

Sarah Coakley. *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay 'On the Trinity.'* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013. 365 pp.

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“But one has to make some sort of choice,” said Harriet. “And between one desire and another, how is one to know which things are really of overmastering importance?” “We can only know that,” said Miss de Vine, “when they have overmastered us.” (Dorothy L. Sayers, *Gaudy Night*, chapter two)

Widely recognized for forging connections between sexuality and spirituality, bridging patristic theology with contemporary conundrums, and relating feminist critique to systematic theology, Sarah Coakley continues to multiply her gifts. Her recent *God, Sexuality, and the Self* (hereafter *GSS*) weaves together several strands prominent throughout her corpus to ask these questions: What would it mean to recognize desire—not knowledge, not mental assent, not even the repetition of certain practices—as the most salient element of spirituality? How does Christian theology, when shifting its gaze to this prospect, reveal the divine’s already prior and always deeper desire? What would it look like for theology today to find itself precisely by losing itself in the overmastering desires that enflame and entangle the self with God?

In this review, I dialogue across three levels with Coakley’s work. First, I overview *GSS*’s structure and claims, paying attention especially to how Coakley devises her *théologie totale* as a method for revitalizing systematic theology. What is this approach, why is it necessary, and how does it relate to other methods? Second, where appropriate, I place major claims in conversation with other portions of Coakley’s oeuvre. I suggest that the roots of *théologie totale* can be discerned in several of these earlier projects, such that *GSS* laces together these prior endeavors in fields now unable to be cordoned off from one another. In my view, *GSS* can best be understood when it is read against this backdrop. As I will eventually make clear, sourcing elements of Coakley’s own theological autobiography as the building blocks of *GSS* honors the ways *GSS* performs the very method it promotes. Third, and finally, I return to the idea of autobiography, the texts and readings Coakley devises, and the question of desire—all in order to offer some reflections on how a theological method centered here promises to shift the discipline as a whole. I note some questions and hopes for how this approach might continue to take shape in the remainder of the four-volume systematics of which *GSS* forms the first installment.

Coakley’s *God, Sexuality, and the Self*: A Summary

First, a brief summary helps clear the ground. Coakley takes as her starting point a number of current theological confusions, struggles, or dead ends. While these crises take various shapes, they generally cluster around perceived clashes between Christian ‘orthodoxy’

and challenges stemming from post-Enlightenment 'secular' approaches to social sciences, philosophy, political thought, gender, and sexuality. Coakley observes that responses to these debates often take shape as mutually exclusive options that tend to cast themselves as authentic spirituality without adequately exploring the historical resources offered by Christian spirituality (see *GSS* xiii-xiv). Coakley proposes that Christian thought has largely overlooked the core around which all of these various controversies cluster: personhood constituted by participation in the divine. An "ineradicable" longing for participative union with God that goes astray and must be redirected reframes intersections of theology with contemporary issues. As prayer surfaces both this desire and its wanderings, Coakley argues that focusing here best orients modern theology (see *GSS*, 6-27). Coakley signaled the need for this approach in her 2008 and 2011 reflections for *Christian Century*, "The Vicar at Prayer"¹ and "Prayer as Crucible,"² as well as in her 2009 interview in Duke's *Faith and Leadership*.³ In all three pieces, she discloses how attention to spirituality enlivened her own theological reflection; the question *GSS* asks in return is how academic theology might benefit once it takes its cues from such habits.

Attending to prayer as that which roots persons in the Trinity reorients how one views the relationship between spirituality and theological reflection. Seemingly irresolvable divides reveal themselves instead as contrapuntal forces necessary to sustain life. Only such an emphasis can generate theology's voice as forever *in via*, less an "arrival at some stable place of spiritual safety" and more "a demanding, and ongoing spiritual *project*, in which the language of the creeds is personally and progressively assimilated" (*GSS*, 5). *GSS* thus promises a fleshing out of Coakley's admonitions from 2005 onward that Christianity needs to rethink desire beyond the binary of repression-libertarianism into the "progressive non-attachment and ascetical transformation" that marks *eros*' sublimation in the divine.⁴ *GSS* hinges, then, on the premise that a *théologie totale*—a theology directed by the insights of spiritual practices placed alongside of, rather than in opposition to, questions and challenges arising from modern and postmodern inquiry—fashions sites of conflict into places of assimilation into God's desire.

Coakley unfolds this proposal through *GSS*'s seven chapters and coda. In chapter one, *GSS* situates systematic theology as inherently bound up with questions of gender, sexuality, and desire. Continuing a theme from such earlier pieces as her lecture at the University of Chicago Divinity School,⁵ Coakley argues that theology must not overcome its previous lacunae by merely importing secular gender theory. Instead, it must renew its outlook by articulating a Trinitarian perspective prioritizing the Spirit. Coakley gives a brief history of systematic theology which now runs into distrust and skepticism along three interconnected lines: (1)

¹ "The Vicar at Prayer: An English Reflection on Ministry," *Christian Century* 125, no. 13 (July 2008): 28-33.

² "Prayer as Crucible: How My Mind Has Changed," *Christian Century* 128, no. 6 (March 2011): 32-40.

³ "Sarah Coakley: Living Prayer and Leadership," *Faith and Leadership*, August 17, 2009, <https://www.faithandleadership.com/qa/sarah-coakley-living-prayer-and-leadership>.

⁴ See her Princeton lecture "Ecclesiastical Sex Scandals: The Lack of a Contemporary Theology of Desire," now reprinted in Coakley, *The New Asceticism* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), as well as her 2011 piece for the ABC *Religion and Ethics* column, "Taming Desire: Celibacy, Sexuality and the Church" (<http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2011/05/20/3222443.htm>).

⁵ Published as "Is There a Future for Gender and Theology?" *Criterion* 47, vol. 1 (2009): 2-11.

systematic theology turns God into an object of human knowledge; (2) systematic theology attempts to hegemonize thought and experience of God; (3) systematic theology remains phallogocentric. Coakley argues that attention to the ascetic pursuit that drives *théologie totale* dislodges all three of these critiques. Understanding theology as the practice of apophatic un mastery (addressing critique 1) creates attentiveness to the marginalized other and decenters hegemonic tendencies (answering critique 2) while lifting up socio-political instantiations of belief that destabilize gender essentialism (moving beyond 3). As she closes this section, Coakley argues that gender, sexuality, and power are all rendered “redemptively labile” by God’s desire for the good but fallen creation (*GSS*, 59). Once surrendered to, this divine desire reformulates all human desire.

The second chapter deepens her analysis by diving into three of the major options currently proposed in response to theology’s chastening by modern social science: reactive attempts to return to an imagined orthodoxy of authoritarian Christian thought, a proclamation of a new theological metanarrative that supersedes the failures of the Enlightenment, or an identification of Christianity as inherently patriarchal and oppressive. Coakley deems all three options insufficient. She sees each occupying its own Wigan Pier, unable to reach the tantalizing sea where theology and spirituality meld. The first two options create a pier of self-directed concern or nostalgia; the third does likewise by being unable to move beyond anger and “stuckness” except by fashioning God in its own image (see *GSS*, 71-76). Here, the reader may detect a similar posture to Coakley’s introduction⁶ and postscript⁷ to the April 2011 issue of *Modern Theology* and her 2012 Gifford Lectures, “Sacrifice Regained.”⁸ While these offerings covered challenging relationships between the sciences, philosophy, and theology on questions of faith, rationality, and emotion, *GSS* articulates a starting point for theological method that, here deployed to consider sexuality and gender, can orient these other inquiries as well. Charting this new course, *théologie totale* denies attempts to divide religion from socio-political contexts, no matter which way such bifurcation cuts. The ascetic life brought forward by *théologie totale* allows attention to be directed to the ‘other,’ including to the ‘secular’ world and the sciences, as well as to elements within Christian theology previously marginalized. Religion, carried out in this “gentle effacement” (*GSS*, 86), does in fact belong in the public square. Coakley closes the chapter by listing *théologie totale*’s hallmarks: in addition to prioritizing the relation of divine and human desire, it centers contemplation as the vehicle driving an ongoing journey of transformative encounter between God and creation, recognizes God at work in the sciences and therefore seeks them as continuing conversation partners, casts orthodoxy as the goal of the transformative life rather than as something already achieved, understands itself as socially located but not socially reducible, expands classical theological *loci*, attends to aesthetical expression, and denies restrictive contradictory divides (*GSS*, 88-92).

⁶ “Introduction: Faith, Rationality, and the Passions,” *Modern Theology* 27, no. 2 (April 2011): 217-225.

⁷ “Postscript: What (If Anything) Can the Sciences Tell Philosophy and Theology about Faith, Rationality, and the Passions?” *Modern Theology* 27, no. 2 (April 2011): 357-361.

⁸ “Sacrifice Regained: Evolution, Cooperation, and God,” (Gifford Lectures, University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen, Scotland, 2012).

Chapter three thus examines how the origins of the doctrine of the Trinity intertwine with power, desire, and gender. Coakley seeks, on one hand, to uphold positive outworkings of the doctrine while at the same time acknowledging its potential “profound theological and spiritual danger”: subordinating the Spirit despite rhetoric to the contrary (*GSS*, 101). This self-contradiction creates a theological mire, trapping gender equality and contemplation under the churches’ fear of sectarian tendencies and sexual disorder. Coakley’s work here builds upon earlier entries such as 1996’s “Living into the Mystery of the Trinity”⁹ by pressing upon institutional margins where the priority of the Spirit, sought and known in prayer, constantly risks unorthodoxy. Such an orientation contrasts a flatter orthodoxy primarily concerned with maintaining order and obedience but, paradoxically, denying its own creeds in its treatment of the Spirit. Taking Maurice Wiles’s deconstruction of Christian triadic formulae as her foil, Coakley argues that an incorporative model of the Trinity, rooted in Pauline discourse and supremely in Romans 8, challenges the priority given to the Father-Son dyad in Lukan and Johannine texts. Coakley sees that prayer in the Spirit holds “inexorably social and even cosmic significance as an act of cooperation with, and incorporation into, the still extending life of the incarnation” (*GSS*, 114). References and quotes from Irenaeus, Origen, and Athanasius beautifully extend these suggestions. Coakley points out, however, that because claims of the Spirit’s influence increasingly became associated with ecstatic challenges to ecclesiastical authority, gender norms, and political stability, theology developed muting countermeasures.

Chapter four’s material may appear somewhat jarring to the unsuspecting reader, as Coakley laces together previous research on Ernst Troeltsch’s ecclesial types¹⁰ with the results from her more recent fieldwork investigating two charismatic churches in northern England.¹¹ Yet, Coakley finds support in both sources for *théologie totale*’s attention to the ways doctrine develops and functions within different organizational types. She showcases these earlier projects to demonstrate how ecclesial structure, conceptions of the Spirit, and ecstatic experiences connect in the lives of people of faith. Coakley suggests that while formal trinitarianism remains a hallmark of the ‘church’ type, the influence of ‘sect’ and ‘mystic’ leadership in a breakaway church enlivens pneumatic expression. At the same time, only the more ‘church’ type—obeying pressures from above—enables women to take leadership roles. Though the breakaway group at first seems more open to the Spirit, its expectations of ecstasy eventually generate pressures requiring a corresponding clamping down of female leadership, any feelings besides those of a constant spiritual progress, and silence. This sort of emphasis on the Spirit ends up recognizing only certain forms of pneumatological presence, perhaps sacrificing greater pneumatic vitality in the pursuit of ‘orthodoxy.’ Coakley wonders if the congregation exhibiting more correspondence to Troeltsch’s ‘church’ type in fact displays greater trinitarian maturity by being able to sense the Spirit’s presence even in the midst of depression, feelings of spiritual aridity, and set prayers and liturgies.

⁹ Now available in *The New Asceticism* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015).

¹⁰ *Christ Without Absolutes: A Study of the Christology of Ernst Troeltsch* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

¹¹ “Charismatic Experience: Praying ‘In the Spirit,’” in *We Believe in the Holy Spirit*, Doctrine Commission of the Church of England (London: Church House Publishing, 1991).

Chapter five elaborates another layer of *théologie totale* by discussing visual depictions of the Trinity. Coakley demonstrates how artwork shapes theological imagination. She notes that she first presented these examples at Lambeth Conference in 1988,¹² marking another way GSS collects and expands not just upon her previous academic work, but upon her ecclesial roles as well. In the intervening years, Coakley added analyses of how women priests image Christ.¹³ There as here, visual representation holds the potential to both purge idolatrous views and redirect the person towards God (GSS, 260). For the Trinity, a strong lineage of portraying the Father-Son dyad in the West risks rendering the Spirit redundant, while Marian substitutions for the Spirit identify femininity as just such another extraneous element. Eastern iconography, by contrast, gives greater attention to the Spirit, who is yet cast within a strongly hierarchal Trinity. Coakley's conclusions stress how the ingenuity of the Troeltschian 'mystic' type creates fresh portrayals of the Trinity (GSS, 260-1).

Layered over chapter three's exploration of early tendencies to mute the Spirit, chapter four's exploration of how the Spirit figures in church types, and chapter five's history of artwork, chapter six now clearly adumbrates Coakley's central effort: how can Christian theology articulate and practice an incorporative trinitarianism without either denying sexuality and gender's relevance to the doctrine or emphasizing the Spirit at the cost of subordinating women? Clearing the ground of pernicious assumptions that pit 'Eastern' and 'Western' thought against one another, or that consider all forms of trinitarian theology hopelessly misogynistic, Coakley returns to patristic voices. She excavates Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine with an eye to how each one's thought corrects the other's struggles to fruitfully relate sexual desire with desire for the divine, all without entailing gender subordination. Sourcing her chapter on previous work such as 2000's "The Eschatological Body,"¹⁴ 2002's "Re-Thinking Gregory of Nyssa,"¹⁵ and *A New Asceticism's* stunning new first chapter, Coakley argues that Gregory's experience of marriage gives him positive evaluations of sexuality. His defense of celibate asceticism does not view sex as corruptive, but rather as needing to be liberated from the cycle of birth and death by the even greater loss of control found in the soul's ascent to God. This pursuit creates an aesthetically and eschatologically labile gender differentiation, even as Gregory maintains a highly ordered view of how the person participates in the Trinity (GSS, 281-8). By contrast, Augustine's famously tortured relationship with sexuality generates a vision of virtue as an ordered mind imitating the ordered God—with gender differences arranged on a hierarchy. Nevertheless, Coakley finds that Augustine's emphasis on the divine grace needed to order the mind opens the door to a sense of the Spirit's indwelling that may overflow even this more rigid framework (GSS, 288-94).

¹² "The Doctrine of God and the Challenges of 'Feminist' Theology: An Iconographical Approach," Lambeth Conference, 1988.

¹³ "The Woman at the Altar: Cosmological Disturbance or Gender Fluidity?" *The Anglican Theological Review* 86 (2004): 75-93; "In Persona Christi: Who, or Where, is Christ at the Altar?" In *A Man of Many Parts: Essays in Honor of John Westerdale Bowker on the Occasion of his Eightieth Birthday*, ed. Eugene E. Lemcio (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2015).

¹⁴ "The Eschatological Body: Gender, Transformation, and God," *Modern Theology* 16 (2000): 61-73.

¹⁵ "Re-thinking Gregory of Nyssa," *Modern Theology* 18 (2002): 431-443.

Chapter seven ties the book together by appealing to Dionysius' *Divine Names*. In his depiction of divine ecstasy, wherein God moves out to abide in love with creation and returns without losing self-identity, Coakley finds affinities to her Romans 8 incorporative model of the Trinity. Such divine love incorporating humanity despite the inequity between God and creation suggests that human love can also be taken up by the Spirit to participate in divine life. Coakley cites Luce Irigaray to promote this interruptive pneumatic power, although she could have turned to Hans Urs von Balthasar's earlier "Spirit and Institution."¹⁶ Coakley's re-reading of Irigaray echoes Balthasar's claim that the Spirit brings lovers out from mere dual egoism into awareness of a 'third' entity uniting and drawing them forward (*GSS*, 313-8). Coakley pivots from this notion to endorse a Dionysian hierarchy, wherein God's transcendence of humanity (*not* a hierarchy of the Trinity) undoes worldly male hierarchies through this same purgative power of the Spirit. She lays out the possibilities of reclaiming the name 'Father' for God, drawing on themes burgeoning since 1996's "Kenosis and Subversion,"¹⁷ 2006's "The Trinity and Gender Reconsidered,"¹⁸ and 2007's "Does Kenosis Rest on a Mistake?"¹⁹ The chapter concludes with a pointed and very welcome section turning the *filioque* controversy on its head. Coakley shows how the question itself stems from tendencies in both the East and West to prioritize the Father-Son dyad. Centering the Spirit instead alone safeguards the full Trinity. The Spirit sources the Father and the Son, the Father begets the Son in the Spirit, and the Father and Son together give rise to the Spirit.²⁰ The Persons do not compete with one another, as either side of the *filioque* controversy would have it. Rather, God the Trinity—Gregory's deep darkness purging human control, Augustine's grace poured out and overflowing upon the person, and Dionysius' self-donating while self-constituting love—must be understood as "a 'source' of love unlike any other, giving and receiving and ecstatically deflecting, ever and always" (*GSS*, 333). Making Spirit 'first' does not substitute a new, intra-divine competition, but rather upturns idolatrous views of the divine paternal source to see the Father as goal just as much as origin (*GSS*, 334).

Coakley concludes the book by listing six of *théologie totale*'s key features: sexual desire and desire for God relate; the Holy Spirit leads; apophaticism undoes gender stereotypes while leading the person into God; contemplation expands the self; contemplation reorders the passions; contemplation shows how the Trinity models power in vulnerability. Thus, *GSS*'s various sub-themes and arguments produce a resonant *dénouement*. Competitions between the 'sacred' and 'secular' social sciences, feminism and theology, prayer and intellection, charisma and order, repression and libertarianism, all constitute echoes of theology's lingering reticence to

¹⁶ *Skizzen zur Theologie IV: Pneuma und Institution* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1974).

¹⁷ "Kenosis and Subversion: On the Repression of 'Vulnerability' in Christian Feminist Writing," in *Swallowing a Fish Bone? Feminist Theologians Debate Christianity*, ed. Daphne Hampson (London: S.P.C.K., 1996).

¹⁸ "The Trinity and Gender Reconsidered," in *God's Life in the Trinity*, ed. Miroslav Volf and Michael Welker (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006).

¹⁹ "Does Kenosis Rest on a Mistake? Three Kenotic Models in Patristic Exegesis, in *Exploring Kenotic Christology: The Self-Emptying of God*, ed. C. Stephen Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

²⁰ Coakley here follows some aspects of Thomas Weinandy's proposals, although her development and conclusions run quite differently than his. See Thomas Weinandy, OFM, *The Father's Spirit of Sonship: Reconceiving the Trinity* (Edinburgh: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 1994).

acknowledge the Spirit. These conflicts dissolve only once the 'third' interrupts the persisting ways Christianity limits itself to a dyad of Father-Son that generates concomitant binary constructions of reality. Such pneumatic interruption does not destroy each pair in seeking a Hegelian resolution, nor does it recommend a social trinitarian attempt to imitate divine threeness. Rather, the Spirit transfigures these limits to reveal the divine love which beckons us forward through them.

Coakley's *God, Sexuality, and the Self*: Attempting a Critique

Attempting to critique *GSS* proves difficult for a few reasons. The sheer number of cascading claims spanning varied disciplines sets a high bar. In addition, just as all theology is autobiography, so, too, runs all review. My own research interests and ecclesial location predispose me to approve of Coakley's work. What follows, then, are not so much faults I have found with *GSS*, but reflections upon its strengths that generate suggestions for further work. These observations take three emphases: theologian as autobiographer, texts and their readers, and desires taboo or transformed.

1. *Theologian as autobiographer*. In this review, I have tried to attend to the ways in which various threads in *GSS* connect to and pull along other aspects of Coakley's work. I did so in order to honor Coakley's own methodology, for it seems to me that *GSS*, without necessarily announcing or stressing its character as theological autobiography, nevertheless performs as such. Several clues promote this view. First, at various points, Coakley refers to her own life experiences and concerns as motives for her explorations. Such prompts for practicing theology are, of course, nothing new—for Coakley or for others. Yet, second, what startles in *GSS* is the manner in which these previous forays across academic specialties and into her own prayer life become theological method. The presence of these recurring points gathers together concerns Coakley has long been pursuing across a variety of forums. That these gestures reappear within *GSS* does not vitiate the value of their original contributions or detract from the weight of this volume; rather, they exemplify Coakley's concern to practice the *théologie totale* she articulates here as no passing whim, but rather as a deeply ingrained priority. So, third, the fact that Coakley sources her own life *and* research across multiple valences to create a new method for systematic theology promises to stimulate the field. That she kneads theology with social sciences, walks headlong into sexuality debates, deftly handles patristic mysticism, centers rather than sidelines prayer, and focuses on artistic depictions of the Trinity remains significant enough. That she does so as a woman who refuses to bury or apologize for her particularities, but takes theology by the shoulders and compels it to reckon with all of these factors, displays a courage seemingly rooted in just the contemplative forging of resistance she describes. That she accomplishes all of this while exhibiting graciousness and good humor (see the pure-gold mention on *GSS* 164-5 of the "ice-blue" pamphlets requested of Archbishop Runcie's Doctrinal Commission) appears just short of miraculous. Could systematic theology indeed persist as a distinct field? *GSS* suggests that it can, as long as it shapes its inquiry in generous, prayerful, Spirit-led ways

that work *with* other modes of inquiry. All theologians owe Coakley a debt for this disciplinary illumination.

2. *Texts and their readers.* This reader of this text finds much to appreciate in Coakley's centering of the Spirit. Chapters three and seven in particular helpfully extend and elaborate on ways Coakley's earlier work traces pneumatology's import. In surfacing problems with the ways the Spirit previously has been 'read,' Coakley motivates further discussion in at least three areas. First, Coakley's focus on the Spirit as agent enfolding humanity within divine desire connects with the resurgence of pneumatology in Thomas Weinandy, Kevin Hector, and Eugene Rogers, among others. One of the key components of Coakley's argument rests on her reading of Romans 8 and its subsequent appearances in patristic theology. Her presentation may risk appearing to pit Romans 8 and its resourcing against other voices and themes in the New Testament and early church. If *GSS*'s claims are to stand, do they demand a privileging of these slices of the tradition? Does Coakley's work in *GSS* subdue such qualms? Could any pneumatology? To ask the same question in a more positive way, if these long-muted segments of Christian thought are to live again, how might they be identified in other portions of the Scriptures Christian theology receives and prays back to the Spirit? Could this work quell the qualms with under-determined pneumatology expressed from such voices as Beth Felker Jones or Ephraim Radner? Second, how might attention to Christian mysticism through the ages also contribute to Coakley's portrayal of God the Spirit as the Lover who knows us more intimately than we know ourselves? St. Symeon the New Theologian, Catherine of Siena, Julian of Norwich, Thomas Merton, and Ruth Burrows, among many others, come to mind. Here too, however, another reckoning similar to the tensions between Troeltsch's church 'types' surfaces: as Coakley's colleague Janet Martin Soskice memorably queries, can theology recognize "a monk who finds God while cooking a meal with one child clamouring for a drink, another who needs a bottom wiped, and a baby throwing up over his shoulder"?²¹ Though Coakley wants theology to move beyond Weber's contrast between institution and charisma (*GSS*, 103), announcing such intentions may not yet complete the arduous task of answering how precisely Christianity, given the tensions Coakley has discovered, can achieve the task. That Coakley has uncovered this need remains a credit. Finally, an additional promising site of investigation places Coakley's theology in conversation not just with the social sciences but also with religious pluralism. *GSS* points to the urgent task Christian theology faces of exploring how other Abrahamic faiths read many of the same texts with different commentaries. What commonalities might be found when theology reads of desire and the divine together with Jewish and Muslim mysticism? All of these questions are less quibbles with Coakley's work and more sketches of where her achievements lay the groundwork for further inquiry.

²¹ *The Kindness of God: Metaphor, Gender, and Religious Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 23.

3. *Desires taboo or transformed.* I have left what may seem my sharpest critique for last. As Coakley notes, the sexuality crises shaking North Atlantic Christianity have not yet abated. In my own context, the Anglican Communion continues to be marked by fractured ecclesial life. The United Methodist Church appears poised to tumble down similar cliffs. More difficult to chart because of their flatter ecclesiologies, non-denominational Protestants and various Pentecostal communities may also follow suit. Meanwhile, the numbers of my generation and younger who have given up on Christianity, organized church life, or both continue to expand. Given the persisting nature of such controversies, the need for the ascetic modalities Coakley has so wonderfully introduced in *GSS* and *The New Asceticism* remains keen. I recall her exchange with Linn Tonstad during the spring 2017 Syndicate symposium on *God and Difference*. I read Tonstad's *God and Difference*²² as challenging Coakley to consider that even her proposed overturnings of patriarchy may still remain stuck within masculinized frameworks of power and control. The history remains, and so, how far can feminist revisions actually reach? The problem Tonstad raises may be solved differently than she suggests, but the question demands to be heard and deserves to be answered. Coakley's reflections on the roadblocks ranged against women priests, her anger with Anglican theological incoherence on women bishops, and even the resistance posed to her dialogue with feminism,²³ all suggest that when contradictions such as these appear intractable, the Spirit delights to work. I hope Coakley continues to create theological contributions that embody what she has so beautifully modeled in *GSS*.

²² (New York: Routledge, 2017).

²³ See *GSS*, 193 n.3, not to mention much of *GSS*'s beginning pages; "Sarah Coakley: Ministry Is Not Easier Than Theology," *Faith and Leadership*, October 22, 2012, <https://www.faithandleadership.com/sarah-coakley-ministry-not-easier-theology>; Sarah Coakley, "Has the Church of England Finally Lost Its Reason? Women Bishops and the Collapse of Anglican Theology," *ABC Religion and Ethics*, November 23, 2012, <http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2012/11/23/3639111.htm>; and Tina Beattie's account of male professors disparaging Coakley's 1999 lecture, "The Eschatological Body: Gender, Transformation, and God" at the annual conference of the Society of the Study of Theology at Edinburgh (Tina Beattie, "Essaying *Theologie Totale*," *Syndicate*, November 9, 2015, <https://syndicate.network/symposia/theology/sarah-coakley-god-sexuality-and-the-self/>).