

of scriptural citations, persons, and subjects. However, whilst modernisation of the Hooker's prose is greatly welcomed, McGrade retains much of Hooker's style, in, for example, long sentences, huge paragraphs, italics – sometimes running for page upon page – and ancient usage (such as 'us-ward' and 'God-ward'). These retentions may be thought to overcomplicate what is already a difficult text to read and comprehend.

This new modern language edition of Hooker's *Laws* is a remarkable achievement; and that one person (and not a team) has produced it is of itself extraordinary. The three volumes will be of enormous value to historians, theologians, political philosophers, and anyone with an interest in church governance. In particular, it is hoped that making Hooker more accessible will stimulate scholars and practitioners of Anglican canon law to rely more on the wisdom contained in the *Laws*: to be critical of legal arrangements; to be circumspect over change for its own sake; to be clear on the reasons for propositions; to be alert to theological dimensions of church law and polity; and to recognise the value of articulating complex legal materials as general principles, with a strong theological dimension of weight, for the digestion of law.

NORMAN DOE

**GOD, SEXUALITY, AND THE SELF: AN ESSAY 'ON THE TRINITY' by Sarah Coakley, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2013, pp. xxi + 365, £18.99, pbk**

To say that *God, Sexuality and the Self* is an ambitious book is not intended, as is so often the case, to flatter to deceive, but to suggest something of the depth and diversity of this paradoxically 'new type of case for the doctrine of the Trinity'. In the first of four projected volumes of 'unsystematic systematics', Professor Sarah Coakley, who self-identifies repeatedly as a feminist theologian, engages with a quartet of Patristic authors – Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine and Pseudo-Dionysius – who have often enough been indicted in sometimes wearily unsophisticated accounts of the allegedly baleful effects of developing Christian 'orthodoxy' on the status of women. Instead, she finds in them resources to freshen and nuance contemporary debate about both gender and the Christian doctrine of God precisely by recovering the connections perceived by the Fathers themselves between sexual desire and contemplative prayer seen as the privileged matrix for the emergence of Trinitarian consciousness.

In addition to this unabashed – and, as she implies, profoundly traditional – linking of themes now more conventionally assigned discretely to the history of 'spirituality' and to that of the development of doctrine, Coakley excavates in two fields even less routinely expected, perhaps, to yield theological treasure.

First, she uses the social anthropological tools of qualitative research, in critical dependence on Ernst Troeltsch's sociological typology of ecclesiological form, to interrogate the continuing validity of her own provisional conclusions drawn from the Patristic sources, by means of fieldwork undertaken in two worshipping communities – one Anglican, one an independent Protestant fellowship group – shaped by their involvement in Charismatic renewal.

Secondly, she offers for our reflection a gallery of Trinitarian images, ranging chronologically from the Roman catacombs to late 20<sup>th</sup>-century London. Her purpose in so doing is, strikingly, not simply to provide visual aids to illustrate an achieved

doctrinal position, but rather to suggest how art can itself be the irreplaceable catalyst for theological insight, in ways inaccessible to verbal articulation.

In less assured hands, the sheer variety of these resources might have led to a somewhat sterile bitterness. Each of the book's 7 substantial chapters can, as Coakley readily acknowledges, be viewed as a more or less self-contained unit, and, to some extent, therefore, the reader can choose their sequence *ad lib*. In whatever order they are read, however, they do not simply rattle around incoherently like so many units in a badly designed course of 'religious studies and theology', but rather build a cumulative case for the doctrine of Triune God as the guarantor of gendered human dignity. Paradoxically, however, this case turns on a conviction of both the inevitability of the apophatic dimension in authentic Christian spirituality and its necessity in theologically – and socially – responsible discourse. To that extent it is a plea not only for the continuing relevance of systematic theology, but also for its reconfiguration. This is required, Coakley suggests, both in the light of contemporary criticisms of the intellectually and politically abusive use to which, it is alleged, any such system can be put (and which is, on some accounts, inherent within them all) and as a response to what is discovered in prayer about the penultimacy of all human speech about God.

The particular conclusions for which she argues about the inter-relationship of dogmatic developments and political (including gender-political) pressures in the third and fourth centuries inevitably share the common fragility of all historical and literary judgement, though they will rightly send many readers back to the Patristic texts with a renewed sense of excitement. This is so especially in the case of her subtle comparative analysis of the place of desire and the nature of gender in Augustine and Gregory of Nyssa. Similar intrinsic limitations apply to social scientific findings, whilst perhaps not all will be equally convinced by Coakley's bold plea for the acceptance of at least partly non-rational responses to works of art as *bona fide* theological raw materials.

Coakley's fundamental conviction, however, that the spiritual, doctrinal and moral should be brought together into a kind of methodological *perichoresis*, in which dogmatic precision, sought and purified in prayer, becomes, at least potentially, a source of healing and peace, not least from the wounds of fallen sexuality, is a proposal that might be expected to find theoretical acceptance from many vantage points along the Christian spectrum. Secular interlocutors, too, who do not labour under undue prejudice about the role of religion in the academy and public square, might be given pause by Coakley's sketch of the expansion, rather than the denial, of rationality that her theological vision enables, and by the suggestion that, in its chastening of the idolatrous pretensions of human knowledge, the practice of contemplation allows the praying subject to be truly open to the other in a way for which entirely this-worldly post-enlightenment anthropologies might struggle to make room.

This is an extraordinarily rich book, then, raising as many questions as it answers, perhaps particularly for the Catholic commentator. In the first place, Coakley's 'incorporative' pneumatology, according to which the Spirit catches us up into the life of an 'expanded' Christ, opens the way for a potentially refreshing renewed emphasis on the Mystical Body, which might do much to revivify contemporary Catholic ecclesiology. Her insistence that such incorporation is inevitably into the Christ of Gethsemane and Golgotha immediately draws the sting of the triumphalism which has sometimes – perhaps somewhat lazily – been assumed necessarily to attend this model of the Church. Secondly, however, there seems one curious absence from Coakley's sensitive and provocative account of the relationship between human sexual desire and its divine archetype. Perhaps due to understandable nervousness about apparent capitulation to stereotypical accounts of feminine spirituality, there

is notably little reflection here on how the human experience of parenting and being parented might be rooted in, and give us language to speak of, the reality of God as Trinity. In such a theologically fecund work, that seems a surprising omission.

ANN SWAILES OP

**THE GARDEN OF GOD: TOWARDS A HUMAN ECOLOGY by Pope Benedict XVI, with a foreword by Archbishop Jean-Louis Bruguès, Catholic University of America Press, Washington, 2012, pp. xvii + 218, pbk.**

The most significant thing about this book, perhaps, is that it exists at all. It consists of extracts from talks, sermons and letters given by Benedict XVI during his pontificate which concern the goodness and the use of the created world, in particular in the light of the ecological crisis and the iniquitous distribution of the world's resources. The three parts of the book are entitled 'Creation and Nature', 'The Environment, Science and Technology', and 'Hunger, Poverty and the Earth's Resources'. Within these sections, the extracts are arranged chronologically.

Protection of the environment has been a regular theme of papal teaching since it first appeared in Paul VI's *Octagesima Adveniens* in 1971. John Paul II emphasised it strongly, and Francis spoke of it in his inaugural homily. But it is Benedict who has returned to the theme with insistent regularity. This collection shows just how far he made it an essential ingredient of his ordinary teaching, whether he was speaking to new ambassadors or assembled ski instructors, to school pupils or the Director of the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation, at Easter, by satellite to the crew of a space station, or in St Peter's square during his regular Angelus message. The Vatican was the first, and is doubtless still the only, carbon-neutral state in the world. In Benedict, the papacy has been preaching what it practices.

The texts return repeatedly to a set of basic themes, many of them familiar from Benedict's encyclicals. (Indeed, a substantial extract from *Caritas in Veritate* is included here.) The ordered goodness of creation is a reflection of the creative goodness of its Creator. Consequently, on the one hand, the experience of nature is religiously inspiring; on the other, the abandonment of God tends to lead to the destruction of his creation. A favourite example, here and elsewhere, is technology: unless human ambition is restrained by faith, the powerful will abuse this in ways that harm both poor human beings and the environment. Justice, on the other hand, requires us to use our political and technical skill and ingenuity to help the hungry and preserve resources for future generations. For these reasons, Benedict insists forcibly that we need 'an effective shift in mentality that can lead to the adoption of new lifestyles' (*Caritas in Veritate* 51).

The final section of the book, which concentrates on the question of food, consists mainly of addresses to international bodies with responsibilities in this area. Here the Pope particularly emphasises the need to support the development of rural communities in a way that allows local economies and traditional lifestyles to flourish.

The most distinctive element in Benedict's approach is his insistence that what he calls 'environmental ecology' and 'human ecology' are inseparable. In other words, there is a mutual dependence between beliefs, attitudes and behaviour that preserve the vulnerable elements of our natural environment and those that protect human beings, especially the poor and weak, from conception to death. The idea is important and intriguing, but it needs a fuller articulation and defence than it receives in the passing references to it in these pages.