Contemporary Anglican Systematic Theology: Three Examples in David Brown, Sarah Coakley, and David F. Ford

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Introduction

In our own time, we are well aware of the imperialism of earlier claims of the Church of England to speak for the whole Communion. Gone are the days when a book written only by members of the Church of England and (at most) two representatives of the Scottish Episcopal Church would dare to use the subtitle “By Members of the Anglican Communion.” But the poor choice of subtitle does not invalidate the important contribution that Essays Catholic and Critical made to Anglican theology in 1926.¹

The present writers do not claim that the three theologians whose works are reviewed in this essay, and who currently teach in England and Scotland, speak for Anglicanism worldwide. But we do claim that each has made an important contribution to Anglican theology. By keeping Scripture as well as ecclesial practices (and disagreements) in mind, they exhibit a characteristically Anglican approach to their academic work. Although all three were Oxbridge-educated, we are also not saying that an English education is required in order to be an Anglican theologian, nor that these are the only contemporary Anglican theologians we could have selected—far from it. Rather, these three happen to be our teachers, and putting them together enables the conversation of which Timothy Sedgwick writes: “Without

¹ See Edward Gordon Selwyn, ed., Essays Catholic and Critical: By Members of the Anglican Communion, third edition (London: SPCK, 1958). The only “member of the Communion” not resident in England was in fact still English, the philosopher A. E. Taylor, who attended a congregation of the Scottish Episcopal Church while a professor at Edinburgh. Contributor Will Spens was born in Scotland.
this conversation, their distinctive claims are lost from view; . . . claims which provide insight into what is central to Anglican understandings of Christian faith and life and what within Anglicanism remains captive to its Englishness.”

The accounts of what is distinctive in the work of David F. Ford, David Brown, and Sarah Coakley at the same time show what these theologians have in common. That commonality we take to be central to Anglicanism, and we hope to show that there are reasons why a tradition with its roots in Great Britain still offers virtues to be practiced across the Communion, and provides answers to knotty epistemological problems inside and outside the academy. Put briefly, all three begin their theology with (more or less critical) readings of Scripture and with ecclesial practice. But each demonstrates that, from there, contemporary Anglican theology makes many border crossings: into the theology of other denominations and faith traditions, into analytic and Continental philosophy, into the arts and natural sciences, even into divine life. It should be noted that Donald MacKinnon (1913–1994), who taught all three theologians the importance of “border-crossing” into other disciplines, himself crossed the border from Scotland to England and back; and geographical border-crossings are important to these three as well, as will be seen from their biographies. In fact, only one of the three is English—and she spent a large part of her teaching career in the United States. Moreover, Coakley and Ford both received American master’s degrees and wrote doctorates on German theology, providing the Harvard/Troeltschian and Yale/Barthian tenor of their respective early work.

Perhaps these trans-Atlantic crossings explain why Coakley and Ford have lower levels of engagement with earlier Anglican theologians than does Brown, who self-consciously upholds the empirical tradition of Bishop Butler and John Henry Newman. Coakley is more likely to engage with Judith Butler than Joseph Butler, but will put her into conversation with the early church fathers—typical Anglican dialogue partners. Ford might not be an obvious choice as an Anglican theologian—as opposed to a theologian who is a committed Anglican—because he interacts so little with historic Anglican theologians or the church fathers. Yet while Ford may not engage with earlier Anglicans nor with typical Anglican dialogue partners, the form of his theology is

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unmistakably Anglican, involved with border-crossing conversations, immersed in Scripture and worship, and alert to the possibility of the contingent character of things’ bearing witness to God. The contexts and themes of each person’s theology will now be examined.

**David F. Ford: A Review by Jason A. Fout**

Born in 1948, David F. Ford grew up in a “not particularly practicing” Church of Ireland family.³ His interest in God and theology grew out of life’s upheavals, including the death of his father when Ford was twelve, and later—while studying classics at Trinity College, Dublin—wrestling with the social issues raised by student riots, the civil rights movement, and “the troubles” in Northern Ireland. He sensed that deep responses were required, and he wondered how Christian faith might approach these matters. He accepted a scholarship from St. John’s College, Cambridge, to study whatever he wanted; he chose theology. While there, he met and worked with a number of varied and influential Anglican theologians who combined deep intelligence with a sincere faith, not least Stephen Sykes and Donald MacKinnon. Following on from this, he moved to Yale, where he took a master’s degree, working with Hans Frei, among others. He then returned to Cambridge for his doctorate, taking a term away in Tübingen; he wrote his dissertation under MacKinnon on the use of biblical narrative in Karl Barth’s *Church Dogmatics*.⁴

Ford’s first teaching post was in the University of Birmingham, where he taught for fifteen years. The dynamic diversity of Birmingham affected him greatly, particularly its multifaith character. Alongside this engagement with other religions, Ford also began longer-term collaborations with two colleagues, Frances Young and Daniel Hardy. Young taught New Testament and patristics; together, she and Ford authored *Meaning and Truth in 2 Corinthians*, an effort to bring hermeneutical, theological, and biblical-studies perspectives together in the task of scriptural interpretation.⁵ The result is a creative, text-focused, multidisciplinary account which takes seriously

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⁴ Published as *Barth and God's Story: Biblical Narrative and the Theological Method of Karl Barth in the Church Dogmatics* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1981).
the questions raised by each discipline yet seeks to do full justice to the text of the ancient letter. Above all, Young and Ford intended the work to go beyond textual concerns to an apprehension of the truth communicated, and in that, to be transformed.6

Ford's second long-term collaboration begun at Birmingham, with Daniel Hardy, who also taught theology,7 led to the co-authored work entitled Jubilate: Theology in Praise, re-named Living in Praise: Worshipping and Knowing God in its second edition.8 In it, they seek to relate knowing and praising God, exploring praise as the way by which human knowing and living are integrally related “to God and God's purposes.”9 This book, above all, is a constructive work of theology, attempting to show something of God, the human “in” God, and the myriad implications of this understanding for life. Ford and Hardy engage in a distinctive “voice” for doing theology, experimenting with various discourses: this is not a work of traditional systematic or dogmatic theology, but something much more exploratory.10

Ford returned to Cambridge in 1991 to become Regius Professor of Divinity, the first Anglican not in orders to hold the post. Professionally, this began a new phase of building and guiding institutions, including founding the Centre for Advanced Religious and Theological Studies, and the Cambridge Inter-faith Program. Theologically, two major works mark this period. The first, Self and Salvation: Being Transformed, constructs a theological anthropology of the self before God.11 In this work Ford continued the pattern that he developed earlier, of creatively expounding the church’s faith through the lenses of theological engagement with Scripture, emphasizing the centrality of worship and conversational engagements with a wide range of thinkers. As before, he does not rest content within the boundaries of dogmatic theology, but draws into consideration a variety of thinkers who have influenced him, including Emmanuel Levinas, Paul Ricoeur, Eberhard Jüngel, Thérèse of Lisieux, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. While

6 Young and Ford, Meaning and Truth, 7.
9 Ford and Hardy, Living in Praise, 194.
10 Ford and Hardy, Living in Praise, 3.
he intends to make a contribution to systematic theology, he does so in part by detouring around typical perennial disputes within the discipline, drawing instead on resources such as phenomenology in order to make a constructive statement. Further, the tone of this work is much more of synthesis than analysis: Ford is convinced that the truth of doctrine cannot be considered apart from ethical, philosophical, liturgical, or biographical considerations, and these run throughout the book. The result is a theology which is not dryly conceptual, but self-involving.12

The second major work of theology written during this time, *Christian Wisdom: Desiring God and Learning in Love*, explores “key elements of Christian wisdom and its relevance to contemporary living.”13 Ford engages this topic particularly through the interpretation of Scripture, not only its historical composition and context, but with its historical and contemporary reception and interpretation in view as well: Scripture is not just read, it is re-read, and this ongoing, expansive, communal engagement is extraordinarily generative for all aspects of life. The result is an account of wisdom which embraces love and desire as well as knowledge and practice.

Unlike *Self and Salvation*, in which wide-ranging conversations with others are initially to the fore and exploration of the specifically Christian self is left until later, *Christian Wisdom* features a close reading of scriptural texts in the first part and then proceeds to set out three case studies which draw Christian wisdom into “cross-border” engagements: with Jews and Muslims in the “Scriptural Reasoning” movement, with the contemporary university, and with the developmentally disabled in the L’Arche communities. Each of these engagements grows out of long-standing commitments in Ford’s own life.

One of these engagements, the practice of Scriptural Reasoning, has figured prominently in Ford’s recent work. Scriptural Reasoning features Muslims, Christians, and Jews gathering to read and study

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12 For an overview of Ford’s project, see Luther Zeigler, “The Many Faces of the Worshipping Self: David Ford’s Anglican Vision of Christian Transformation,” *Anglican Theological Review* 89, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 267–285. Although Zeigler shows well how Ford may be understood as an Anglican theologian, he overstates the degree to which Ford is philosophically committed to phenomenology (as opposed to finding phenomenology heuristically useful).

their scriptures together in mutual hospitality. Space forbids deeper consideration of this important movement, except to note the centrality of friendship to the practice.\textsuperscript{14}

I have deliberately set forth Ford’s career in more of a biographical than a systematic fashion, as this fits the sort of theologian Ford is. The conversations, relationships, and friendships which comprise Ford’s life are intrinsic to his identity (as are the border-crossings that these entail). He draws all of these into the task of theologizing, of speaking adequately of the encompassing reality of God, and of relating all things to God.

There are three aspects of this work which bear highlighting as distinctly Anglican. First, there is a care to attend to the contingent and particular as themselves theologically significant. Friendships, the experience of the Eucharist, encounters with the developmentally disabled, readings of Scripture, conversations with colleagues: all of these are significant for theologizing, rather than being accidents to be forgotten when thinking of God. There is in this a view of the world that sees creation, in its present reality, as capable of mediating knowledge of God, a sacramental view of reality, a view which some Anglicans in particular would call “incarnational.”

Second, and closely related to this, Ford’s theology does not dwell in the abstract and universal, nor does it tend to speak finally and authoritatively. Further, it arises from close readings of Scripture, without being precommitted to a single hermeneutical strategy. While Ford does not deny the value of dogmatic theology, his work is much more exploratory, interrogative, and heuristic, sensitive to particular contexts, and carried out as much in the subjunctive mood—asking “what if?”—as in the indicative and imperative. This frees him to explore ideas and engagements, alert to their potential for illuminating Christian faith, without being committed to them as more final or more basic than Christian faith. This is fully consistent with the tendency of Anglicans to do theology through essays, pamphlets, sermons, and poetry, rather than single- or multi-volume works of

systematic theology. It is also consistent with the Anglican willingness to “borrow” outside of their tradition, without feeling thereby committed to the whole of the tradition from which they are borrowing.

Finally, Ford’s theology is deeply formed and informed by the practices of Christian life and specifically worship of God. For Ford, knowledge of God cannot come apart from the praise, love, and desire of God. And so to speak truly of God, and of all in relation to God, will necessarily involve one in the life of worship. In this regard, Ford is a paradigmatic Anglican theologian, seeing worship not as a response to a conceptual account of God, but seeing both worship and theology as themselves responding to the One in whom we “live, move, and have our being.”

David Brown: A Review by Robert MacSwain

David Brown was born in Scotland in 1948.15 He studied classics at the University of Edinburgh; philosophy and theology at Oxford; and received his doctorate in moral philosophy from Cambridge, where he was co-supervised by Elizabeth Anscombe (1919–2001) and Bernard Williams (1929–2003). After training for ordained ministry at Westcott House, Cambridge, he returned to Oxford as Chaplain and Fellow of Oriel College in 1976 and was also appointed as University Lecturer in Philosophical Theology and Ethics. In 1990 Brown took up the joint appointment of Residentiary Canon of Durham Cathedral and Van Mildert Professor of Divinity at Durham University.16 During his seventeen years at Durham he was deeply involved in various artistic and musical projects related to the life of the Cathedral, and served as Canon Librarian from 1998 to 2007. A former member of the Doctrine Commission of the Church of England, in 2002 he was made a Fellow of the British Academy, and in 2007 he returned to Scotland to accept his present position as Wardlaw Professor of Theology, Aesthetics, and Culture at the University of St. Andrews.

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15 This biographical material is based on personal information and various public sources, including John Macquarrie, “A Sketch of David Brown,” in Anglican Theological Review 84, no. 3 (Summer 2002): 767–770.

16 The oldest professorship at Durham, and one of the great chairs of Anglican theology; previous occupants include O. C. Quick (1885–1944), Michael Ramsey (1904–1988), Stephen Sykes (1939–), and Daniel W. Hardy (1930–2007). The present occupant, Brown’s immediate successor, is Mark McIntosh.
For the majority of his career, Brown has thus followed the traditional Anglican model of combining academic teaching and research with pastoral, homiletic, and sacramental responsibilities. His scholarly work has been characterized by four broad themes. The first, associated mostly with his period at Oxford, is the interaction between philosophy and theology. Two early books represent this dialogue, with *The Divine Trinity* defending a social doctrine of the Trinity against a strongly deistic and unitarian trend in twentieth-century English theology, and with *Continental Philosophy and Modern Theology* offering more of a synoptic survey of classic and contemporary figures. At this point, Brown was primarily associated with a circle of Anglo-American analytic philosophers of religion, such as Richard Swinburne, and published various essays in this genre. However, even at this early stage he was already pushing against the confines of strictly analytic and empirical thought toward a more open and nuanced approach.

The second theme is sacramental theology, particularly as this was renewed and expanded in the last decades of the twentieth century to view all material reality in sacramental terms. Brown's work here has been both collaborative and interdisciplinary. Along with his colleague Ann Loades at Durham, he co-edited two essay collections in this area, and with David Fuller of Durham's English Department he co-authored a volume which offered commentary on selections from a wide range of literary classics. Against what he views as the dangerously instrumental and utilitarian tendency of contemporary Christianity—perhaps most obvious in many prevalent approaches to


worship, liturgy, and church architecture—Brown sees sacramental theology as “a plea for the useless, for the material world of divine and human creation alike to be seen as capable of mediating experience of God, a sacramental reality to be valued in its own right irrespective of what further benefits it may bring.”

This statement provides a natural segue to the third theme, reflected in Brown’s current professorship at St. Andrews, which deals with the relation between theology and the arts, as well as human culture more broadly. Brown’s interests in philosophy, theology, sacramentality, the arts, and human culture led him to publish five major volumes with Oxford University Press that explore these topics in great depth and detail over an enormous canvas: Tradition and Imagination: Revelation and Change (1999), Discipleship and Imagination: Christian Tradition and Truth (2000), God and Enchantment of Place: Reclaiming Human Experience (2004), God and Grace of Body: Sacrament in Ordinary (2007), and God and Mystery in Words: Experience Through Metaphor and Drama (2008). Each of these volumes has been individually reviewed in this journal and, collectively weighing in at almost two thousand pages, it is impossible to do them full justice here.

Overarching and unifying the whole series are Brown’s firm convictions, implicit in his earlier work but now articulated more clearly and impressively, that human imagination no less than reason is essential to the theological enterprise; that Scripture is not a fixed text but a manifestation of a living and moving tradition; that revelation is a culturally-enmeshed, fallibly-mediated, and progressively-grasped phenomenon; and that divine action, grace, and truth are to be found outside the Christian church as well as within, in secular philosophy.

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22 For Tradition and Imagination and Discipleship and Imagination, see Margaret R. Miles, Anglican Theological Review 83, no. 4 (Fall 2001): 925–928; for God and Enchantment of Place, see Lizette Larson-Miller, Anglican Theological Review 89, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 296–297; for God and Grace of Body, see Vaughn S. Roberts, Anglican Theological Review 90, no. 4 (Fall 2008): 807–808; and for God and Mystery in Words, see Vaughn S. Roberts, Anglican Theological Review 91, no. 2 (Spring 2009): 301–302. See also the forthcoming volume, Robert MacSwain and Taylor Worley, eds., Theology, Aesthetics, and Culture: Responses to the Work of David Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). Some sentences of this section are drawn from my introduction to this book.
and other religions no less than through the work of painters, sculptors, writers, composers, musicians, dancers, film-makers, architects, town planners, landscape gardeners, and so forth. In addition to being a signal example of Anglican “hospitality,” this series is one of the most ambitious projects of contemporary theology and represents a substantial challenge to currently dominant perspectives across a range of important issues.

The fourth and final theme has been Brown’s scholarly engagement with the Anglican tradition itself. Aside from Stephen Sykes and Rowan Williams, Brown is one of the very few contemporary Anglican theologians (as opposed to historians) who explicitly interacts with and draws upon earlier Anglican figures. For example, he has written on Joseph Butler, John Henry Newman, Edward Bouverie Pusey, Michael Ramsey, and Austin Farrer. He has also written more thematically on Anglican moral theology, ecclesiology, and Christology.23

In terms of his Anglican predecessors, Brown stands in the apologetic tradition of Butler, the philosophical tradition of Farrer, and the liberal Catholic tradition of Gore and Ramsey. In the classically Anglican manner, he rejects any sharp distinction between natural and revealed theology, emphasizes the essential goodness of creation over the effects of the Fall, and upholds the priority of the incarnation over the atonement.24 Along with Newman he maintains that “revealed

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24 For a monograph on the incarnation that includes an engagement with Sarah Coakley, see his most recent book, David Brown, Divine Humanity: Kenosis and the Construction of a Christian Theology (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2011).
religion builds on natural religion rather than wholly subverts it.”

More controversially and distinctively, Brown denies the fundamental distinction between Scripture and tradition, holds that later tradition can improve upon and “correct” the teaching of scriptural texts, and insists that God’s generous presence can be found everywhere, including “secular” culture and other religions. He is convinced that Christians worship “a God of mystery who has disclosed something of that divinity to humanity but with an inexhaustible richness that means that . . . there remains always something more to discover, something more to delight the senses and the intellect.”

Sarah Coakley: A Review by Benjamin J. King

Sarah Coakley was born in England in 1951. She studied theology at the University of Cambridge, where David Ford was in the year above her (and Rowan Williams two years above), and there she wrote her doctoral thesis on the German liberal theologian Ernst Troeltsch. Between her undergraduate and graduate degrees from Cambridge, she earned a master’s in theology at Harvard Divinity School. Coakley’s commitment to feminism and her education in the liberal theology of both Cambridges in the 1970s provided a critical edge against which she cuts at any theology unengaged with life in the world. However, this critical edge did not diminish her deep sense of meeting God in prayer.

It has been the practice of prayer, described in Pauline terms as a conversation between God the Father and the Holy Spirit into which the practitioner is incorporated “in Christ,” that guided Coakley to what could be called critical orthodoxy. As she puts it in the

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26 Brown, God and Mystery in Words, 278.


long-awaited first volume of a proposed four-volume systematic theology, one dare not assume “that the achievement of classical orthodoxy is the arrival at some stable place of spiritual safety. ‘Orthodoxy’ as mere propositional assent needs to be carefully distinguished from ‘orthodoxy’ as a demanding, and ongoing, spiritual project, in which the language of the creeds is personally and progressively assimilated.”

In what follows, four themes of this critical orthodoxy will be examined as they relate to the three places in which she taught, prior to her appointment, in 2007, as Norris-Hulse Professor of Divinity at Cambridge.

Of the many themes of Coakley’s writings to emerge from fifteen years’ teaching at Lancaster University in the United Kingdom, two are central to her ongoing work. First is her view that the theologian is in service to the church, and second is her use of the social sciences in theology. For some theologians today these two themes would be seen as contradictory, with the social sciences being more appropriate to a school-of-religions approach rather than an ecclesial understanding of theology. But at Lancaster from 1976, as Coakley recalled in her inaugural lecture as Norris-Hulse Professor, “I first learnt the richness of the social science approaches to religion, when non-reductively construed, and how these disciplines could be turned back on Christian theology.” For instance, she used the methodology of sociology in the service of the Church of England’s Doctrine Commission, making field studies of two groups of charismatic Christians—an Anglican parish (“church-sect” hybrid) and a group (“sect”) that had just split from it. Coakley compared these groups’ self-described experiences of prayer, not only with each other but also (and here was her ecclesial thrust) the writings of various church fathers. She concluded: “All prayer is prayer ‘in the Spirit,’” but warned of the “danger of associating particular sorts of experience with the Spirit . . . [which] may lead either to an implicit tritheism (a belief in three different gods), or

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31 Another theme from these years was a conference that eventually led to the volume Religion and the Body, ed. Sarah Coakley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

else a sporadic, instrumentalist, and possibly impersonal, vision of the Spirit." Here one sees the influence of two of her most frequently quoted authorities and ongoing dialogue partners, the Roman Catholic anthropologist Mary Douglas (1921–2007) and the church father Gregory of Nyssa.

A third theme is Coakley’s use of the Anglophone tradition of empirical reason and her awareness of its limits when talking about God. At Oriel College, Oxford, where she taught briefly, Coakley learned the analytic philosophy that Richard Swinburne and David Brown also used there (although she arrived just after Brown left for Durham). But she reminded its proponents to be aware of concerns raised by feminism. At this time Coakley also delivered the Hulsean Lectures, which took an apophatic approach to God-talk, recognizing for instance the essentially metaphorical use of “Father” when applied to the first person of the Trinity. As she put it later (opposing Brown’s and others’ “social” image for the Trinity): “What the overlapping and bombarding images of [Gregory of Nyssa’s] Song commentary remind us is that the ‘persons’ of the Trinity are always being reconfigured and reconstrued as the soul advances to more dizzying intimacy with the divine.”

Coakley also questioned the usefulness of ordinary language in Christology, interpreting the Chalcedonian “definition” (horos in Greek) as a horizon beyond which it is unsafe to venture in talking about Christ. Yet her fluency in Anglophone philosophy

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35 See, for example, Coakley, Powers and Submissions, chap. 6: “Analytic Philosophy of Religion in Feminist Perspective: Some Questions,” 95–106.


37 Coakley, Powers and Submissions, 129.

enabled a joint research project at Harvard with evolutionary biologist Martin Nowak, who himself shifted into theological metaphor to explain the cooperation (rather than simply selfishness) within species as “sacrifice.” In opposition to theologians who employ Continental philosophy to claim that Christian theology has its own untranslatable grammar, Coakley’s use of analytic philosophy to talk to natural scientists has led to the employment of Christian idioms in biology.

Such interdisciplinary work flourished during fourteen years’ teaching at Harvard, from which comes the fourth theme: her work at the “borders.” She identifies these “borderland raid[s] . . . into secular philosophy and science” with her teacher at Cambridge, Donald MacKinnon, but it was in Cambridge, Massachusetts (living on the borderland between North America and Europe, between empirical/pragmatic and Continental philosophy) that “liminality” became such a theme of her theology. Her work at Harvard took place on the threshold of many disciplines, enabling her discernment that humans are liminal creatures, living on thresholds as well as crossing them. For instance, in the Pain Seminar (an off-putting name!), she worked at the threshold of neuroscience, ritual and music theory, and religious studies. Coakley also suggested theology should cross the threshold of business schools. Ordination as an Anglican priest in 2001 gave her insight into the liminal life of the priesthood. She gained renewed awareness of the parish church as a “thin” place, as well as noting the Church of England’s liminal role as an established church in a secular society. She also meditated on the liminality of the eucharistic celebrant, specifically as a woman standing on the threshold that is the altar.


For a brief account, see Coakley, Sacrifice Regained, 22–28.

Coakley, Sacrifice Regained, 6–7.


Coakley’s greatest contribution to contemporary theology is perhaps her consideration of the liminality of human gender and sexuality from a doctrinal perspective. She argues that, in prayer, a human’s desire for God leads to a “porous” selfhood to which gender binaries do not apply.44 Neither difference between human persons nor their sexuality can be reduced to binaries and, for Coakley, this is the case for humans because it is first true of God. The existence of the Spirit means that God cannot be reduced to a Father-Son binary or to some undifferentiated unity; rather, “its love presses not only outwards to include others, but also inwards (and protectively) sustains the difference between the persons.”45 Notice the Spirit is called “it” here, not, as has become fashionable, “she.” Coakley is clear about the dangers of, on the one hand, projecting gender stereotypes onto the divine persons, but also, on the other, of negating difference within the Trinity by ignoring questions of gender and desire when speaking of God’s inner life.46 Human desire for God brings us to the threshold of divinity, as we submit to God in prayer and are thus empowered.

**Conclusion**

Much more could be said about the work of these three contemporary Anglican theologians, both individually and collectively, but our task has not been to analyze and evaluate but rather to introduce and describe. However, after comparing our sections, we noticed that whereas Fout and King spend as much time describing the contextual character of their subjects’ thought as they devoted to content, MacSwain focuses primarily on Brown’s thematic concerns. In reflecting on this difference we concluded that it was not accidental. Although Brown has written insightfully on postmodernism and Continental philosophy, it is probably fair to say that of the three figures considered here he has maintained the most conventionally “self-effacing” scholarly voice, and this may well have to do with his commitment to the British empirical tradition noted earlier. To varying degrees


45 Coakley, “Prelude,” in *God, Sexuality and the Self*.

and for differing reasons, Ford and Coakley are more critical of this
native British approach, and supplement it accordingly from various
other sources. We raise this issue here not to settle the debate, but to
indicate where the fault-lines still lie. That is to say, questions of the
nature of reason and the relation between reason and faith, theory
and practice, remain as live for contemporary Anglican theologians as
they were for the writers of *Essays Catholic and Critical*. However,
the border-crossing exhibited in these three suggests that, although
they are indeed writing from England and Scotland, their Anglican-
ism is less insular than in earlier generations.