

more out of a Christian tradition and Christ from Goddess spirituality, both are responding to questions raised by the feminist study in religion in the West in the last three decades. Since both work out of the western feminist episteme, it is not surprising that they ask similar questions in their philosophy of religion.

As an Asian feminist who appreciates their contributions, I want to ask in what ways a feminist philosophy of religion can be open to issues raised by feminists in non-western traditions? I think a feminist process model will contribute to dialogue with non-western traditions because it is less dualistic and more inclusive. As Christ rightly notes, process philosophy has similarities with East Asian traditions, especially with Buddhist philosophy. But we need to respect the integrity of other philosophies and avoid superimposing a basically western model onto the Asian traditions. Furthermore, a feminist philosophy of religion needs carefully to rethink the definition of religion and the conceptualization of religious boundaries in light of postcolonial criticism of the field. Christ follows the customary usage of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Hinduism as if they were not problematic and makes generalizations about other traditions without attending to historical and regional differences. Although I agree that religious identity and affiliation are fluid, I had hoped that Christ would include a critique of white women's appropriation of non-western symbols and religious resources, given the power differentials. I do not feel comfortable when white women appropriate Kali to help them release anger or to satisfy their wish to find a dark feminine goddess, in contrast to God as an Old White Man (232–233).

Although process philosophy can be daunting and highly abstract, Christ has done her readers a great service by making it accessible and even enjoyable at times. She has also boldly raised the issues of constructing feminist philosophy of religion, comparative feminist studies, and feminist appropriation of western male philosophy for scholars to think about.

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Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy, and Gender. By Sarah Coakley. Blackwell Publishers, 2002. 172 pages. \$70.95 cloth; \$30.95 paper.

This volume is a compilation of nine essays by Harvard Divinity School theologian Sarah Coakley. All of the essays were published previously between 1990 and 2000 and have been lightly revised (according to the author) for their new context. Each essay follows a similar method and is clearly and accessibly written. Coakley juxtaposes contemporary texts (secular and/or religious, feminist or not) with texts from older strands of the Christian tradition. The old and the new are scrutinized for gender bias, for intellectual rigor, and for religious worth—often with surprising results. To each essay Coakley brings her commitments to traditional tenets of Christian faith (incarnation, resurrection, and trinitarianism) and to feminism.

The book takes its title from what Coakley sees as the distinctive task for Christian feminist theology today: articulating a concept of the relationship between divinity and humanity that undoes women's subordination but supports the paradoxical Christian claim that true liberation comes through submission to God. By her lights, then, Christian feminism shares with secular feminism the goal of promoting liberation from gender stereotyping, but differs from it in understanding true freedom as residing in radical dependence on God. As Coakley puts it in the prologue, "[I]f our fundamental and *practiced* dependency is on God, there is the fulcrum from which our (often necessary) dependencies on others may be assessed with critical discernment, and the assumed binary gender-associations of such dependencies called into question" (xx). That submission is not primarily a matter of belief, according to Coakley, but of practice, particularly that of contemplative prayer.

Coakley recognizes the risks in such a formulation of the Christian feminist theological task. For one thing, the Christian tradition can be rocky soil for feminist cultivation. The logic of submission has been invoked in support of women's subordination and even outright abuse. Many of the volume's essays expose the gender stereotyping that runs rampant through the tradition. For another, foraging through ancient fields in search of sustenance for contemporary concerns risks anachronism. In each essay Coakley attempts to tread carefully around these problems. Though she sometimes falters, at her best Coakley combines incisive and careful reading of texts old and new with trenchant analysis of the contemporary scene. Placing practice at the forefront brings with it a refreshing change of focus on the old and the new.

The volume is organized into three sections of three essays apiece. The first section, "The Contemplative Matrix," focuses on notions of vulnerability, especially those connected with practices of contemplative prayer. Of particular note is the first essay, which takes up the question of the value (or lack thereof) of kenotic Christology for feminist theology. To this debate Coakley contributes an account of the various meanings of *kenosis* in the tradition. She distinguishes between those versions that are vulnerable to feminist criticisms that self-emptying Christ is a dangerous role model for women (already too well trained in self-abnegation) and those that are friendly to feminist aims. Coakley aligns herself with Rosemary Ruether in understanding Christ's *kenosis* as positive for women. She reads it as an emptying that is both human and divine. Christ "instantiates . . . the very 'mind' that we ourselves enact or enter into, in prayer: the unique intersection of vulnerability, 'non-grasping' humanity and authentic divine power, itself made perfect in weakness" (38). She recognizes that careful distinctions between this sort of *kenosis* and self-abnegation need to be made in practice—especially where women are concerned. How exactly that would play out Coakley does not tell us.

The second, "Philosophical Interlocutions," brings classical feminist concerns (mind/body dualism, God as man writ large) to the fore, first in an inquiry into pre-Cartesian Christian understandings of selfhood, then in hard-hitting interrogations of analytic philosophy of religion. Of particular note here is the first essay's refreshing take on Descartes. Drawing on recent scholarship Coakley

argues that the philosopher's own position on the relationship between mind, soul, and body belies the familiar portrait of him as the originator of the peculiarly modern version of the mind/body dualism. Clearing this ground makes space for an inquiry into pre-Cartesian notions of selfhood in this essay and, in another essay, rescues Descartes for possible Christian feminist projects.

The third section, "Doctrinal Implications," brings the volume to a close with a set of essays focused on three different theological issues. Each brings Gregory of Nyssa into conversation with contemporary scholars as disparate as Richard Swinburne (on the trinity) and Judith Butler (entitled "The Eschatological Body"). The strongest essay in the volume, in this reader's opinion, is the final essay in this section (and the volume), that partners Butler and Gregory. The essay begins with Coakley's own take on the current fascination with the body in academic circles and in late western capitalist culture in general. Coakley provides a cogent and even witty description of our contemporary fascination with and fixation on the body. The chief symptoms seem paradoxical, on the surface. On the one hand, our consumerist culture encourages fleshly indulgences of various kinds. On the other, some of us, at least, also actively pursue regimens of intense bodily discipline (diet and exercise), dubbed by the author a "sweaty Pelagianism." (155) Coakley diagnoses these paradoxical tendencies as symptoms of an eschatological longing for ultimate meaning (in a time when metanarratives no longer provide it) and for freedom from finitude. She argues that the continued hold Judith Butler's work has over both academic and popular imaginations is symptomatic of these tendencies. Indeed, she suspects that it, too, manifests this kind of longing. Coakley's approach to Butler, although certainly novel, is also refreshing. First, she sees past the clumsy and/or deliberate misreadings of Butler's work. Coakley understands that Butler does not collapse the body into language, for example, nor does her work end in political quietism. Coakley's approach highlights often-neglected aspects of Butler's work, especially its basis in bodily practice. Reading Butler alongside Gregory of Nyssa highlights the notion that transformation of the *status quo*—be it religious or sexual—comes not through thinking new thoughts but through "arduous exercises" (159) that involve body as well as mind.

The volume exhibits a remarkable coherence, given the disparate nature of the essays. Figures and issues appear in more than one essay, which allows for a deepening of analysis and fresh insight. However, a collection of essays will necessarily lack the freshness and comprehensiveness of a newly crafted monograph, and this one is no exception. Perhaps because the essays range over a particular ten-year period, the feminist template applied to the texts and issues in question in many of the essays feels somewhat dated. With the exception of allusions to womanist theology in the prologue, feminist methodology is limited to gender analysis here that seeks out familiar stereotypes (e.g., associating women with body, emotion, etc., and men with mind.) whose damage to women seems primarily psychological. Those who understand feminist analysis as involving what Judith Butler calls other "vectors of force" (race, class, sexuality, as well as gender) and political and economic as well as psychological realities will find Coakley's analyses somewhat thin. The application of this particular

kind of feminist analysis at times results in a flattening of historical perspective when ancients are judged by contemporary standards (is it reasonable to expect Augustine to have posited women as men's equals?) and the occasional anachronism. It seems unlikely that the "interests, . . . conversations and civilities" of a medieval royal household (quoted by Coakley, 91) that prevent Descartes's correspondent, Princess Elizabeth, from developing the "habit of meditation" prescribed by the philosopher are the same as "the maelstrom of toddler's demands and emotional blackmail" (91) of the modern middle-class bourgeois household.

The volume's call for a new understanding of the divine/human relationship goes tantalizingly unrealized as well. Indeed, some of Coakley's conclusions seem to push its realization into an impossible future. In his commentary on the Song of Songs, Gregory of Nyssa describes the ascent to spiritual union with God. He figures the soul first as a male suitor, then as bride. Christ appears first as the suitor's desired object, Sophia ("a manly woman") and finally as the bridegroom. Coakley reads this as evidence that "gender stereotypes must be reversed, undermined, and transcended if the soul is to advance to supreme intimacy with the Trinitarian God" (128). The transition Gregory describes seems to be from active seeking to passive waiting; the tropes that bespeak that transition, then, may change sex(ual assignation), but, if anything, they reify gender stereotypes that associate masculinity with activity and femininity with passivity (a point Coakley notes in a subsequent essay). That they conclude in a relationship of submission figured as female to male begs the question with which the volume began: does the Christian tradition contain within it resources for conceiving of submission to God that escape gender stereotyping and the psychological damage to women that it entails?

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Body and Soul: A Sympathetic History of American Spiritualism. By Robert S. Cox. University of Virginia Press, 2003. 288 pages. \$39.50.

In his fascinating book, *Body and Soul: A Sympathetic History of American Spiritualism*, Robert S. Cox delves into the emotional nexus between human and spirit worlds by emphasizing what he sees as a forgotten dimension of this metaphysical religion: the spirits themselves and their messages. Cox gently chides previous scholarship for what he sees as its "instrumentalist tinge," whether it focused on the Enlightenment pedigree and scientific rhetoric of Spiritualist cosmologies (R. Laurence Moore), the reformist imperatives and scrambling of political codes by Spiritualist media (Ann Braude), or the political unconscious of Spiritualist leaders (Bret E. Carroll). Cox cautions against an overly narrow focus on strategic religiosity and liberatory politics at the expense of seeing the diversity within Spiritualism and the poetic and sometimes ugly side of the spirit world. Instead of hastily identifying any center of religious or social argumentation



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