, hope and light that fills the heart and the mind. "Consolation" is what happens when desire touches what it desires. "Consolation" is not an insight but an emotion. "Consolation" is not intellectual but sensual. This, however, makes the outcome of the meditation rather unpredictable. The emotional reaction will, typically, be rather chaotic. It doesn't only reveal the desires a pious person might be looking for, but also the more or less undesired ones. Desire is a complex reality, and being exposed to this emotional chaos so unprotected and during a long period of time is mostly an utterly unsettling experience. These moments of inter-

ruption and confusion have an immense importance for the process of the Spiritual Exercises. They reveal the deep ambiguity of human desires and invite the retreatant to choose between the liberating desires (which eventually lead to greater "consolation", which means to God) and the enslaving ones (which lead to "desolation", i.e. away from God).

The quality of the desires that seize the heart is not so much judged on a scale of neutral norms (even though this is also the case) but rather by their ability to liberate the individual to do the will of the God who is revealed in Jesus Christ. The question is therefore, which potential the different desires of life (sexuality, eating, drinking, money etc.) have to deepen the relationship to God. Do they help or are they an obstacle? The answer to this question is not given by the nature of the desire, as for example that sexuality would be a "bad" desire and, let's say, the desire to abstain from food for the sake of God would be something intrinsically "good". Rather, the question, which desire comes from God and which from evil, is deeply personal because the Holy Spirit that guides every person in prayer is deeply personal. The question of the character of our human desire and our relationship to the desire for God can be quite different from one person to another. A decision regarding which turn to give one's life can therefore be very different from one person to another.

Perhaps in contrast to your approach, "desire" in the Ignatian tradition, even as it is experienced in prayer, is deeply ambiguous. To find out which desire truly leads to God is a difficult and time-consuming process – and it is a rather personal process. Ignatius calls it "ordering one's life". This "order" is neither a successful assimilation to cultural expectations nor a blind submission to ecclesiastical discipline. Rather it is the willingness and the ability of the individual to shape one's life, to give it a form and a direction. This takes me to the question to what extent the experience of God in meditation and prayer can serve as a "locus theologicus" for systematic theology such as seems to be the case in your theology. You have pointed out that the practice of prayer prevents the theologian from ending up in the onto-theological (and a few other) traps. That is a valuable point. The personal experience of prayer and meditation is a reminder to the theologian that God is transcendent and not an object that can be studied as one studies trees or stones. However, I wonder if this insight *comes* from prayer or if it is just *experienced* in prayer. Personally, I would locate revelation, from where all systematic theology receives its light, more exclusively in the collective setting of the faith of the Christian tradition than in the experience of individual prayer. Of course, these two are not to be separated completely as there is no faith without prayer and as the way we pray forms our faith. However, there is revelation without prayer and systematic theology is the reflection on revelation that to a great extent can be done solely in the realm of reason. Theology, even as a *théologie totale,* is more at home at the "*agora*" than in the "*inner room*". Revelation is by nature public and so is theology.

I am very much convinced that prayer has an enormous potential to change the way we experience ourselves as men or women. It will also change the way we construct gender. The transforming power of God that you convincingly described in your lecture, re-creates human beings to become who they were created to be. There is a potential in prayer to break up the dichotomies that each culture lays as a burden on the shoulders of those who live in it. The experience of prayer is an experience of transcendence and liberation but it is also an experience of incarnation. It reveals a God who breaks boundaries, overthrows cultural limitations, "casts the mighty from their thrones and raises the lowly". There is an enormous potential for change in prayer. This does indeed come from within the religious experience – not from without, as you in your lecture so convincingly have argued. The re-creative power of prayer is truly dynamic – in contrast to the mostly static secular concepts of human identity.

But what does the transforming power of God do to the theologian – as theologian? Personally, I would like to situate the transforming role of prayer as follows: first of all, I would state that prayer in the community is of deeper significance than individual prayer. Secondly, I would rather expect the fruits of prayer on the practical than on the theoretical level. To start

with the first point: the general rule that the way people believe is formed by the way they pray (lex credendi- lex orandi) is probably not more than a very realistic description of how people come to faith: they find themselves in a situation where believers practice their faith and imitate it. But on a deeper level, "lex orandi- lex credendi" can only be understood within the context of the "sensus fidelium", i.e. that the faithful have an internal insight into what is right and wrong in matters of faith. However, this gift is by nature given to a community and not to an individual. Individual convictions will, as John Henry Newman argued, have the tendency to remain personal preferences that are not sufficiently challenged by or synchronized with conflicting preferences of other individuals. The "sensus fidelium" is the experience not of an individual but of a community. It expresses itself in common beliefs and in common prayer. These expressions of the Christian faith that are formed by a community of faith seem to me the starting point for any Systematic Theology. Therefore, Christian doctrine, Christian liturgy, moral teaching etc. is the result of a collective quest for God. Or, to put it more theologically: Divine revelation is never given to individuals but always to the community. This is even – and particularly true – where the community "persecutes and kills its prophets" because the denied reception of revelation is merely a special – although dramatic - case of its reception.

Does this mean that it doesn't matter if – and how much - a theologian prays? Obviously, most or all of the great theologians were or are also prayerful people. However, this fact doesn't answer the question whether theological work inspires one to pray or if prayer opens one's mind to theological questions. Arguably, it might work both ways but that does not mean that the better the theologian's prayer life is, the more illuminated he or she will be in doing theology. Personally, I find it more interesting to have a closer look at the way the *acting* of prayerful people is changed by prayer than to examine how their *theological thinking* is affected. In regard to the question of gender I would expect that it could be a fruitful approach to have a fresh look at the great figures of the Christian tradition (which in the Catholic tradition are called "saints") and to see what it meant to them to be men or women. There may well be some interesting discoveries there that could be revelatory for our understanding of gender. I would find this approach more fruitful than the opposite method, which is to see the saints rather as victims than as agents of culturally determined views on gender. It seems, then, that in following your method, with its expectation that prayer provide liberating exits out of the dilemmas of gender theory, it can be advisable to look as closely at church history as at systematic theology, as indeed you have done elsewhere.

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"Behold, I am the Lord's handmaiden, not the lords'!"

On Sarah Coakley's Powers and Submissions

ANNE-LOUISE ERIKSSON

Dr. Theol. Anne-Louise Eriksson is a priest and director of the research unit at the National office of Church of Sweden. Among her publications is The meaning of gender in theology: problems and possibilities, Uppsala 1995.

For many years the Criterion Theatre in London gave a play called *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare in 97 Minutes*. It was – and presumably still is – a hilarious performance. The actors wizzed through all the historical plays in just a couple of minutes simply by tossing around a chopped king's head, capturing with a few lines the very essence of John, Richard and Henrys I and II. Faced with the task of responding to a book as rich as *Powers and Submissions* in 25 minutes, I must admit to being tempted to try something similar. However, I gave up the idea of an unabridged presentation, realizing that decapitation was not an option. Some, though by no means all, the mostly male, theologians whom Sarah Coakley discusses are in fact still alive and kicking. It could too easily have been misconstrued as feminist aggression.

Instead I will take the liberty of being entirely eclectic, commenting on some of the concerns and issues that came into my mind when reading *Powers and Submissions*, choosing whatever perspective I personally find most interesting.

But before setting out on that journey I want to say thank you to the Theological Department here in Lund for giving me the opportunity to engage in a conversation with Sarah Coakley over such interesting issues as power and submission. And, of course, thank you also to Professor Coakley for the richness of her work.

Powers and Submissions contains a collection of nine essays. They have been published previously over a period of approximately ten years; even so, the essays form a whole in which Coakley pursues a question that obviously has been close to her heart for many years. The question could perhaps be framed like this: How is it possible simultaneously to maintain the feminist theological call for equality and the strange Christian claim that true liberation comes through submission to God?

And that is of course the billion dollar question for feminist theology. All religion contains elements of submission. But submission, even within the realm of religion, has proved to be lethal for many women throughout history. And although I agree that submission to God is part and parcel of being a Christian, I have not yet come across an answer to the question of how it can be *practiced* without posing serious risks for women.

To say that is perhaps to align myself with the feminist theologians who tend to "*identify* 'power' with ecclesiastical 'domination'"[1] in a way Coakley calls too "simplistic". But in my opinion, things must be kept "simple" when dealing with power and submission so as not to obscure the issues.

My point of departure when discussing power and submission is a much less sophisticated understanding of power than what Sarah Coakley presents already in her prologue, where she writes:

> Things would be simpler if there were any agreement on what human 'power' was in the first place ... Is power a force, a commodity, a hereditary deposit, a form of exchange, an authority, a means of 'discipline', a sheer domination, or a

[1] Sarah Coakley, *Powers and Submissions*, s. xviii. Blackwell Publishing, Oxford: United Kingdom 2002.

> more nebulous 'circuit'? Must it necessarily involve intentionality, imply resistance, suppress freedom, or assume a 'hierarchy'? And where does it reside: in individuals, in institutions, in armies or police forces, in money, in political parties, or more generally and democratically in every sort of subtle social exchange?[2]

These are all valid questions, but no matter how we answer them, I would suggest that power is first and foremost a relational concept. It inevitably presupposes at least two parties, of whom one, for better or worse, has the means to make sure his will is done. Whenever I hear women say that the feminist struggle is not about taking power from men, that everyone should have more power, I never know whether to laugh or cry. Power by itself is nothing; it can not exist on its own. It is always about one party's will holding sway over another party. It is, moreover, a zero-sum game.

We can, and need to, discuss under what conditions such an imbalance occurs and by what means. That is why the questions I quoted are so legitimate. But power always involves an inequality where the conditions for the relationship are determined by the party with power. It may be the case that Hegel's Master and Slave are intertwined in obscure and complex ways, but it is nevertheless the Master who is in a position to relinquish his power, whereas the Slave cannot throw off his subordination without risking his life.

That is why I am a bit ambivalent, right from the start, about how Sarah Coakley constructs her argument. Her knowledge of Gregory and, for that matter, Descartes and Troeltsch, although he does not appear in this book, is truly impressive. I remember my joy when I first set eyes on her work in a feminist theological context, i.e. when I read *Swallowing a Fishbone.* Coakley is such a sound scholar – a "real theologian" who can compete with any man when it comes to first-hand knowledge of many of the big elephants in the Christian tradition. Over the years I have read too much feminist theology that does not reflect a solid theological training. At the same time, however, I ask myself again and again: In what way is a feminist argument for equality strengthened by the fact that Coakley or I or anyone else, successfully manages to tease out from an androcentric tradition, a line or two that supports women, or equals the feminine with the masculine … or even with the Divine?

Whom are we pleasing?

So my first question when reading Coakley's book would be: Whom are we pleasing – in the academy and in church – by drawing on mainstream theological traditions that in a profound way can not but be understood as biased against women? This is not to say that women and feminist theologians are not entitled to the same research interests as men. Neither am I saying that Christian tradition is unimportant for the construal of Christian life today. I am simply asking about the conditions under which we are taking part in the academic game. Who decides whether or not an argument is valid?

I am well aware that Sarah Coakley is not claiming that something is true solely because it can be found in texts from one of the early fathers of the church, as in the case of Gregory, or one of the fathers of the Western philosophical tradition, as in the case of Descartes, or a nineteen century Benedictine monk, as in the case of John Chapman. As I read Coakley, she is simply pointing out that there are things to harvest in male traditions for Christian life today, and in her reading, that goes for women, too. That might be true, although I do not always find her arguments convincing. When, for example, in the chapter on *'Persons' in the 'Social' Doctrine of the Trinity*, she reads Gregory as suggesting that gender stereotypes must be overcome in order for the soul to reach a close relation to the Triune God, I do not object to that interpretation, but in my understanding such a transition remains within a discourse of male activity and female passivity.

However, that is not the main point here. It just illustrates the extreme complexity of all issues concerning gender, power and submission, especially within a religious discourse. For that reason, we must never lose sight of the question of who sets the conditions for our participation in the academic game, or for that matter the

[2] a.a., s. xv.

churchly game. Who decides which arguments are valid?

Submission needs to be practiced with care

That brings me to my second question, still taking as a point of departure my rather straightforward perception of power. I am intrigued by Coakley's use of the plural in the title of her book. I suppose it can be read simply as referring to her claim that there is the power of God and the power of men, i.e. at least two kinds of power – divine and human – and therefore at least two submissions. Alternatively, it can refer to all those legitimate questions concerning the "what", "how", "whom", "where" and "when" of power. But if we stick to my insistence that power is always about one party imposing his will on another party, then there is only one kind of submission, namely surrendering to someone else's will. As I have already pointed out, that has proved lethal for too many women through out history. Submission is dangerous.

At the same time, as a Christian I can not but say with Augustin: My heart is restless, O God, until it rests in you. I have this yearning to submit myself to God. But I also know that it is dangerous. I live in a world where the power of God and the power of men are so intertwined that they can scarcely be disentangled. My own dissertation, *The Meaning of Gender in Theology*, has become somewhat outdated and much has happened in feminist theory since 1995. But my analysis of the Sunday high mass in Church of Sweden made it very clear that, from a Christian perspective, the foundational distinction between God and Human is constructed as a distinction between male and female, a gender divide that, through its connection to the God – human divide, is in turn construed hierarchically. I have called this symbiosis "the dual process of value reinforcement". It can also be put as simply as Mary Daly's: "If God is male then the male is God".

So what can be said about women's submission from a feminist theological point of view? It seems to be that we must always start by reminding ourselves that submission *is* dangerous. Women's submission to God is therefore truly an act of faith, trusting God not to use her power in a way that will harm us. Therefore, and now I am spelling out a thought that is new also in my own thinking, so I am not sure how much weight it carries, but knowing how dangerous submission is for women, for me faithful submission has to be part of a secret love life. Although I trust the power of God not to hurt me, I do not trust the power of men (or women, for that matter). For that reason, for me as a feminist theologian, submission must never become a part of a public discourse. As a person of faith, I share Coakley's belief that true liberation comes through submission to the Divine. But as a public feminist theologian, I find it impossible to preach such a message to women.

My title for this paper is taken from one of the early Swedish feminists, Fredrika Bremer, who once started a speech by saying: "Behold, I am the Lord's handmaiden, not the lords'!" Women need to insist on this and bear it in mind. Therefore and finally, concerning what can be said about women and submission: Besides being dangerous for women, submission is a temptation. How can we serve the Lord without serving the lords, seeing that submission to God is modelled and taught by an androcentric theological tradition that sets the conditions and decides what is valid? When the Lord's word speaks to me through the words of the lords, it is tempting to yield to the will of men. After all, pleasing the lords can be much more rewarding than resisting them, as women in the academy are well aware. Submission therefore needs to be practised with care. For women this means not only being alert to male power but also being wary of giving in to our inner comfort zones. Yvonne Hirdman talks about 'concealed subordination', by which she means the silent agreement between men and women where women accept subordination peacefully as long as they gain not only appreciation from men, but also power over other women and men, albeit within the frame set by the man in charge. Being faithful, trusting in God, may therefore also involve resisting rather than submitting, seeing that the rewards of submission are almost everything … except freedom.

I know, of course, that Sarah Coakley is aware of all these risks and takes them seriously. Working on this response has therefore caused me to wonder why it is that I tend to end up opposing Coakley rather than joining forces with her. Unlike Daphne Hampson, for example, I do not claim ‘autonomy’ as a must for women. Not only would such a claim exclude us from any religious discourse – what God can be envisioned alongside such a claim –it also seems to me to express an unrealistic view of what it is to be human. Dependence – and therefore incomplete autonomy – is part of being human, and that holds with or without the idea of a God. So my struggle with Coakley’s exploration of ‘submission’ as a means for feminist theology to contribute to a better Christianity (or even world) does not mean that I oppose the idea of Christian life as a life subordinate to God. But there is something about ‘submission’ that does not work for me.

Dependence rather than submission

I really appreciate Coakley’s elaboration of the development of the concept of *kenōsis*; I find it both interesting and helpful. I read her first article on *Kenōsis and Subversion* against the background of Hampson’s attack on Christianity. That is perhaps not so clear in *Powers and Submissions*. But as published in *Swallowing a Fishbone,* the essay comes through much more as a response to Hampson. And because of that, and Hampson’s concern for autonomy, I started to think about dependency. Therefore, as a third issue for discussion I would like to look at how dependency would work instead of submission for the development of a *kenōtic* theology that takes seriously the power of the Cross? Must *kenōsis* necessarily be understood as a relinquishing of power that leads to submission; could it be seen instead as an acceptance of dependency? For me this is not just a matter of words. The vulnerability associated with dependency differs from that which follows from submission. Accepting dependency entails acknowledging my need for “the other”, be it God, other humans or the whole of Creation. And what if *kenōtic* Christology conveys the message of a mutual dependency between God and his creation? To me, that would pose other questions than those we usually ask concerning *omnipotence* and *omnipresence,* perhaps even *omniscience.* And for women *vis à vis* both the Lord and the lords, acknowledging dependence points not only towards vulnerability but also towards mutuality, responsibilities and possibilities of taking part in the conditioning of the relationship. Whereas submission, in my mind, implies surrender and passivity, dependence means *needing* something or someone and leaves room for me to take an active part in how the fulfilment of my need is to be played out.

I shall have to leave it at that for the time being. But my question to Sarah Coakley is whether or not she can see “dependence”, rather than the notion of submission, as a possible and fruitful way of exploring the “relinquishing of power” that is implied in *kenōtic* theology. Generally speaking, I believe that Swedish society – and probably most Western societies – are in need of a theology of dependence more than anything else.

And that leads me finally to bodies that matter. I love the way Coakley, in the last chapter of *Powers and Submissions,* has “courted the dangerous charge of anachronism”.[3] Butler’s theories on gender are seen here, in the last chapter, as an example of the obsession with bodies that marks our time, and Coakley interprets this cultural trait as an expression of a “profound eschatological longing”[4] to which Gregory has something to offer. I would personally never assume that questions concerning bodies and gender, or even life ever after, *as posed and understood today,* can be answered by an antique mind but that is not to say that there is nothing to learn from such a mind. I applaud the boldness of putting Butler in “sort of a dialogue” with Gregory. And I congratulate Coakley on her witty and, as I understand it, well-informed reading of Butler.

When the Reduced Shakespeare Company at the Criterion Theatre presented Hamlet in their 97-minute performance, they did so by getting the audience to act out different characters in the play. One section of the theatre was instructed to

[3] a.a. s. 166.
[4] a.a. s. 151.

represent Ophelia by standing up, waiving their hands above their heads and crying out: "My biological clock is ticking, I want a baby now!" Seeing that my time is running out, a "shorthand" version of Coakley's view on contemporary body fixation could perhaps be a rather alarmed: My biological clock is ticking, and my body is all I've got! From the Gregory section in the audience we would then, in Coakley's reading, hear a comforting whisper: Yes, your biological clocks are ticking but your bodies will be transformed.

My personal take on this would be: My biological clock is ticking, so I am dying day by day. Awareness of such *kenōsis* teaches me an absolute dependence and a need of the other, and therefore ultimately of the One who sustains us all. As Ninna Edgardh puts it, referring to Elisabeth Stuart's theological response to Butler: "[A]ll human desire is ultimately directed towards God."[5]

Therefore, my heart will be restless, O God, until it rests in you.

[5] Ninna Edgardh, *"Difference and Desire – a Queer reading"*, in Dialogue: A Journal of Theology. Volume 48, Number 1.

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Kenosis as mirroring

JONNA BORNEMARK

Jonna Bornemark is a PhD student in philosophy at Södertörn University, Stockholm. Her forthcoming dissertation has the preliminary title "The limit of knowledge – knowledge of the limit: A phenomenological investigation of body and transcendence" and includes an analysis of Edmund Husserl, Max Scheler, Edith Stein, and Mechthild von Magdeburg.

I would like to explore some of the features that Sarah Coakley proposes in her first essay in the collection *Powers and Submissions*: "Kenosis and Subversion: On the Repression of 'Vulnerability' in Christian Feminist Writing."[1] I will suggest an interpretation of *kenosis* not as an act performed by God, but as divinity itself, beyond any substantiated God, more in alliance with a Neo-Platonic tradition than with an idea of a God emptying himself of a primary substantiated divinity. And I will relate this to Coakley's question on vulnerability. This, I will argue, also sheds a certain light upon the question of the bodily and gendered human being.

Coakley's question

In "Kenosis and Subversion" Coakley gives four different suggestions of how to understand kenosis. The background is the critique that has been leveled against this concept by feminists, especially by Daphne Hampson,[2] who understands it as an expression of a male compensatory need or guilt. Coakley presents these four interpretations of kenosis in the following way:

1) as a *temporary* relinquishing in the incarnation.
2) as *pretending* to relinquishing.
3) as a *choice* not to have certain false and worldly forms of power.
4) as revealing *divine powers to be humble* rather than grasping. (11) This could be developed into an understanding of self-giving as the *essence* of divinity. (22-23)

And later on she adds the following interpretations. Kenosis:

5) not as a loss, but an *addition* of human flesh to the abiding, unchanging characteristics of a divinity that remains God in nature. (14)
6) as a temporary withdrawing of *some* characteristics into potency. (19)

The critique proposed by Hampson and others implies that kenosis as a redrawing of power implicates a preceding possession of power, and thus could be an ideal only for men. Coakley rightly questions the assumption that only men would have power and that kenosis would be a male category. She also shows that it is only in relation to 1) and 2) that such a criticism would be justified. But she is (as I understand her) afraid that interpretation 4) would mean to abandon the omnipotence and omniscience of God.

Coakley suggests instead that we should see kenosis as pointing toward an idea of vulnerability as a certain kind of human strength and not as a female weakness. Instead of trying to get rid of all vulnerability, she claims that Christian feminism should understand the necessary and fruitful sides of vulnerability beyond victimology. Her suggestion is that the practice of prayer could be understood as kenosis in use: Only through emptying oneself can one make possible the reception of the divine (32-39). But my question is: what does this imply for the concept of "God"? She criticizes the idea of God as an autonomous individual, or as a large disembodied spirit endowed with power and freedom, who

[1] Sarah Coakley, *Powers and Submissions – Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2002.
[2] Daphne Hampson, *Theology and Feminism,* Oxford: Blackwell, 1990.

would be in control (28, 30). Instead she wants to emphasize a divine "strength made perfect in (human weakness)," and thus the investigation of human vulnerability (31). But I don't understand what kind of God this would be. So this is one question I would like to ask, i.e. what implications the analysis of human vulnerability would have to the concept of God. But I would also like to sketch out *my* answer to this question.

I would like to try to develop this in line with the fourth interpretation above, self-emptying as divinity itself, but without abandoning the idea of God's omnipotence and instead re-read it: Kenosis as the power to give, beyond any substantiated giver that is given in-itself.

"Woman" as a central concept in contemporary philosophy

But before we continue to investigate kenosis as the essence of divinity, I would like to say something about "woman" as a central concept in contemporary philosophy. Picking up on the thread from Coakley, the question how we, as feminist philosophers and theologians, should relate to ideas such as vulnerability has been a central issue since the beginning of feminism. In the search for female empowerment, the question has been whether we should emphasize some kind of female essence, or abandon every gender-duality, since duality always tends to be structured hierarchically.

In relation to religion it has been seen as problematic that women would have no positive essence on their own, and that their spiritual journey only means to leave what they understands as themselves in order to strive towards a male divinity. Feminist philosophers have developed different strategies to deal with this problem: Irigaray, for instance, argues that women need to find a core and female essence on their own, and that they need to found a new religion in order to formulate a female ideal to aspire to. The opposite tendency has been to claim that gender has never been fixed, that it really doesn't matter in relation to God, and that it throughout history has never really played a significant role, since males could be female in relation to God and females could be described as male if they displayed great spirituality.

But we can also claim that the concept "woman" today names a philosophically interesting position precisely *because of* women's supposed lack of stable and autonomous subjectivity. Instead it allows us to investigate subjectivity in its relation to passivity, bodiliness, dependence, and affectivity. This philosophical interest can be seen in relation to kenosis as divine essence: the one interprets subjectivity beyond autonomous substantiality, the other divinity beyond a likewise autonomous substantiality.

But this doesn't mean to make neither subjectivity nor divinity powerless and insignificant. In both these philosophical ideas there is instead an interest in the limit as such, not only in the two sides that are produced through the limit. This is also where my interest lies, i.e. in what happens at the limit: where passivity and activity touch each other; where the lived bodiliness is both an inside and outside of itself; where dependence becomes independent, and every independence touches its limit and shows itself as dependent; where affectivity is connected to reason, etc. This also leads to the interest in a concept of a God that would be most intimately present and at the same time fully absent. My focus lies on the limit between what is understood as opposites, and such a discussion could of course also shed light on the human being as gendered. Because of the limited space I will here only come back to dependency, the living body, and gender.

Kenosis as mirroring

I think that there are resources for such a discussion in the concept of kenosis, as the connection between God as an omnipotent power and a humble and obedient servant. Not only does he relinquish power and becomes powerless, but, as Philippians 2.9-11 has it, because of this emptying of power, God exalted Jesus above every other name. In this sense, kenosis is not only a movement from power to lack of power, but it is also the return of power.

So let us look a bit closer on the *movement* of kenosis, i.e., the movement between the divine

power and the servant that is exalted as the central event of kenosis. I would like to suggest that this movement could be related to the phenomenon of mirroring. Mirroring includes a prototype that is mirrored, a reflecting medium, and a reflected image. In the reflecting medium the prototype is thrown out of itself, received somewhere else, and then given back. But the mirror, in contrast to a statue or a photograph, is constantly in movement. The mirror image unfolds in time, i.e. in a continual and processual contact with its prototype. If I raise my hand, the mirror image follows instantly. But, and this is central, the image is inverted. When I raise my right hand, the image raises its left hand. This is also a difference with respect to photography, even to the moving pictures. If I have a film camera in front of me together with the recorded image, it will not be a mirror image; it will raise the wrong hand and do the opposite of what I am doing. The mirror follows me exactly *only since* it is an inversion of me in terms of left and right. Only because the mirror image inverts its prototype, can it be in close alliance with it. The condition for the proximity of mirroring thus lies in its inversion. But it also lies in its temporality. As stated above, the nearness lies in the common movement, which is so tightly knit together that one sometimes can get the feeling of not knowing whether it is the image that guides me, or I that guide the image. This intrinsic temporality of mirroring allows us to look differently on the whole phenomena. If we focus on the process, *mirroring* is not constituted through three different parts (a prototype that is mirrored, a reflecting medium, and a reflected image), but through the inverted movement itself. This means to focus on the relational character between what we experience as substances, rather than starting out from substances and only subsequently see them in connection to each other. The *process* of mirroring would thus be central for us to experience ourselves *as* a prototype that can be reflected. It is also important to note that the prototype is invisible to itself other than through its image – both which have their possibility in the event of mirroring.

So, what does this have to do with kenosis? Kenosis means "emptying," not mirroring. In mirroring one still has oneself at the same time as one is thrown out of oneself, whereas in emptying one looses oneself. But what if emptying is a way to formulate the divine itself? Then the movement of emptying, which could also be understood in terms of giving, would mean not only to erase oneself, but also, and necessarily, to keep oneself. It would be the only way *not to* erase oneself. The emptying movement (mirroring) would be the only way to produce a prototype as something stabile and continual, but this stability is only possible through the continual change and movement of self-emptying. On the other side the mirror image, as a metaphor for the world, is fully dependent upon this mirroring movement. In creation divinity gives itself, and thus also preserves itself as a hidden prototype.

This could be understood as a development of the fourth alternative above. Giving would then be God's central power: The power of becoming, and thus of constant transformation, since what is given is constantly "new". But this way of thinking is not new; on the contrary, it is older than Christianity. In Christianity it can be found in Christian neo-platonism and the idea of emanation, especially as it was developed by John Scotus Eriugena in the 9th century. Eriugena does not discuss the idea of kenosis, but nevertheless develops a logic of mirroring that is close to the one above. God is both identical and utterly different from the world; it both shows itself through the image of man and is hidden through this image in its inversion of the divine.[3]

The fear of such an interpretation always lies in the dread of pantheism, i.e. that God would be nothing but its creation. But this is exactly what I take to be the strength of the analysis of the mirror. If "God" would be understood more in line with the event of inverting mirroring, rather than as a prototype, its omnipotence would lie in

[3] Johannes Scotus Eriugena, *Periphyseon, Liber 1-4*, Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1968. See for example 568A, 574B, 754B-D, 759B. The analysis of mirroring above is developed through a reading of Eriugena, see my "Jaget som evighetens spegelbild – Spegelbild som central metafor för relationen mellan människa och gud hos Johannes Scotus Eriugena" in *Det främmande i det egna: filosofiska essäer om bildning och person*, Huddinge: Södertörns högskola, 2007, ed. Jonna Bornemark.

the giving that never ends—not in the giver, but in giving. The giver is not what is primary, but only a possible objectification after the act. "God" would be the event, not a substance. The world, as a place of relational objects, would not empty the concept of God, instead worldly objects would have their origin in the event. Relating to this event, searching for it as one's own origin would be to search for God.

When Coakley discusses self-giving and self-limiting as the essence of divinity, which she formulates as "the identification of 'God' as permanently 'limited'," she asks: "Does this not then also make God intrinsically non-omnipotent and non-omniscient (as opposed to temporally non-omnipotent and non-omniscient under the conditions of incarnation)? And how, then, could such a being be 'God'?" (23) I would like to suggest that this is only so if "God" is understood as one side of a limit, as something that could depart from itself. But this is, as we have seen, not the only way to understand a self-giving God. In relation to the concept of "limit" we could understand it as *the limit itself*, or even as the event of drawing a limit. God would then, once again, not be a substance with different powers such as omnipotence and omniscience that could be relinquished. The omnipotence would instead lie exactly in the power of constantly giving.

I think Coakley too points in this direction when she discusses the image of God as an autonomous and free individual in her chapter on "Analytic Philosophy of Religion in Feminist Perspectives." There she examines such an image of God and brings forth its one-sidedness and male prerogatives, and claims that a feminist analysis would give an expanded notion starting out from experience. She also points out that such an analysis would give affectivity a different status, as well as erotic images (102-104). I would like to add that an analysis starting out from experience also necessarily needs to focus on temporality, and on the flowing character of the divine rather than divinity as a stabile substance. The divine is thus also seen as relational and in connection to the world rather than purely absent and redrawn.

Dependency, body and gender from the perspective of kenosis as mirroring

So, what happens to questions of gender and body if we see them from the perspective of kenosis as mirroring? To begin with we need to say something about God as ideal pattern for the human being. In Philippians 2:1-11 it is explicitly stated that the kenosis of Christ is an example for all human beings. For instance in the writings of Eriugena, the divine is not only what the human being should try to resemble, but he focus on the intimate similarity between God and the human being. The human being is, as it is said, "made in God's image." To Eriugena this means that the mirroring of God also lies at the heart of the human being. He claims that the human being is a mirror image of God to such an extent that it does not only constitute a simple image of God, but contains the same mirroring as God.[4] This mirroring similarity shows and hides at the same time, the image has both a similarity and an essential dissimilarity or inversion.

So lets briefly come back to what consequences a kenotic starting-point could have in relation to the question of the mutual dependence of God and the human being, the lived body, and finally to the relation between men and women.

This mirroring can, to begin with, be understood as a mutual though asymmetric dependence between the human being and God. Through the mirroring kenosis man becomes manifest. But this movement does not only show the human being as dependent upon God, but also that God is dependent upon man. The self-giving of God means that something is given, but a giver also needs a gift to give and a receiver in order to be a giver. This might sound like a very (post-)modern way to phrase it, but the dependence of God upon man has been present also in the Christian tradition, for example in the beguine Mechthild von Magdeburg's *Das fließende Licht der Gottheit* (*The flowing Light of the Godhead*), written in the 13th century.

[4] *Periphyseon,* 579A-B, 771B, 790C see also Bornemark p. 190-194.

Mechthild states that God is longing and yearning for her, and in need of her to heal his wounds. Mechthild is dependent on God as her presupposition, but God is dependent on Mechthild in order to be whole. He is wounded and incomplete without her.[5] In her text there is a continual weaving, often in erotic terms, between the divine and the human. God is *her God*, i.e. God only in relation to her (or in relation to the living). There is never any talk of God as a pre-existent substance independent of his creation (or self-emptying).

One special feature in Mechthild's relation to God, connected to God's dependence upon her, is her bodiliness and sensibility. She says to God: "You are the sun of all eyes", and he answers: "You are a light unto my eyes".[6] I understand these phrases exactly in terms of their mutual dependency. The ability to see is dependent upon the light of God, i.e., upon the given capacity to see, but God also depends on Mechthild (as a representative) in order to constitute the full phenomena of sight. Without bodily beings there could not be any visibility, i.e. without something to see, there would be no seeing—just like the prototype is invisible to itself without its mirror image. She is thus a reflecting light in front of God, but she is also seeing through God, doubling God's seeing and thus mirror the mirroring at the same time as God's seeing goes beyond the seeing of all beings (just as we accept that the backside of the moon is visible without anyone ever seeing it). The bodily being both has the capacity to see and to be seen. The living body is exactly the connection between experiencing capacity and something experienced.

Whereas Gregory of Nyssa (at least in Coakley's reading in the last chapter, "The Eschatological Body") strives toward a desire beyond gender, my reading of Mechthild would stick to gender as the difference between erotic bodies. Mechthild and her God are dissimilar, but deeply connected, their meeting goes beyond the similarity / dissimilarity of prototype and image – it goes into their erotic meeting in the inverting movement of mirroring, i.e. the point that connects them and at the same time draws them apart. In Mechthild, gender is a name of this simultaneous similarity and dissimilarity between lovers. This could of course be understood as locked into hetero-normativity, but I'm not sure that this is a necessary consequence. Maybe gender does not name two biological sexes, but two positions in a play of erotic tension. It would then not name a fixed order that we are bound to, but a fluid field of tensions, where power, domination, submission, passivity, and activity are central aspects, and between which the world comes forth. The kenotic mirroring demands difference, craves for difference—and thus creates difference. Without this divine drawing of limits there is no world and no God. The relation between God and the world is thus inherently gendered, as the name of an erotic tension that needs simultaneous similarity and dissimilarity.[7]

Conclusion

God as dependent and vulnerable is a large and complex question in the Christian tradition. Here I only wanted to point to tenets that connect kenosis with God as an event – as self-giving and as mirrored in man – with God as dependent. These tenets are most apparent in texts that we understand as parts of a mystic tradition.

Coakley argues that kenosis should be understood as a positive vulnerability and that the repression of vulnerability would be a danger to Christian feminism. I would like to argue that the human being can not be truly vulnerable if this is not understood as mirroring a divine vulnerability, which I have discussed here as a dependency. But Coakley, as I understand her, does not want to end up in a position where divine essence is understood as self-emptying, since she understands this as giving up the omnipotence of God. My suggestion here would be to re-read omnipotence: Instead of understanding it as a characteristic of a substance, it could be

[5] *Das fließende Licht der Gottheit*, Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 2003, see for example II:4, III:2.

[6] *Das fließende Licht der Gottheit*, III:2

[7] The analysis of Mechthild is developed further in my forthcoming dissertation, *Vetandets gräns – gränsens vetande: transcendens och kroppslighet utifrån tidig fenomenologi*.

understood as the capacity of continual giving, thus locating the divine in the mirroring, the event of drawing a line.

To investigate such an understanding of God would also mean to develop a concept of subjectivity that connects activity to passivity, autonomy to dependence, and spirituality to bodiliness. And these resources, it could be argued, can to a large extent be found in a tradition of female subjectivity, not only among female writers, but also among men in a mystic and queer relation to God. Similarly as in the concept of kenosis, this does not mean to take leave of power, but implies a different kind of power – and thus that the play between power and dependency are two sides of the same coin.

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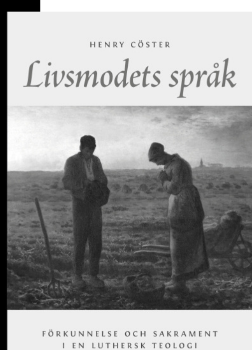

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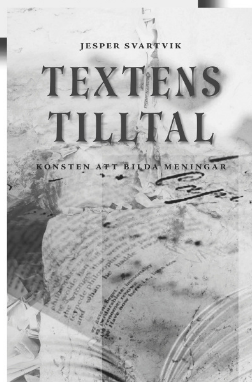

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Pain and Its Transformations
A Discussion

SARAH COAKLEY

In this last section of the day I should be glad to tell you something about a recent book I have co-edited on pain,[1] its relationship to my earlier, feminist, work on the body,[2] and the nature of this new book's intended interdisciplinary and inter-religious undertaking.

However, I should also like to frame this introduction to the volume on pain with some brief, suggestive remarks about practical (or 'pastoral') theology, its relation to systematic theology, and its potential for a richer – and more intellectually demanding – engagement with other disciplines, especially with medical science, than is commonly presumed possible.

The book *Pain and Its Transformations* in fact arose from an interdisciplinary conversation started at Harvard after my year's internship as a trainee chaplain in a Boston hospital when I was being formed for the priesthood (i.e., during my diaconal year). That year changed me immeasurably, both spiritually and theologically: I was serving on a cancer ward, and also on a very desperate ward for elderly Alzheimer's patients with violent 'atypical psychosis'. However, for all the richness of the year in the hospital, I experienced a great deal of frustration at the lack of interaction between doctors and nurses, on the one hand, and chaplains on the other; and I was also greatly disappointed by the lack of connections made to systematic theology by the senior chaplains who were teaching us ordinands pastoral care in the hospital. The overall assumption seemed to be that chaplaincy work in general, and 'pastoral' (or 'practical') theology in particular, were not arenas for the operation of the mind or intellect so much as realms of the *affect*. Consequently it was unsurprising that medical personnel saw their own technical, clinical expertise as having little to do with the undertakings of the chaplains. 'Religion', in general, was demoted in the hospital (even, oddly in the Catholic hospital in which I was serving) to the realm of personal, private 'preference' – an inner arena with little obvious implications for clinical outcomes. And this presumption seemed to be both undergirded, and intensified, by the American myth of the separation of church and state.[3]

Now I would not deny for a moment that all chaplaincy work requires great spiritual sensitivity and 'affective' maturity: in this way, practical/pastoral work is if anything *more* demanding than academic theology in the university. But at its best, I should like to suggest, pastoral theology should be a creative extension of systematic theology, not its anti-intellectual step-sister; and if this is to be so, and the links between the realms rightly operating, then sophisticated interdisciplinary connections should also be possible between theology, medical science, and other cognate disciplines (such as anthropology, sociology, psychology, musicology, and 'religious studies'). These disciplines, in turn, can not only enrich the task of theology itself, but actually change approaches to clinical practice and medical research as well.

Such, at any rate, was my ambitious hope when I returned from my year of intensive pastoral training and embarked on a 2-year interdisciplinary seminar at Harvard on 'Pain and Its Transformations', co-chaired with the Harvard medical anthropologist and psychiatrist Arthur Kleinman. The seminar led to a very exciting capstone conference, of which the *Pain* book is the immediate outcome. It also led to the first course developed at Harvard involving equal numbers of Divinity students (many of them destined for hospital chaplaincy or the parish) and

[1] Eds. Sarah Coakley and Kay Kaufman Shelemay, *Pain and Its Transformations: The Interface of Biology and Culture* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2007).

[2] Ed. Sarah Coakley, *Religion and the Body* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997).

[3] I say 'myth', because – as anyone who lives in the United States knows – the 'separation' is regularly abrogated by, e.g., politicians who bless their constitutents or use explicitly theological language in their speeches.

of Medical students (destined for careers in medical practice and research). In that course ('Medicine and Religion') Arthur Kleinman and I put into action many of the insights and new research agendas of the book itself. The book, then, is designed to be used *both* as a teaching volume (especially for classes in which medical personnel might be brought into contact with students of theology and religious studies), *and* as a set of proposals for future research on pain. Further, my own hope (though this matter is not very actively discussed in the book itself) is that this model of interdisciplinarity may go on to serve as a catalyst for rethinking the relation of systematic theology, 'pastoral theology', and the other disciplines represented in the book. Such interconnections, I believe, can be mutually transforming for all involved. The processes involved in such interconnections can be followed in the book itself, since in it we have 'captured' and transcribed some of the richest conversations from the conference in which creative new ideas came forward between exponents of different disciplines.

Pain and Its Transformations: The Core Contents

So much by way of background about how this book came to be produced. Let me now sketch something of its contents, albeit rather briefly and selectively. I shall then end with some very brief suggestions for how its lessons might impact both medical practice in the hospital and pastoral, ministerial practice in the area of 'spiritual healing'.

I shall list here five distinctive dimensions of this volume which may be of special interest to the members of this symposium, leaving it to my respondent Jayne Svenungsson to pick up on whichever of these may be of most concern to her in her response.

i. *The Malleable Body*. As mentioned already, I came to the *Pain* project from my earlier inter-religious and feminist work on the body, *Religion and the Body*, in which I had argued (in the 'Introduction' to that volume) that the post-modern body, far from being an extra-cultural datum – the one physically-given and unambiguous item that we all have in common, as some may suppose – is, in contrast, a fluid, malleable and mysterious entity, subject to our continuous imaginative re-workings and narrative re-descriptions. Thus it makes all the difference in the world (literally) whether I think of the human body as a mere slab of mortal flesh that 'I' must somehow seek to control, master, and keep jogging on as long as possible in order to defy death; or whether, in contrast, I think of bodiliness as the site of a progressive religious transformation with a glorious eschatological goal in mind. The human body, then, with all its joys and failures, is the arena of significant metaphysical decisions; and these decisions are open to (sometimes dramatic) change when inflected with religious meaning.

ii. *Neuroscience and Hermeneutics*. Moving from here, what the *Pain* volume explores centrally is some remarkable discussions in the recent neuroscientific investigation of pain which chime consonantly with the hermeneutics of the body that my earlier volume had stressed. For what we now understand scientifically (and the California-based systems neuroscientist Howard Fields is the exponent of this research in the *Pain* volume) is that the way we *interpret* pain is an absolutely crucial component *of* any pain that we may have. Work with fMRI imaging can demonstrate that the neural circuitry bearing messages to the brain from the site of actual physical injury or pathology are quite distinct from the circuits contributing other messages relating to the *interpretation* of that pain; and the 'pain event', as such, is of course an inextricable combination of these from the point of view of the sufferer. Experiments by Bayer, Baer and Early (reported in *Pain* 1991) already found that quite significant pain could be educed in volunteer subjects by mere expectation or fear; and – *mutatis mutandis* – there is strong reason to believe that some pain can be significantly moderated, even effectively obliterated, by reinterpretation or spiritual transformations of various sorts. Much of the *Pain* book is therefore taken up with examining how different religious traditions have responded to questions of pain, and how their various different metaphysical presumptions about pain can and do transform it experientially. There is also the accompanying

issue of how rituals and musical forms of expression (formal lament, etc.) might be equally powerful, or precisely be the bearers of such reinterpretation.

iii. *Pain and Spiritual Practice*. A special interest is evidenced in the book in forms of spiritual practice which may assist in coping with pain, relating differently to it, or even rendering one oblivious to it in some circumstances. But the various essayists who explore these dimensions (I do so, in my own essay on the 16th.-century Carmelites on pain, and so does Luis Gomez, in his piece on pain and Buddhist practices of meditation) are keen to underscore that religious practices should not be read as only being interested in *stopping* pain, or alleviating its impact. Here I take – respectful but critical – issue with Herbert Benson of the Mind/Body Institute in Boston, who has successfully utilized 'meditation' for pain relief *qua* 'relaxation response', as he calls it. I point out that, in contrast to the immediate presumptions and goals of Benson's approach, for ramified religious theories of spiritual transformation (such as the Carmelites'), pain is often seen as an unavoidable *means* of such transformation, though never sought as an end in itself. However, pain does - on such a view - inexorably come to those who persevere in practices of meditation and contemplation, and perceive themselves as joining some sort of cosmic battle of spiritual efficacy and significance.

iv. *Pain as Trans-Individual*. This point in fact brings us to the fourth central theme of the book: its exposition of the capacity of pain to be transferred by forms of trans-individual, or corporate, or substitutionary, ways of bearing it. This tends to be an aspect of pain that seems initially fantastical to the secular medical mind; but once the inextricability of physical and 'interpretative' (or spiritual) pain is recognized, it can no longer be ruled out as impossible. Indeed this facet of pain is – by contrast to the scepticism of the medical establishment – almost obvious to those religious traditions which utilize religious rituals for the purgation of memory, the transformation of grief, and the setting of irreducible pain in a wider metaphysical frame of meaning. The contributors to our book who concentrate on these aspects of pain are for the most part social anthropologists and psychiatrists who have witnessed the efficacy of forms of ritual in the overcoming of negative effects from social traumas.

v. *Pain, Philosophy and the 'Somato-moral'*. Finally, the book considers from a variety of angles what ethical and philosophical lessons follow from the neuroscientific and hermeneutical approaches to pain discussed in it. It is here argued that there can be no pain event which does not have implicit ethical consequences. Indeed, *without* pain, our actions would be dangerously divorced from reflections on their consequences; whereas *with* pain, we are forced to deeper reflection about human empathy and care, on the one hand, and the problems of religious 'theodicy', on the other.

I have now said enough, I think, to indicate to you something of the interests and novelties of the *Pain* book. The central 'take-home' message of the neuroscientific and clinical research found in it is that *there is no such thing as imagined pain*. Anyone 'presenting' clinically with pain – physical, psychic, or some combination – *is* in pain. But by the same token, and somewhat paradoxically, there is no pain *except* 'imagined' pain. By this I do not mean that pain is not real; but rather that there is always already interpretation of any pain event, which vitally affects its felt human impact.

It follows, therefore, as the 'Conclusions' of the book outline, that the individualized, medicalized approach to pain in the modern hospital is greatly in need of hermeneutical complexification; and that the approach to 'pastoral training' in the hospital in which doctors, nurses and chaplains operate in entirely separate realms (with nurses and chaplains assumed to be merely adjunct subsidiaries to the doctors), is a model clearly brought into severe critical question by the latest pain research itself. An implicitly feminist analysis here can easily show that that which has been occluded, or subordinated, or 'privatized', in the field of modern medicine may well now hold the key to significant new possibilities in medical research.

Finally, and by way of conclusion, it follows that any theological approach to so-called 'spiritual healing' in the contemporary sphere must take fresh account of the significance of the realm of the *hermeneutics* of bodily pain, as our

Pain volume has been all along concerned to underscore. Indeed, the final volume in the trilogy which I began with *Religion and the Body* and continued with *Pain and Its Transformations* will be devoted precisely to the topic of spiritual healing, and to the role of interpretation within it. Only within the context of a sensitive account of the possibilities of hermeneutical transformation of some sort is any such healing comprehensible scientifically. I hope in this third, and last, volume to show how powerful is the predisposition to healing in an interpretative context of physical safety and psychical or spiritual support.[4]

[4] Ed. Sarah Coakley, *Spiritual Healing: Science, Meaning and Discernment* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, forthcoming)

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Pain, Passion and Compassion

A Response to Sarah Coakley

JAYNE SVENUNGSSON

Dr. Theol. Jayne Svenungsson teaches systematic theology at Stockholm School of Theology. Her dissertation treated the question of God in postmodern philosophy and theology. Dr. Svenungsson is the co-editor of an introduction to postmodern theology in Swedish, a volume in which Sarah Coakley is represented. She presently works on a research project with the preliminary title: "Thinking historically: On prophetism, messianism and the development of the spirit (Geist)".

On the turning away
From the pale and downtrodden
And the words they say
Which we won't understand
Don't accept that what's happening
Is just a case of others suffering
Or you'll find that you're joining in
The turning away

D. Gilmour

With Easter Week still present in mind, the first theme which announces itself to a theologian addressing the question of pain will most likely be that of the Passion. The Passion of Christ. The "Man of Sorrows," who was known in the Swedish translation of the Hebrew Bible until the year 2000 as the "Man of Pains", *smärtornas man*. However, as most theologians know very well, this is not an altogether uncontroversial topic. Particularly in the aftermath of Mel Gibson's much debated interpretation of the Passion in 2004, people tend to be, to say the least, put off by the violent tale of the bleeding Savior. And anyway, why would we want to spend our Easter vacation staring into the gloomy and tormented face of Jesus Christ when we could instead rejoice in candy-coloured feathers, chocolate eggs and crackling bonfires?

Still, to some people, the tale of the suffering Christ does carry some meaning, even in the present day. The commemoration of the Passion, in the liturgical year of the church, offers an occasion to simultaneously contemplate on our own *compassion*, our empathy for the pain and suffering of other human beings. But also, and perhaps even more importantly, to reflect on our own partaking in humanity's perpetual passion, i.e., in repressive structures and collective violence, which few of us could claim not to be entangled in at one level or another.

The question I would like to address, although perhaps not answer, in this short paper is whether the Passion story still today, and not only to a few faithful ones, can serve as an incitement precisely to this kind of self-examinating reflection. In other words, is it possible to retrieve through the Passion a narrative framework which alerts us and urges us never to grow complacent or to remain passive when confronted with the pain and suffering of another human being?

On the narrative mediation of pain

Having put this question on the table, let me now turn my attention to the impressive and in many ways thought-provoking collection of papers edited by Professor Coakley under the title *Pain and its Transformations*.[1] Among the many merits of this volume is its wide range of researches — from neurobiologists to psychiatrists and theologians — which allows for an extensive interdisciplinary investigation of the complex and intriguing topic that pain constitutes. Although not altogether without tensions between representatives of some of the more distantly re-

[1] Sarah Coakley and Kay Kaufman Shelemay (eds.), *Pain and Its Transformations: The Interface of Biology and Culture*, Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2007.

lated disciplines, a number of exciting cross-fertilizations are revealed, which may well enrich the future reflection on pain within the various particular disciplines.

From a theological viewpoint, one of the more challenging perspectives revealed is the observance, made by cognitive neuroscientists, of how higher-order neural processes in fact reach down and modulate incoming sensory information, with the implication that larger patterns of meaning to some extent shape our perceptional apprehension of the world. As emphasized by neuroscientist Howard Fields, there is, in other words, an intrinsic relationship between our experiences of pain and the narrative patterns through which we (simultaneously) interpret pain. Or, to put it even more straightforwardly, physical pain — to the extent to which it is conscious — is always already neurally interpreted.[2]

If it is true that our sensitivity to pain is to an important degree a matter of "learned hermeneutics", it becomes of prime interest to investigate how various interpretative frameworks might serve as mediators of meaning with the potential to either alleviate or intensify pain. And this is precisely where further studies are required of how pain and suffering are construed in and by various mythological, philosophical, ritual and literary narratives.

In her own major contribution to the volume, Sarah Coakley offers an excellent example of such a study.[3] Through a careful reading of the spiritual writings of the sixteenth-century Carmelites Teresa of Ávila (1515–1582) and John of the Cross (1542–1591), Coakley reveals an intricate understanding of the relation of psychic or spiritual pain to physical pain. To both these authors, writing in the early dawn of modernity, pain and suffering appeared as a purgative precondition of spiritual transformation. Interestingly, however, the objective of the painful spiritual journey — which is precisely that of a higher spiritual transformation — does *not* imply the end of pain and suffering. Rather, this transformation, which is interpreted as an appropriation of Christ's life and sufferings, implies a refined capacity to continually live with the pain and suffering which are a necessary part of all embodied life.

Given the crucial part played by interpretation in the experience of pain, one can, as does Coakley in her conclusion, ask whether these accounts of spiritual development — including the construal of pain implied — might offer helpful clues to our capacity to cope with experiences of pain. Can, in other words, these narratives, and the practices they involve, palpably affect the felt quality of physical pain?

I shall leave that question open for our further discussion. What I would like to do instead, is to stretch Coakley's conclusion in another direction and return to my initially announced question whether the contemplation of Christ's passion can render us more sensitive to the pain and suffering of other human beings. Now, I shall immediately make clear that such a perspective is already hinted at in Coakley's reading of both John and Teresa. Accordingly, she stresses that the spiritual transformation aimed at by both authors ultimately does not have merely individual but also *communal* significance.

Thus, for Teresa, the appropriation of Christ's life and sufferings does not only imply an incorporation of the self into the life of the Trinity, but also a call to *imitate* Christ in his sufferings. And this imitation is played out nowhere else than in the continuing partaking in the pain and hardship of ordinary shared human life. This communal aspect is also beautifully expressed in John's use of the metaphors of wounds. Having gone through the "dark nights" of the spiritual journey — with all the pain involved — John is still left with a wound. So the very *healing* brought about by the union with Christ entails that John is marked by a wound — the wound of love, which leaves his soul open to God's further love, but also the wound of contrition, which prevents him from growing complacent, from turning away from the pain and suffering of his fellow human beings.

[2] See further Howard L. Fields, "Setting the Stage for Pain: Allegorical Tales from Neuroscience", in Coakley and Kaufman Shelemay (eds.), *Pain and Its Transformations*, pp. 36-61.

[3] Sarah Coakley, "Palliative or Intensification? Pain and Christian Contemplation in the Spirituality of the Sixteenth-Century Carmelites", in Coakley and Kaufman Shelemay (eds.), *Pain and Its Transformations*, pp. 77-100.

Hence, to both Teresa and John there seems to be an integral bond between passion and compassion, between sharing in Christ's pain and being attentive to the pain of one's neighbor. This should, however, not surprise us. If we look more extensively at the Christian tradition, we find that the compassion motive — emblematically expressed in the mourning women at the foot of the cross — is inscribed in the Passion narrative from its very beginning. It is also worthwhile recalling that the compassion motive has been an important part of Christian art throughout the ages. Here, one can especially point at the visual representations of the Passion in the Western tradition during the High Middle Ages, where it was a deliberate motive to induce feelings of compassion and contrition in the viewer. Contemplating the image of the suffering Christ, in other words, became a matter not only of sharing in his pain, but also of revealing the believer's own partaking in the crimes against divinity. However, the aim was not only to engender feelings of compassion and contrition before God, but ultimately before the suffering of *all* others.[4]

Once we again touch upon the question whether contemplation of the suffering Christ can serve as a narrative pattern which enhances our attentiveness to the pain of the "other". These fragmentary historical examples indeed indicate such a possibility.

The danger of glorifying unnecessary suffering

Still, this is far from the whole story. If the Passion narrative, at its best, has served to alleviate pain for people in agony and to enhance feelings of compassion, there is a long and indisputable register of more sinister effects which the same narrative has had throughout history. These effects, which have been brought to light in an unparalleled way by modern feminist critique, concern above all the Passion story's tendency to foster patterns which glorify pain and suffering as something which has a value in itself and which therefore we should not necessarily try to overcome. To pick but one example, one can think of Rita Nakashima Brock's and Rebecca Parker's painful accounts of how the narrative of the suffering Christ in certain Christian contexts is used by both victims, perpetrators and church authorities to legitimate and preserve relations of domestic violence or sexual abuse. Hence, you would find abused Christian women encouraged by their spiritual advisors to remain faithful to their violent husbands, as "Christ did not turn away from the cup of suffering," or, equally appalling, Christian teenagers who endure abusive sexual relationships in the conviction that their suffering makes them more Christlike.[5]

Taking note of these horrible accounts, it is, however, important to observe that these destructive patterns do not naturally follow from the Passion narrative itself, but rather from a particular theology of atonement which, in parts of the Christian tradition, has been projected onto the story of Jesus' suffering and death. The theology in question, which can be traced back to certain currents of scholasticism and which reverberates in much of both Catholic and Protestant theology, teaches, in short, that God's honor demands satisfaction for human transgression and that the sacrifice of Jesus therefore is a necessary ransom to be paid if God's reconciliation with mankind is to take place.

So the argument, forcefully put forth by Brock, Parker and numerous other theologians, is that the idea that God himself somehow requires the suffering of an innocent victim has shaped — and continues to shape — cultural structures which sanction oppression, victimization and glorification of unnecessary suffering. Looking at the very concrete cases presented by Brock and Parker, but also, looking around at a world where honor-related violence and distorted notions of retaliation thrive, it is, of course, hard to contest the pertinence of this critique.

[4] See further Gabriele Finaldi, "Passion and Compassion", in idem (ed.), *The Image of Christ: The Catalogue of the Exhibition SEEING SALVATION*, London: Yale University Press, 2000, pp. 104-107.

[5] See Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker, *Proverbs of Ashes: Violence, Redemptive Suffering, and the Search for What Saves Us*, Boston: Beacon Press, 2001.

A face to set against the violence

With this critique in mind, let me now finally return to my question as to whether it would be possible to retrieve through the Passion narrative an interpretative framework which might play a constructive role in our coping with experiences of pain.

Some of the theologians who have directed this critique indeed seem to suggest that it would not. Thus, Rita Nakashima Brock, in her own constructive conclusions, stresses that if we want to break free from the violent and oppressive structures that certain theologies of the cross have fostered, we need to do away not only with the violent representations of Christ in our tradition, but also with the emphasis on the particularity of Jesus' suffering and death.[6]

I am, for my own part, less sure about this. My worries, more precisely, are that in this eagerness to distance ourselves from the violence and particularity in the sufferings of Jesus of Nazareth, we tend to reveal something about our more general inclination to turn away from any particular victim. As psychiatrist Laurence Kirmayer points out in his revealing contribution to the volume, this inclination certainly seems to be an inevitable part of our constitution as human beings, one which probably can be related to our inability to accept our own powerlessness to alleviate the pain and suffering of others.[7] The interesting question in this light is, of course, to what extent we are able to modify this original inclination.

Which brings me back to the Passion story. One reason to take leave of it would certainly be the fear that it might induce and strengthen this inclination. In other words, with its emphasis on violence and suffering, the Passion runs the risk of making us indifferent towards pain and suffering, or even worse — it might entice us to reenact its violent logic. But this is precisely where I believe we are mistaking ourselves. For is it really the violence depicted — the bruised body and the bleeding face of Christ — which risks corrupting us, and not rather the ideological framework which teaches that this violence somehow is divinely sanctioned?[8] Does not the tortured gaze of Christ, when stripped away from this sinister theology, on the contrary call out for our compassion and thus remind us of the unrighteousness of the turning away from any particular victim?

To spell out the point that I am trying to make here a little bit further, let me recall an important distinction made by Emmanuel Levinas in his philosophical reflections on pain and suffering. Although sometimes inevitable, Levinas comments, the pain and suffering of the other — of every other, including the self as the other's other — is senseless, absurd and utterly unjustifiable. But just as pointless, ugly and unjustifiable as the suffering of the other happens to be, the self's suffering for the other's suffering is, to the same degree, meaningful and essential. For it is precisely this second kind of suffering, i.e. the pain I experience when confronted with the suffering of my neighbor, which evokes my responsibility to care for and ease his or her pain.[9]

The value of this distinction between the pain and suffering of the other and that of the self — between passion and compassion if you wish — is that it allows for a rejection of all forms of glorification of pain and suffering *per se*, without ever permitting us to turn away from the actual pain and suffering of particular victims throughout history, let alone in the concrete life surrounding us.

To begin to conclude, what I am suggesting is that the Passion — enacted literary, visually or musically — indeed can function as a narrative structure which enhances our attentiveness to the pain and suffering of others, but that this requires, precisely, that it is viewed in light of this

[6] Cf. Rita Nakashima Brock, *Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power*, New York: Crossroad, 1988, p. 250.

[7] Laurence J. Kirmayer, "On the Cultural Mediation of Pain", in Coakley and Kaufman Shelemay (eds.), *Pain and Its Transformations*, pp. 363-401.

[8] Cf. S. Mark Heim in his *Saved from Sacrifice: A Theology of the Cross*, Grand Rapids, Mich. and Cambridge, Mass: Eerdmans, 2006, pp. 108-133. See also Michel Demaison, "Peut-on dire aujourd'hui que la souffrance de Christ et la nôtre sont rédemptrices ?", i Catherine Perrotin et Michel Demaison (red.), *La douleur et la souffrance*, Paris: Cerf, 2002, s. 153-156.

[9] Emmanuel Levinas, *Entre nous. Essais sur le penser-à-l'autre*, Paris: Grasset, 1991, pp. 100-112.

distinction between passion and compassion. More particularly, this means that we should have to turn our back to every sacrificial theology which sees the suffering and death of Christ as a necessary part of the atonement, *without* turning our back to the particular victim who is made visible at the cross. In this respect, a great deal of work has indeed been achieved in recent decades, not only by the already mentioned feminist critique, but also by René Girard in his many influential works on the particular anthropology which successively unfolds in the Jewish and Christian traditions.[10]

Accordingly — and not unlike Levinas by whom he is partly inspired — Girard interprets the Passion story in the light of the prophetic theology of the Hebrew Bible. This theology, as you know, pictures a God who manifests himself in the world by taking sides with the weak and powerless, a God who allies himself with the ones who are rejected by the order of this world: the widow, the poor, the exiled. A God, furthermore, who takes pains to rehabilitate persons who have unjustifiably suffered, such as the figures of Joseph or Job. What is disclosed here, as Girard observes, is a theological anthropology which persistently stresses the innocence of the victim and thereby undermines the scapegoating logic characteristic of so much human culture.

Read in this light, the Passion story more than anything reveals God's identification with the victim and thus manifests a forceful rejection of the entire idea of a divinely sanctioned logic of sacrifice. God's will is not revealed in the execution of Jesus at the cross, but rather in the man who filled a sponge and offered him to drink at the cross, or, in the women who kept watch at the foot of the cross until he gave up his breath.

The value of this narrative reversal of victim and perpetrator — God no longer being on the side of the vanquisher — can hardly be overestimated. As Laurence Kirmayer points out with reference to the transformative effects of rituals, the way a ritual — or indeed any form of cultural narrative — structurally orders suffering is likely to influence the worldly predicament of the sufferer by shaping how others view the sufferer, and thereby alter his or her social position in one direction or the other. In this perspective, the Passion story — read in line with the Hebrew prophetic tradition, as suggested by Girard and others — might well serve as such an interpretive framework which alters the position of the sufferer in the more benign direction.

What I am suggesting, in order words, is that the Passion story, once divested of the sacrificial theology so often ascribed to it, might serve as a narrative structure which enhances our sensitivity not only to the exposure and vulnerability of (potential) victims, but also to our own inclinations to take part in repressive or scapegoating structures which create victims.

So, by way of conclusion, why would we want to spend our Easter vacation staring into the gloomy and tormented face of Jesus Christ? Certainly not because this offers us something unique, new or exiting. This tormented face and agonized gaze is only too familiar, as are the numerous tormented faces and agonized gazes which stare at us every time we turn on the news or open the morning paper. The Passion story, in this respect, offers only another example of humanity's seemingly bottomless potential for violence and victimization.

But perhaps it is precisely here that we find a good reason *not* to turn away from the violent tale of the bleeding Savior: because this tale is *not* unique, because marginalization and persecution of human beings persevere in every new time, in every culture. But also because this tale, in all its commonness, nonetheless contains a unique element. Because this particular tale about this unparticular execution as it has (partly) been narrated throughout history testifies to a God who rejects sacrifice and declines the blood of the innocent. It is for these reasons, among others, that we continue to recount the Passion of Christ. To give a face to the victim. And to the victimizing tendencies subtly present in each of us. But also to give a face to forgiveness. To have a face to set against the violence.

[10] See, above all, René Girard, *Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde. Recherches avec Jean-Michel Oughourlian et Guy Lefort*, Paris: Grasset, 1978; *Le Bouc émissaire*, Paris: Grasset, 1982; and *Je vois Satan tomber comme l'éclair*, Paris: Grasset, 1999.

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Brief responses to my interlocutors

SARAH COAKLEY

First let me say how grateful I am to all my respondents, for the care and charity with which they have read my work. I thank them all for the time and energy they have given to their task. In what follows I do not intend to counter-respond in any way defensively, because each of the points they raise is well taken. Indeed, between them they have covered almost all of the points of criticism that I regularly hear when people first read me; and in some ways I must admit that I deliberately provoke such criticisms in order to engender further thought. However, let me provide just one paragraph of appreciative response to each of my critics in turn:

Antje Jackelén. This is a very discerning critique of my lecture. I do want to stress, however, that Bishop Jackelén is right to say that we have a lot in common in our approaches – perhaps more than is obvious from the one lecture she is here responding to. In particular, my work has been marked by a distinct commitment to interdisciplinarity, including recent interlocutions with medical and biological science. Perhaps what is confusing, then, is that I resist the (still common) presumption that such an engagement in interdisciplinarity necessarily leads to a 'liberal' dilution of doctrinal content, or a selling out to secular metaphysical tenets of thought. Secondly, I know I risk misunderstanding (perhaps this is where I most provocatively 'trail my coat') when I use the term '*totale*' to describe my theological method; many are my readers who have begged me to drop this term! But the provocation is quite intentional, and also paradoxically related to an equally strong theme in my theology: that of the 'apophatic qualifier' of any method which is committed to the always-disturbing practices of silent attention. Remember that I insist that my method is just as much an 'unsystematic systematics' as it is a *'théologie totale'*. The reason I cling to the latter term, however, is to remind the reader of two things which tend to get forgotten in our current postmodern theological and philosophical milieu: 1. that coherence of vision is always that to which the systematician must aim, however diverted and redirected s/he may be by constant pneumatological 'interruptions'; and 2. that systematic theology, far from being 'totalizing' in the hegemonic sense, aims to dig down the messy tell of doctrine's earthed enactments, there to encounter both heterodox or abusive enactments, on the one hand, and/or buried spiritual treasure otherwise ignored by drily academic theology, on the other. Recall here that I originally borrowed the term '*théologie totatle*' from the parallel 'archeological' intentions of the *Annales* school of historiography (*l'histoire totale*). Finally, Bishop Jackelén is very right to press her point about whether such a method as mine is suitable for the (secular) university, or whether it can be practised at all by non-believers or non-Christians. I take this issue very seriously and it demands a careful answer. But let me first point out that when we train 'theologians' in the university, we initially spend most of our time doing a second-order enterprise which largely consists of 'talking about talking about God' ('theologology', as the Dutch Jesuit Joep van Beeck has called it). And indeed some theologians (including many very fine ones) do that for most or even all of their careers. Morevoer, this second-order discourse overlaps with, and to some extent animates, the 'systematic' task, proper. But that *real* systematic task, I insist, is always in some sense a proposal for life – a complete vision into which one is asking the reader to step and to 'taste and see'; and it is a weird modern aberration, in my view, that systematic theologies can be written that somehow pretend they are not doing such.

Can non-believers or non-Christians join in this discussion? Absolutely: this sort of systematic theology invites criticism and – if it disturbs or annoys – that does not mean that it itself is not open to being disturbed or annoyed (see above). Finally, if offence is caused in the 'secular' university that some 'practice' should be seen as intrinsically related to an academic undertaking, here I can only point to such supposedly-uncontroversial parallel 'practices' as sports training in degrees in sport, acting in degrees in

theatre and English literature, and the undertaking of practical experiments in almost all branches of science. Again, it is only a modern regnant secularism that has marginalized or suppressed the integration of thought and practice in philosophy and theology (on this see the insightful work of Pierre Hadot on ancient pagan philosophy); and it is a mistaken picture of religious belief – much put about by contemporary atheism – that such belief is necessarily authoritarian and inflexible, incapable of academic rigour and self-critical reflection. I say: we must expose and resist these presumptions, not pander to them!

Philip Geister, S.J. Again, this is a sympathetic and insightful reading, linking my thought creatively to that of Ignatius Loyola; and I really only have one short point of clarification to make in response to Fr. Geister. That is: as becomes much more apparent in the first volume of my systematics as a whole than is evident in this one lecture (which forms an early chapter), I take it as axiomate that prayer is *essentially* corporate, because it is made possible in and through the Holy Spirit, who gathers us ever more deeply into the realm of Christ's suffering and redeeming incarnate life. Therefore, although when we first start to pray on our own (and particularly in silence) such prayer may seem at times both lonely and frightening, as one matures in the life of prayer one comes to understand that prayer is in fact the *least* lonely or individualistic thing one does, linking us as it does – most mysteriously and deeply – to all those whom we meet but also to many whom we may only ever meet in another life. (Sometimes we get glimpses of this, but only fleetingly). Outside my systematics, mainly in homilies and sermons, I have written of prayer as both humanly 'impossible' (because really done by the Spirit: see again Romans 8. 26), and also humanly 'unbearable' (because most deeply conjoined to the suffering and redemptive work of Christ: see Mark 14. 36). In short, we can only pray at all because we are stepping into a *divine* conversation always already in process, one which links heaven and earth vertically and all the 'saints' horizontally. I think Fr. Geister and I really agree about this, and it is my fault in this particular lecture for not making this corporate element clearer. However, there is a remaining, adjunct, point on which we perhaps do not quite agree. For I remain puzzled that Fr. Geister would want to drive a wedge between 'acting' and 'theological thinking' (p. 21) in looking for the effects of prayer in a person's life. It is precisely because I insist that these two *cannot* be disjoined in a '*théologie totale*' that I insist on the importance of prayer for both ethics and theology; whereas here Fr. Geister seems to me to reflect once more that tragic disjunction that had indeed already occurred by the time of Ignatius Loyola – between academic theology on the one hand, and prayer-and-action-for-life on the other. In a writer contemporary to Ignatius, John of the Cross, who is much more strongly informed by scholastic Thomism, and yet brilliantly reworks it in integration with his theory of spiritual development, we get a different kind of model to which I am – I must admit – personally much more attuned.

Anne-Louise Eriksson and Jonna Bornemark. Perhaps I may respond to these two respondents to *Powers and Submissions* together, because they represent two different generations of feminist scholarship and, as such, are interestingly contrastive. To Dr. Eriksson I think I can only repeat that the view of 'power' that she takes for granted ('It is *always* about one party's will holding sway over another party ... a zero-sum game') is precisely one that I wish to query and complexify throughout my book; and that the accompanying perception of Christian tradition as hopelessly and thoroughgoingly 'androcentric' is equally what I wish to contest. If I held so dismal a perception of Christianity and its liberating capacities I should long ago have left the church! The feminist project, for me, involves the careful sorting of distinctions between *different* types of 'powers' (divine and human) and *different* types of 'submissions'; and whilst I agree entirely with Dr. Eriksson that the word 'submission' always comes with danger for women (making that particular word anathema to her), it is the capacity to keep a hermeneutics of suspicion balanced by a hermeneutics of charity and hope that sustains my belief that Christianity can yet be purged of patriarchal idolatry. And I am intrigued to see that Dr. Eriksson at least partly agrees with me when she admits to the importance of a 'secret love life' language

reserved *for God alone*. Still, I wonder why she reserves this for the 'private' realm, when surely a fundamental feminist principle is that 'the personal *is* the political'? Jonna Bonnemark's essay displays a rather different, and more fluid, set of presumptions on the crucial matter of power, and equally a more overt interest in rediscovering in the mystical traditions of Christianity a means of gender transformation. To that extent we are very much on the same page. The main point of critique she presents to me is that I fail to consider *kenosis* as intrinsic to the very nature of the divine, and to that I must plead guilty. (I have partially compensated for that omission in two more recent essays on kenosis – in ed. John Polkinghorne, *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis* (2001), and in ed. Stephen Evans, *Exploring Kenotic Christology: The Self-Emptying of God* (2006)). The important point I stand by, however, is that there is a crucial difference between acknowledging that 'Giving [is] ... God's central power' (here I am more than happy to agree with Jonna's proposal), and moving from there to assert that 'God is dependent upon man [*sic*]', if by the latter is meant an actual *metaphysical* dependence leading to some sort of 'process' view of God. It is, I think, a complex hermeneutical matter whether some medieval or early modern 'mystical theologians' actually make this latter move. The reason I myself resist it is that it seems to me ultimately to remove the *sure* hope of transformation that the classical God of omnipotence holds out to us; in short, if I were a process theologian I fear I might be tempted to feel as gloomy as Anne-Louise about the 'stuckness' of Christianity in patriarchal sin! But note that there are ways in which Jonna's sensitive reflections on 'mirroring' can be accommodated without an actual slide towards a process God. When Teresa of Avila, for instance, remarks somewhere (of our human responsibilities in relation to God): 'He has no other hands but ours', she is insisting on the mystical incorporation of our lives into the ongoing effects of the incarnation, *not* (as I read her) suggesting that we abandon the notion of divine omnipotence *tout court*. So everything depends here on how exactly one perceives the relation of human and divine in the incarnation – which is why I spilled so much ink, rather tediously I'm afraid, on the technical problems of the hypostatic union in *Powers and Submissions*.

Jayne Svenungsson. Finally, let me add a note of appreciation for the feminist/theological comments by Dr. Svenungsson on *Pain and Its Transformations*. She does well here – echoing strands in Dr. Eriksson's piece – to insist that no reflection on Christ's pain should be divorced from a critical probing of the issue of whether a 'sinister theology' of mandated violence could be an accompaniment to it. But she is also careful to stress the dangers of a fateful *loss* of empathetic capacity if reflection on suffering is altogether repressed in feminist discourse. If I have a remaining difference with Dr. Svenungsson here it would be in my critical reading of the *earlier* work of René Girard, in which 'sacrifice' is represented as intrinsically violent and 'scapegoating'. Ironically, Girard (whom Dr. Svenungsson cites approvingly) here seems to me to fall into a 'sinister' tendency himself; but this is a matter which takes us beyond the immediate discussion points of this symposium.[1] Let me thank all involved, once more, for their acute and searching readings of my recent work, from which I have learned a great deal.

[1] I am to take up these criticisms of Girard in my Cambridge inaugural lecture (forthcoming, October 13, 2009) entitled 'Sacrifice Regained: Reconsidering the Rationality of Religious Belief'.

Sallie McFague: *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World and Global Warming* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008). 176 sid.

Ingen har kunnat undgå att märka att klimatfrågan fått en allt viktigare plats på den politiska dagordningen under de senaste åren. I *A New Climate for Theology. God, the World and Global Warming* tar sig Sallie McFague an denna fråga ur ett teologiskt perspektiv. McFague är professor emerita vid Vanderbilt Divinity School och har gjort sig känd som en av de viktigaste ekologiska teologerna med flera inflytelserika verk, bl.a. *The Body of God* (1993), *Super, Natural Christians* (1997) och *Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril* (2001). Hon hävdar inledningsvis att klimatförändringen tvingar fram en radikalt förändrad livsstil om vi skall lyckas undgå kraftiga försämringar av förutsättningarna för mänskligt liv på jorden. De rapporter som publicerats av FN:s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) visar att det varmare klimatet redan nu ökar antalet fall av torka, översvämningar och tropiska cykloner och att vi kan förvänta oss ännu värre konsekvenser om utsläppet av växthusgaser inte minskas drastiskt. I värsta fall kan stora delar av jordens nuvarande landområden bli obeboeliga på 100 eller 150 års sikt.

Teologins bidrag till att skapa en annan världsordning är enligt McFague att hjälpa oss att omtolka synen på oss själva, naturen och Gud. Hon tar avstånd från den individualistiska människosyn som hon menar karakteriserar mycket av den protestantiska teologin. Denna teologi intresserar sig framför allt för individen och hennes förhållande till Gud. Naturen reduceras till en bakgrundskuliss för den mänskliga frälsningshistorien. McFague hävdar att vi behöver en annan människosyn som stämmer bättre överens med naturvetenskapen. Vi måste inse att vi är förbundna med andra levande varelser och med ekosystemen som helhet. Den globala uppvärmningen får långtgående konsekvenser som ingen på jorden kan värja sig från. Teologin kan därför inte längre begränsa sig till frågor om individens frälsning, utan måste integrera ett ekologiskt och kosmologiskt perspektiv.

Klimatfrågan gör det nödvändigt för teologin att revidera synen på Gud och naturen, enligt McFague. Hon menar att den traditionella skapelseläran har betonat Guds transcendens och distans från naturen på bekostnad av Guds immanens och delaktighet i naturen. Som ett alternativ till den traditionella kristna natursynen argumenterar McFague för att vi skall betrakta naturen som Guds kropp. Denna modell av naturen betonar att den här världen har sin källa i Gud och reflekterar Guds härlighet. Den får oss att inse att vi kan möta Gud i den här världen genom att bry oss om andra levande varelser och deras behov. Det är dock viktigt enligt McFague att inse att modellen av naturen som Guds kropp, precis som mer traditionella beskrivningar av Guds relation till skapelsen, enbart är en metafor och inte bör tolkas bokstavligt.

Dagens miljöproblem kräver också att vi ändrar vår syn på ekonomi, menar McFague. Eftersom ekonomi handlar om människors och andra varelsers välbefinnande är det en rättvisefråga som religionen måste engagera sig i. Dagens marknadsekonomiska tänkande med dess betoning på obegränsad konsumtion måste ersättas av ett annat ekonomiskt system som rättar sig efter det faktum att jordens resurser är begränsade. McFague tar avstånd från det rådande neoklassiska ekonomiska paradigmet, eftersom det fördelar jordens begränsade resurser enbart på grundval av vem som kan betala utan hänsyn till rättvisa eller ekologisk hållbarhet. Den neoklassiska ekonomin bygger på idén att det enbart är egennyttiga individers val på en marknad som skall styra vad som produceras och konsumeras. Istället propagerar McFague för en ekologisk ekonomi där rättvisa och hållbar utveckling är de grundläggande principerna.

McFagues bok utgör ett intressant bidrag till den teologiska och etiska debatten om klimatfrågan. Hon visar på ett övertygande sätt att den globala uppvärmningen och de problem den för med sig innebär en viktig utmaning för teologin likväl som för samhället i övrigt. En brist är dock att hon inte vidareutvecklar sina teologiska resonemang i förhållande till sina tidigare verk. Det mesta av hennes argumentation känns igen från hennes tidigare böcker om kristendom och miljöfrågor. Jag är också skeptisk till att hennes modell av naturen som Guds kropp skulle utgöra ett hållbart alternativ till en mer traditionell kristen natursyn. För det första finns det en viss oklarhet med hennes modell eftersom hon hävdar att den bör förstås som en metafor och inte som en bokstavlig sanning, samtidigt som hon menar att den har etiska implikationer. Frågan är om hon verkligen vill ha sagt att varje aspekt av naturen bör behandlas som om den vore en del av Guds kropp. Dessutom leder modellen av universum som Guds kropp till en idealisering av naturen som är svårförenlig med nutida naturvetenskap, eftersom den betonar samhörigheten mellan olika livsformer på bekostnad av konkurrensen. Evolutionsbiologin talar om för oss att naturen kännetecknas av kamp och konkurrens mellan olika arter och hur kan vi då tala om att dessa arter är delar av samma kropp? Om vi skall kunna ta hänsyn till det våld och lidande som finns i naturen och samtidigt hålla fast vid den kristna tanken på en kärleksfull Gud tror jag att det är nödvändigt att upprätthålla distansen mellan Gud och naturen. Vad gäller hennes beskrivning av den ekologiska ekonomin finns det en brist på konkretion som gör det svårt

att bedöma om den utgör ett hållbart alternativ till det rådande ekonomiska systemet. Det låter förstås bra att samhällets produktion skall styras av rättvisa och hållbarhet, men frågan är hur det i praktiken skall genomföras. Om produktionen inte alls skall styras av val på en marknad återstår ett planekonomiskt system, men de historiska erfarenheterna av ett sådant talar inte för att det skulle leda till ett mer miljövänligt samhälle.

Anders Melin

Mattias Martinson, Ola Sigurdson och Jayne Svenungsson (red.): *Systematisk teologi – en introduktion* (Stockholm: Verbum, 2007). 289 sid.

Systematisk teologi är skriven av tio teologer, hemmahöriga vid olika lärosäten och i olika samfundskontexter. Denna introduktionsbok med flera tongivande bidrag och med ambitionen att fungera som läromedel har med sin lättöverskådliga framställning av allt att döma satt agendan för ämnet på grundnivå i Sverige för några år framåt; inte minst genom sin klara föresats att ”ständigt brottas med mångfaldens problematik”. I elva kapitel har respektive författare ombetts presentera ”en mängd olika tankemöjligheter som funnits i historia och nutid” och att också argumentera för ”sin syn på saken” (s. 16). De olika bidragen är något ojämna i kvalitet med ett par uppsatser av hög internationell akademisk standard (bl.a. Arne Rasmussons *Kyrka och samhälle*, kap. 10).

Genomgående teman i boken är frågor om sanning, auktoritet, genusperspektiv, tradition, mångfald, tolkning, dialog och lyhördhet för samtidens formuleringar. ”Vem har auktoriteten att omtolka auktoriteterna?” undrar Mattias Martinson (s. 45), och i inledningen ställer bokens redaktörer den alltmer aktuella frågan om det inom akademin överhuvudtaget finns plats för ämnet systematisk teologi – för en särskild reflektion över den kristna tron – när kyrkan och kristen tro inte längre utgör ett ”sammanhållande kitt i vår kultur”. Inledningen visar också på medvetenhet om den kritiska framtida utmaningen för en kristet präglad akademisk disciplin: hur den systematiska teologin skall kunna öppnas mot andra religioner än den kristna. Även om föreliggande antologi primärt är tänkt som en introduktion till ämnet ”som det historiskt har sett ut”, så förläggs avsnittet om religionsteologi först i den systematiska framställningen (kap. 2), och specifikt kristna sanningsanspråk, som ses som i princip förhandlingsbara, sägs alltid vara beroende av historia, plats, situation och perspektiv; ”[d]et finns helt enkelt ingen given utgångspunkt, religiös eller ickereligiös” (s. 15). Detta är ett påstående som inte är självklart enkelt att relatera till de i personregistret fyra mest anförda teologerna, Augustinus, Thomas, Luther och Barth, med sin tro på en mer stabil utgångspunkt för kristen kunskap och tolkning. Men det är just här, i skärningspunkten mellan historia/tradition och nutid, som boken har ett tydligt fokus. Att sanningen aldrig är slutgiltigt formulerad eller förfogbar exemplifieras genom Paul Tillichs hårdkokta *protestantiska princip*: ”teologin måste orientera sig utifrån det negativa kriteriet att varje anspåk [sic] på slutgiltig teologisk sanning är okristligt såväl som filosofiskt oacceptabelt” (s. 15). Av flera skäl framställs därför ”den systematiska teologins modus” vara konjunktivets; det handlar om hypotetiska eller möjliga förhållanden: ”så här *skulle* vi kunna tänka om Gud, kyrka, man, kvinna etc.” (s. 16). En liknande avgjort försiktig hållning till funktionen hos kristna sanningsanspråk (ibland i anslutning till den italienske filosofen Gianni Vattimo) möter hos flertalet av bokens författare. Inom akademins hägn är detta öppna sätt att bedriva teologi kanske ett krav, och i den mån källmaterialet kommer till sin rätt, även förtjänstfullt, även om andra vägar för akademisk teologi också är möjliga, där bibelteologi, apostolisk tradition och den kristna uppenbarelsen tydligare tillåts sätta ramarna.

I kapitel 2 om religionsteologi lyfter Maud Eriksen fram den viktiga frågan om vad det innebär utifrån ett kristet perspektiv att leva i en kulturell verklighet präglad av religiös mångfald och vad som egentligen står på spel för kristen tro om inte Jesus är ”vägen, sanningen och livet” (Joh. 14:6). Eriksen definierar religionsteologi som en ”teologisk reflektion över det faktum att det finns andra religioner än den man som teolog identifierar sig med” med särskilt fokus på övergången från modernitet till postmodernitet och en hermeneutisk, tolkande approach. I Martinssons avsnitt om skrift, tradition och auktoritet (kap. 3) argumenterar författaren (i en diskussion om relationen mellan tillgänglig sanning och behovet av tolkning) att ”[p]å samma sätt som den kristna traditionen alltid har framträtt i skepnad av många olika traditioner, har olika perspektiv på bibeln – olika bibelsyn – fungerat destabiliserande för enheten i den kristna tron” (s. 47). Detta är visserligen sant, men kan kompletteras med en tanke från den ekumeniskt intresserade teologen Dietrich Bonhoeffer: ”Det är verkligen bibeltexten som sådan som binder samman hela den kristna församlingen till en enhet. Den försäkrar oss om att vara sammanbundna till en enda familj av bröder och systrar, inte bara med den kristna församlingen i det förgångna och i framtiden, utan med hela den samtida kyrkan. Som sådan har bibeltexten en oerhörd enande, ekumenisk betydelse.” (*Reflections on the Bible: Human Word and Word of God*, Hendrickson, Peabody, MA 2004). En mer vågad tankegång hos Martinsson,

som framgår av hans kritik av den amerikanske teologen George Lindbeck, är hans syn på den nutida västerländska kulturens djupa rötter i kristet språk och textpraktik, som han menar är så djupa att det i princip är omöjligt ”att dra *tillräckligt* tydliga gränser mellan en sekulär och en kristen kultur” (s. 63). Men är inte detta att reducera, eller nivellera, både det som karakteriserar västerländsk sekulärkultur, å ena sidan, och kristen tro, å den andra?

I sitt bidrag om teologisk kunskap, förnuft och uppenbarelse (kap. 4) betonar Elena Namli förnuftets begränsning i en koncis översikt av bl. a. Tertullianus, Augustinus, Immanuel Kant, Paul Tillich, Bridget Gilfillan Upton och Gianni Vattimo. Även Namli ställer den återkommande frågan ”om man kan ha en kristen tro utan att helt och hållet acceptera det som av kyrkan betraktas som uppenbarad kunskap om Gud och människan” (s. 71). I kapitel 5 ger Philip Geister en gedigen historisk presentation av gudsbegreppet följd av en kort nutidsorienterad analys av klassiska frågeställningar om Guds namn, egenskaper och existens, där den ”historiska och topografiska grunden för gudserfarenheten” stimulerar, snarare än utesluter, filosofisk och teologisk reflektion: ”En Gud som är god kan inte samtidigt vara ond” (s. 112).

I Thomas Ekstrands uppsats om Treenigheten (kap. 6) möter en bred framställning med hänsyn tagen till såväl nytestamentliga som dogmhistoriska perspektiv. ”[T]ydliga triadiska formuleringar” redan hos Paulus lyfts fram (Gal. 4:4-7), och den paulinska brevsamlingen sägs erbjuda ”en startpunkt för den senare utvecklingen av en fullfjädrad treenighetslära” (s. 124). Ekstrand hänvisar här också till vad Christoph Schwöbel beskrivit som en *proto-trinitarisk djupstruktur* redan i Nya Testamentet. Lägg till detta nya forskningsrön av bl a Richard Bauckham, som i likhet med Martin Hengel och andra vågat argumentera revolutionerande ”att den tidigaste kristologin också var den högsta kristologin” (*God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament*, Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1998, s. viii). Vad vi ser här är en som det verkar begynnande förändring av forskningsläget inom tidig lärobildning, med särskild hänvisning till tidig Kristustillbedjan, där Jesus redan under månaderna efter korsfästelsen och den förmodade uppståndelsen börjar inkluderas i Guds unika identitet. Här finns många nya rön som potentiellt kan klargöra det som Ekstrand kallar för ”två slags treenighetsläror i teologihistorien” – sådana som betonar *enheten* (särskilt i västerländsk teologi) mellan de tre personerna, och sådana som understryker *trefalden* (särskilt i östkyrkan) av personer i gudomen (s. 135).

I det följande diskuterar Katarina Westerlund antropologi och eskatologi, som bl.a. inkluderar några intressanta tankar om självet och kroppsligheten i västerländsk tradition (kap. 7). Boken avslutas med fyra välskrivna uppsatser som innehåller såväl värdefulla teologihistoriska översikter som systematiska reflektioner: Ola Sigurdson om kristologi (kap. 8), Ann Heberlein om synd och frälsning (kap. 9), Arne Rasmusson om kyrka och samhälle (kap. 10) och Jayne Svenungsson om den heliga Anden (kap. 11).

Systematisk teologi – en introduktion speglar vad som just nu händer i ämnet vid svenska lärosäten. De teologiskt sinsemellan ganska olika bidragen kan med fördel läsas parallellt med en mer traditionell kristen läroframställning.

Tomas Bokedal

Michael S. Northcott: *A Moral Climate: The ethics of global warming* (Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, London 2007) 336 s.

Michael S. Northcott är professor i etik vid University of Edinburgh och präst i den episkopala kyrkan i Skottland. I sin bok om klimatuppvärmningens moraliska aspekter förenar han dessa båda roller på ett både underhållande och övertygande sätt. Som etiker vågar han vara normativ, som när han t.ex. säger att ”Global warming is the earth's judgement on the global market empire, and on the heedless consumption it fosters”, och som präst drar han sig inte för att räkna upp naturvetenskapliga fakta för att motivera behovet av omvändelse. Lägg därtill rösten av en samhällskritiker, som med avstamp i bibliska berättelser söker svar på frågan vad vi måste göra: ”the Noah saga suggests that turning away from the ecologically destructive path on which humanity is headed requires humility and preparedness to change direction in response to the clear signs of impending danger.”

Med andra ord: boken är spännande läsning. Få andra i dagens offentliga rum kommer med så svidande och välartikulerad kritik av den nyliberala ekonomin. Och få kyrkliga förkunnare förankrar sitt budskap i något så allvarligt och aktuellt som den globala uppvärmningen. En brasklapp vill jag dock foga in: den nyliberala marknadsordningen presenteras som grunden till allt ont så många gånger att det till slut börjar kännas tjatigt.

Northcotts metod är att ta klimatfakta, samhällsvetenskapliga teorier (t.ex. Hannah Arendt, Stanley Hauerwas, Wendel Berry, Val Plumwood) och bibliska moralberättelser och låta dem samtala med varandra.

Hans huvudpåstående är att klimatförändringen är det yttersta symptomet på en orättvis social ordning, som västvärlden upprätthållit sedan kolonialtiden. Den pådrivande faktorn i denna ordning är enligt Northcott

den nyliberala ekonomin, som han menar grundar sig på en massiv kollektiv lögn om att när vi strävar efter ekonomisk tillväxt utan hinder, och när makten är koncentrerad i händerna på ekonomiska bolag, får jordens folk njuta av utveckling och fred.

För Northcott är den utlovade friheten och freden en chimär. Enligt honom är den nyliberala ekonomiska ordningen en tyrann lika sträng som den kommunistiska planekonomin. Och i tron på den nyliberala lögnen favoriserar nationalstaterna de multinationella bolagen framför medborgarna och miljön i sin lagstiftning och överlåter därmed sin politiska makt.

Northcott understödjer sitt påstående med undersökningar som visar att ökningen av BNP inte ökat lyckan och välmåendet bland de industriella konsumenterna under de senaste 40 åren. Och för att visa att välfärden inte spridits till de fattigaste i världen, fast hindren för marknadsekonomin blivit färre, tar han fram statistik som visar att nettotransaktioner av välfärd från syd till nord har ökat markant under vårt årtusende.

Den moraliska grunden för denna slags globala imperialism är enligt Northcott den samma som till exempel i det romerska imperiet på Jesu tid. Grundsynden är stoltheten, hybrisen, tanken på människan som oberoende av Skaparen och i kontroll av det skapade. Därav följer enligt Northcott negligerandet av det relationella, som enligt honom är konstitutivt för människan. Vi blir oss själva i förhållande till andra människor och till den fysiska omgivning vi lever i. Glömmer vi det, glömmer vi den gudomliga, kosmologiskt förankrade rättviseordningen, och vår civilisation blir en civilisation som värdesätter lättja och girighet, oförstånd och orättvisa.

Northcott lyfter fram kärleken som det mest centrala i moralen. Kärleken överstiger de abstrakt teoretiska rättvisekraven (kritik mot John Rawls och Martha Nussbaum) och liberalismens negativa förståelse av frihet som frihet från skada. De svagas nöd, inte de starkas kapacitet, sätter standarden för kärlekens krav. Northcott jämför den kristna nattvarden med det romerska symposiet, där de rika åt först och tjänarna städade upp bland resterna. Till skillnad från detta skulle de kristna äta tillsammans, fattiga och rika sida vid sida. Northcott hävdar t.o.m. att Paulus inte gjorde någon skillnad mellan politik och religion: att som församling i en gemensam måltid tillsammans utgöra Kristi kropp var att manifestera en alternativ politisk ordning till kejsarens Rom.

Northcott ser i klimatförändringen en kritik av den moderna människans stressade livsstil – att vi på något årtionde har bränt upp miljontals år av solenergi är ett praktexempel på vår tids slit- och slängkultur.

Vägen tillbaka är att ta vara på lokala närings- och energikällor och att börja uppskatta skickliga hantverkares hållbara arbete. Northcott efterlyser en radikal demokrati, som främjar geografisk närhet och natur, där hushåll och småskaliga jordbruk åter skulle bli ställen för noggrann produktion och konsumtion.

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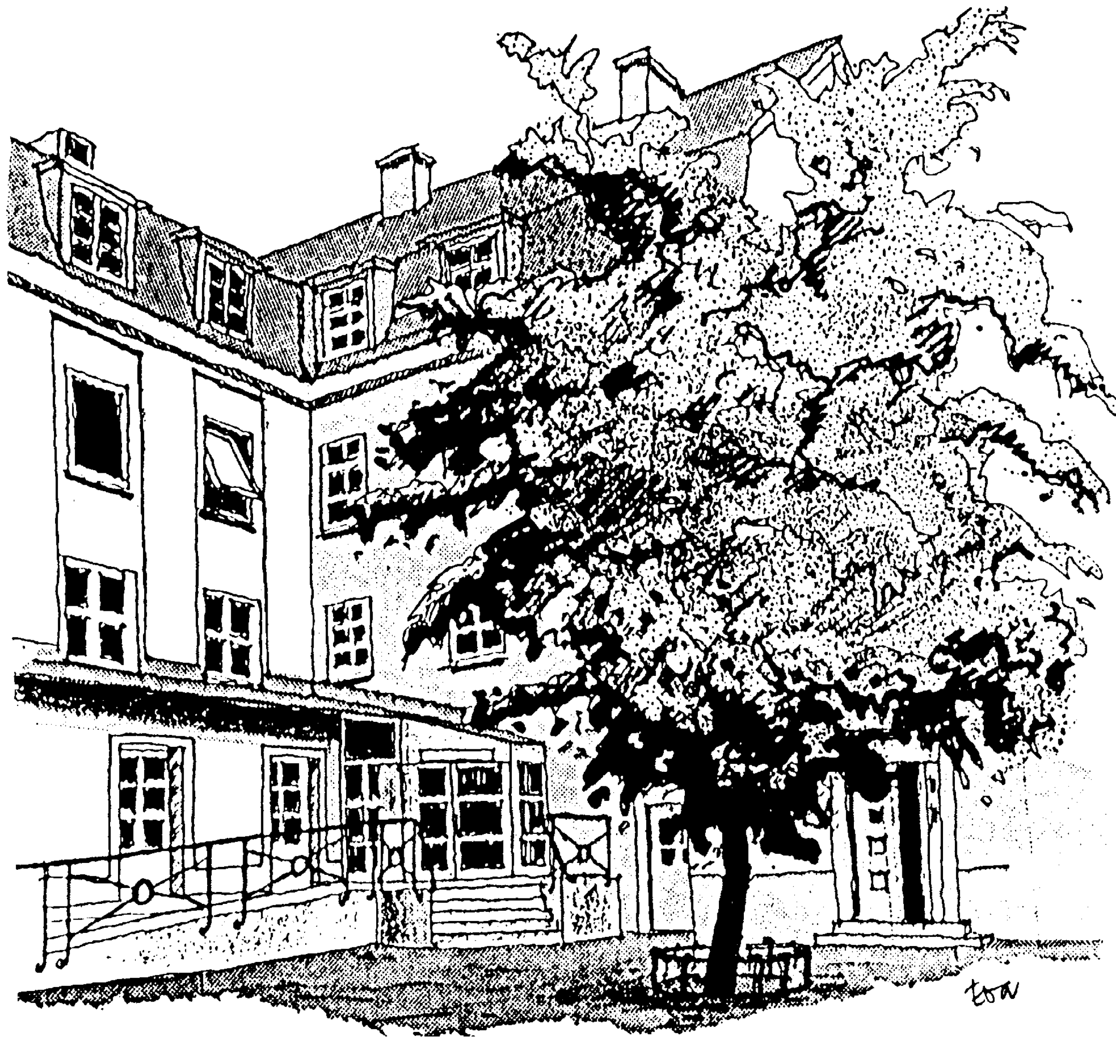

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