



On Prayer in Anglican Systematic Theology

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Abstract: For an ecclesial tradition that does not have a particularly strong history of systematic theology, it is curious that several of those currently engaged in the production of large-scale, multi-volume projects of systematic theology are Anglican theologians. In this article, I investigate three such projects: Sarah Coakley's *God, Sexuality and the Self: An Essay 'On the Trinity'*, Graham Ward's *How the Light Gets In: Ethical Life I*, and Katherine Sonderegger's *Systematic Theology – Vol. 1: The Doctrine of God*. In the first section, I examine these examples of systematic theology in light of Stephen Sykes's analysis of the state of the discipline in Anglican theology. Then, in the second section, I identify a common characteristic shared by Coakley, Ward, and Sonderegger: the grounding of systematic theology in the practice of prayer. I argue that although these contemporary systematicians might not see themselves as enunciating an *Anglican* systematics, the systematic seriousness they accord to matters of prayer can be interpreted as articulations of the Anglican propensity to grant theological priority to the liturgy. In the final section, I suggest that for all the theological opportunities made available by the systematic reclamation of prayer, these invariably positive embraces of prayer leave little space for what might be called the *Schattenseite* of prayer. There is a 'shadow-side' to the history and practice of prayer that I argue needs to be appropriately theorized if the category of prayer is to have a future in the discipline of systematic theology.

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Introduction

The discipline of systematic theology is flourishing. Curiously, many of those drawn to the production of large-scale, multi-volume projects of systematic theology belong to an ecclesial tradition that does not have a particularly strong history of the discipline. That tradition is Anglicanism. In this article, I consider three such systematic projects: those of Sarah Coakley, Graham Ward, and Katherine Sonderegger.¹ While each of these systematic theologies has attracted significant scholarly attention in its own right, in this article I bring them into closer dialogue with each other in order to reveal a common characteristic: the prioritization of prayer. I aim to magnify these contemplative (that is, prayerful) inflections and then to hypothesize that the systematic seriousness granted to prayer is an expression of a particularly Anglican sensibility.² It is, I contend, the

1 To date, each has published the first instalment of their respective systematic theologies: Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self: An Essay 'On the Trinity'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), Graham Ward, *How the Light Gets In: Ethical Life I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), and Katherine Sonderegger, *Systematic Theology – Vol. 1: The Doctrine of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015). Of the three, Sonderegger is likely to be the first to publish the second of her projected three volumes: *Systematic Theology, Volume 2: The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity: Processions and Person*. In the preface to *God, Sexuality and the Self*, Coakley offers a sketch of the three further volumes which will complete her four-volume project: *Knowing Darkly* (on an anthropology of the 'spiritual senses' and race); *Punish and Heal* (on sin and atonement and the 'public realm of the polis' and its secular institutions of prison and hospital); and *Flesh and Blood* (on Christology and the Eucharist) – see, Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self*, p. xv. And in the preface to his first volume Ward offers a breakdown of the three volumes to come: after *How the Light Gets In* is *Another Kind of Normal* (on Christology, sin, anthropology, and revelation); then comes *The Vision of God* (on the church, sacraments, ministry, pneumatology, and the Trinity); and finally *Communio Sanctorum* (on Christian faith in respect to other religious pieties) – see, Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, pp. x–xi.

2 More accurately, by 'Anglican' I am really talking about the Church of England (Coakley and Ward) and The Episcopal Church (United States) (Sonderegger). For a historical exploration of the term 'Anglican', see Paul Avis, *The Identity of Anglicanism: Essentials of Anglican Ecclesiology* (London: T&T Clark, 2007), pp. 19–20. In what follows, I do not intend to suggest other ecclesial traditions neglect prayer. I am simply offering a way of thinking about these three systematic theologies as consistent with a distinctively prioritized strand of Anglican theological identity. Likewise, my rationale for selecting these three and not others is not to exclude either other Anglicans who approach the theme of prayer with systematic seriousness or the systematic labour of other prominent Anglican theologians also involved in the production of systematic theologies in various guises. Examples of the former might include: John Macquarrie, Daniel W. Hardy, David F. Ford, Rowan Williams, and Mark A. McIntosh;

grounding of systematic theology in the ‘law of prayer’ that enables these theologians to overcome some of the anxiety their tradition tends to have about the discipline.³

Before attending to the issue of prayer in closer detail, some groundwork is needed to locate these projects in a longer history of Anglican ambivalence about the discipline of systematic theology. I take up this work in the first of the three sections of this article and in dialogue with Stephen Sykes’s influential *The Integrity of Anglicanism* (1978).⁴ Then, in the second section, I turn specifically to the three projects of systematic theology and document how each handles the theme of prayer. In the third and final section, I begin to assert some pressure on what I take to be the invariably positive embrace of the contemplative in this trilogy of Anglican systematic theologies. My argument in this final section is that despite the systematic opportunities made available by the theological reclamation of prayer the turns to prayer in contemporary Anglican systematic theology have not fully acknowledged what might be called, as an ode to Barth, prayer’s *Schattenseite*. That is, there is a ‘shadow-side’, an ugly underbelly to the history and practice of prayer that needs to be theorized if the category of prayer is to have a future in the discipline. Here, I have been influenced by the work of Lauren F. Winner and her uncovering of the ‘dangers’ of Christian practice.⁵

Anglicans and systematic theology

While recent scholarship has pointed toward a more textured account of Anglican theological identity than Stephen Sykes narrates in *The Integrity of*

and of the latter: David Brown, Kathryn Tanner, Oliver O’Donovan (for whom the category of prayer takes an increasingly critical role and especially in the third volume of his ethical systematics, *Entering into Rest: Ethics as Theology – Volume 3* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017)), and the late John Webster (whose announced five volume systematics was interrupted by his death in 2016). As suggested by this list of names, Anglicanism has clearly produced a distinguished line of systematic theologians. Despite this, anything broadly resembling works of systematic theology do not tend to figure in formal expressions of Anglican identity and self-understanding.

- 3 For a fuller treatment of the *lex orandi* and its reception into Anglican theology, see Ashley Cocksworth, ‘Theorizing the (Anglican) *lex orandi*: A Theological Account’, *Modern Theology* 36.2 (2020), pp. 298–316. There I argue that it is through the law of prayer that the *lex credendi* is corrected, communicated, and complexified.
- 4 Stephen Sykes, *The Integrity of Anglicanism* (London: Mowbray, 1978). For recent engagement with Sykes’s writings, see the special issue of *Ecclesiology* 15.1 (2019) on ‘The Ecclesial Legacy of Stephen Sykes’.
- 5 Lauren F. Winner, *The Dangers of Christian Practice: On Wayward Gifts, Characteristic Damage, and Sin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018).

Anglicanism,⁶ it is nevertheless helpful to start with Sykes's assessment of the state of the discipline as representative of an influential strand in the recent past of Anglican systematic theology to set the scene for what follows. Sykes begins *The Integrity of Anglicanism* with the claim that 'Anglicans are not supposed to know about, or to be interested in, systematic theology'.⁷ William Temple's introduction to the 1938 Report of the Doctrine Commission of the Church of England is a good articulation of the kind of Anglican ambivalence about the discipline Sykes has in mind. The Report claimed that 'there is not and the majority of us do not desire that there should be, a system of distinctively Anglican theology'.⁸ According to Sykes, the apparent lack of motivation to produce an Anglican systematic theology is compounded by three barriers that further prevent the flourishing of systematic expressions of Anglican theology. The first can be seen as a dispositional barrier and the second and third function on more of an institutional level.

First, the dispositional barrier. Sykes argues that Anglican theology is built 'more on practical than on theoretical grounds'.⁹ That is to say, there is a lack in

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- 6 Paul Avis, for example, has challenged the heavily popularized thesis that the distinctiveness of Anglican theology is more methodological than doctrinal. For Avis, although Anglicanism is marked by a certain restlessness in its search for authority, there is a rich and complex theological history to the Anglican tradition that suggests a depth and distinctiveness to its theology. What Sykes found theologically wanting in Anglicanism was the kind of intellectual rigour he read in Schleiermacher and Barth, whereas Avis and others permit a wider measure of intellectual rigour that enables a more textured assessment of the state of the discipline of Anglican theology, see Paul Avis, *Anglicanism and the Christian Church: Theological Resources in Historical Perspective*, 2nd edn (London: T&T Clark, 2002) and Paul Avis, *In Search of Authority: Anglican Theological Method from the Reformation to the Enlightenment* (London: T&T Clark, 2014). See also, Mark Chapman, *Bishops, Saints and Politics: Anglican Studies* (London: T&T Clark, 2007) and Peter H. Sedgwick, *The Origins of Anglican Moral Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2019).
- 7 Sykes, *The Integrity of Anglicanism*, p. 1. Similar claims are made in more recent literature, such as: Mark Chapman, *Anglican Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2012), p. 8 and Sedgwick, *The Origins of Anglican Moral Theology*, p. 3.
- 8 *Doctrine in the Church of England: The Report of the Commission on Christian Doctrine appointed by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York in 1922* (London: SPCK, 1938), p. 25. Likewise, Geoffrey Fisher claimed that Anglicans 'have no doctrine of our own' (cited in Colin Podmore, *Aspects of Anglican Identity* (London: Church House Publishing, 2005), p.38), a position Sykes would refute in Stephen Sykes, *Unashamed Anglicanism* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1995).
- 9 Sykes, *The Integrity of Anglicanism*, p. 76. It is worth emphasizing that Sykes's positive proposal for an Anglican systematic theology and the barriers that frustrate its flourishing emerge out of, and betray the marks of, a distinctively English Anglicanism and may not be shared by a significant proportion of the Anglican Communion. On the need to pluralize Anglicanism, see 'Introduction' in Mark D. Chapman, Sathianathan Clarke, and Martyn Percy, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Anglican Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 1–20 and for a discussion of the post-colonial mixed economy of Anglicanism, see Ian S. Markham, J. Barney Hawkins, IV, Justyn Terry, and Leslie Nuñez Steffensen, eds., *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to the Anglican Communion* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

Anglicanism of anything like a canon of doctrinal authority of the sort that can be found in other ecclesial traditions. Confessional statements are differently prioritized in Anglicanism. There is not an uncontested list of canonical figures or historical writings. There is nothing akin to the Magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church or anything like the heyday of dogmatic orthodoxy enjoyed by the Reformed tradition. While Anglicanism has at its doctrinal disposal sources such as the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, the Ordinal, and the Lambeth Quadrilateral, these have tended not to encourage full-scale Anglican systematic theologies.¹⁰ Then there are the seminal works of figures such as Richard Hooker, but, as Mark Chapman notes, ‘despite his undoubted greatness, Hooker is neither a Luther nor a Calvin: he did not write catechisms or a systematic theology’.¹¹ Alongside the lack of motivation to produce an Anglican systematic theology noted by the 1938 Doctrine Commission Report is the absence of either the raw materials or the historical precedence to write one.

The second, this time institutional, barrier has to do with the structural ‘circumstances of the establishment of theological faculties in the universities of England’ and their makeup.¹² The historical exclusion of non-Anglicans from academic positions in theological faculties led, Sykes believes, to a skills deficiency in the area of systematic theology and a consequent majoring on anything but systematic and doctrinal theology. Although important contributions were made by Anglican theologians within historical and philosophical theology as well as biblical studies, systematic theology tended to fall by the institutional wayside. Third, again institutional, when doctrinal issues were investigated by Anglican theologians the internal tensions within Anglicanism (between Anglo Catholics and evangelicals) encouraged concentration on the comparably safer ground of pre-Reformation and patristic theology.¹³

These dispositional and institutional barriers consolidate into the impression, now firmly cemented into Anglican self-portraiture, that Anglicans don’t ‘do’ systematic theology. Such a portrait has been painted by some of its most influential figures. In addition to Temple’s claim cited above, his successor

10 The historical formularies have inspired more popular expressions of Anglican theology. For example, the following resources on Anglican ministry interact with and ground themselves in the Ordinal: Michael Ramsey, *The Christian Priest Today* (London: SPCK, 2009), Christopher Cocksworth and Rosalind Brown, *Being a Priest Today: Exploring Priestly Identity* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2002), and Steven Croft, *Ministry in Three Dimensions: Ordination and Leadership in the Local Church*, 2nd edn (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2008).

11 Chapman, *Anglican Theology*, p. 103. See also Peter Sedgwick, ‘Anglican Theology,’ in David F. Ford with Rachel Muers, eds., *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology Since 1918*, 3rd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 173–93 and Paul Avis, ‘Stephen Sykes and the Essence of Christianity,’ *Ecclesiology* 15.1 (2019), pp. 34–45.

12 Sykes, *The Integrity of Anglicanism*, p. 76.

13 Sykes, *The Integrity of Anglicanism*, pp. 76–7.

to the See of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey, wanted to see Anglican theology characterized neither by ‘a system nor a confession . . . but a method, a use and a direction’.¹⁴ Ramsey is referring to the *via media*, the veritable badge of Anglican theological identity if there ever was one, which positions Anglican theological discourse someplace between the theologies of Rome and Geneva rather than having a distinctive theology of its own. Much of *The Integrity of Anglicanism* reads as a critique of what Sykes feels is the stifling hold the *via media* asserts over the Anglican theological imagination. ‘It must be stated bluntly that it has served as an open invitation to intellectual laziness and self-deception.’¹⁵ Sykes is deeply critical of such an approach as it encourages, he thinks, an internal incoherence to run free under the myth of ‘comprehensiveness’.¹⁶ For Sykes, there is such a thing as a credible Anglican theology, with coherent content and definable characteristics, and without rigorous attention to it, Anglicanism lacks integrity. It is for the sake of the integrity of Anglicanism, therefore, that Sykes issues a call for ‘specific individuals to write systematic theologies or extended treatments of Christian doctrine’.¹⁷

Nowhere does Sykes take up this call for intellectual action himself. But if the preponderance of Anglicans currently invested in the production of full-scale systematic theologies is anything to go by, it would appear that his call has not gone unheeded – at least in part. Partly, that is, because although there are now Anglican theologians pursuing large-scale, multi-volume systematic theologies, none of these projects claim to be *Anglican* systematic theologies. In fact, Graham Ward states in no uncertain terms that ‘I am not making any claims that I am compositing an Anglican systematic theology’.¹⁸ It might be that the three examples of systematic theology discussed in this article are better

14 A. M. Ramsey, ‘What Is Anglican Theology?’, *Theology* (1945), p. 2, cited in Sykes, *The Integrity of Anglicanism*, p. 63.

15 Sykes, *The Integrity of Anglicanism*, p. 19. A more positive description of the *via media* can be gained when it is better connected to that other critical but similarly conceptually slippery aspect of Anglican theological identity: the *lex orandi*. Read through the logic of the *lex orandi*, the kind of dispositional posturing demanded by the *via media* can be seen as the stuff of prayer. Both require patience, attention, dispossession, the willingness to listen, the giving up of control, and the giving over of space to receive from the other. When reconfigured as spiritual practice, the *via media* is not so much a piece of conceptual apparatus that seeks comprehensiveness as a way of life, a product and practice of prayer, a commitment to the daily negotiation between the diverse communities of Anglicanism(s).

16 An example of this Anglican obsession with ‘method’ can be seen in the way Anglicans have tended to read its historical figures. Readings of Richard Hooker, for example, tend to get bogged down with partisan questions concerning the ‘method’ of his theology and the extent to which he triangulates reason, Scripture, and experience. Cutting through these standard readings of Hooker is the refreshingly measured study, Andrea Russell, *Richard Hooker: Beyond Certainty* (London: Routledge, 2016).

17 Sykes, *The Integrity of Anglicanism*, p. 68.

18 Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, p. 196.

understood as systematic theologies written by theologians that happen to be Anglican rather than systematic theologies seeking to enunciate an explicitly *Anglican* systematics. Another reason why this new wave of systematic theology might not fully satisfy Sykes's call for an Anglican systematics is that none of these projects seem to be interested in pursuing the kind of 'integrity' he has in mind for the role systematic theology should play in the life of the church. At this point, a better handle on Sykes's definition of systematic theology is needed.

'By "systematic theology"', Sykes explains, 'I mean that constructive discipline which presents the substance of the Christian faith with a claim on the minds of men.'¹⁹ Systematic theology, he continues, is tasked with the discovery and specific articulation of the 'internal rationale' that binds 'Anglicans together as a "Church"'.²⁰ Even from these quotations it is clear that Sykes's understanding of systematic theology is bound up to some degree with issues of power and control. The issue of power in Sykes's formulation of systematic theology has been identified and critiqued by Richard H. Roberts in his somewhat stinging and sustained engagement with *The Integrity of Anglicanism*. For Roberts, who reads Sykes through Hegel's Lord and Bondsman dynamic, 'Sykes's call for intellectual action [for Anglicans to write Anglican systematic theologies] is made without any serious attention to the socio-structural factors which control the production, distribution and exchange of knowledge.'²¹ While there is more to Sykes's theorization of power than is presented in *The Integrity of Anglicanism* alone,²² there is a strong sense that the intellectual posture Sykes assumes here is more toward asserting 'on the minds of men' an integrity that has been determined in advance and from the centre than receiving from those who have come to understand the Christian faith differently. The concern Roberts has with Sykes's definition of systematic theology is a version of the same concern others have had with the enterprise of systematic theology more generally: it is 'hegemonic' and uncritically assertive. As Coakley explains:

The moral or political critique of so-called 'hegemony' ... 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.²³

I will return to the issue of power and its entanglement with the task of systematic theology later as it has a bearing on Coakley's theorization of

19 Sykes, *The Integrity of Anglicanism*, p. ix.

20 Sykes, *The Integrity of Anglicanism*, p. 1.

21 Richard H. Roberts, *Religion, Theology and the Human Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 128.

22 For his most mature dealings with the theme, see Stephen Sykes, *Power and Christian Theology* (London: Continuum, 2006).

23 Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self*, p. 42.

prayer. The point to be noted at this stage is that whereas for Sykes a system of distinctively Anglican theology is the solution to the crisis of Anglican identity, for the generation of theologians writing after Sykes, systematic theology is itself part of a more pressing, *systemic* problem: that is, systematic theology is too often totalitarian ('hegemonic') in its integrity-seeking project. Our three projects under consideration would fail to achieve the kind of integrity Sykes has in mind because they would disagree that that is what systematics is for.

'Integrity' has a double meaning, however. When Sykes speaks of 'integrity' he mostly has in mind the quest for 'coherent identity' and tasks systematic theology with a role in achieving that coherence. But when a figure such as Rowan Williams speaks of 'integrity', he has in mind the disposition of 'honesty' and associates the character of an honest theology with the practice of prayer.²⁴ The dispossessive qualities of prayer and its explicitly receptive posturing takes on iconoclastic significance as one of the primary ways the urge for what Williams calls the 'tyranny of a "total perspective"' is resisted.²⁵ Williams's tethering of the task of theology to the dispossessive practice of prayer is instructive as it introduces the flip-side of the Anglican diffidence about systematic theology: pride in the doctrinal significance of the liturgy. What Anglicanism lacks doctrinally, so the story goes, it makes up for practically as it is in common worship that Anglicanism gains its theological identity. The heart of Anglican theology beats to the rhythm of the liturgy, as Paul Avis explains:

For the Churches of the Anglican Communion, perhaps more than for any other church except the Orthodox, the liturgy in the broadest sense has a doctrinal and confessional function: it is the place where, particularly Anglican beliefs are articulated . . . Anglican Churches are churches that conceive their relation to Christian doctrine liturgically. They state their doctrines in the liturgical register.²⁶

Sykes is fully aware of Anglicanism's habitual deferral to the liturgy for matters of doctrinal identity. He acknowledges that Anglican liturgy, sermons, and hymns are 'the most powerful agents of religious education'.²⁷ Yet, for Sykes, the power the liturgy yields is not necessarily a good thing. The theological deferral to the liturgy risks, he feels, concealing the same kind of 'intellectual laziness' and consequent lack of integrity that comes from neglecting systematic theology in the first place.²⁸ So long as we pray rightly, all (doctrinally) shall be well, is the

24 See his essay on 'Theological Integrity' in Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 3–15.

25 Williams, *On Christian Theology*, p. 8.

26 Avis, *In Search of Authority*, p. 90.

27 Sykes, *The Integrity of Anglicanism*, p. 95.

28 Anglican liturgy, like all liturgy, is far from doctrinally neutral. In fact, it is 'thoroughly stamped by a particular doctrinal inheritance', Sykes, *The Integrity of Anglicanism*, p. 6.

logic Sykes fears. In addition, Sykes questions whether Anglicanism's diverse liturgical culture can realistically achieve the unity it promises. 'Indeed, if one were honest, the worship of the churches is one of the most deeply rooted and troublesome sources of diversity and disunity.'²⁹ However, the contemporary projects of systematic theology now to be discussed make a methodological move that did not occur to Sykes. While Sykes appears to see only two options available to the systematic theologian – either a theological deferral to the liturgy that would perpetuate Anglicanism's identity crisis or a full commitment to an Anglican systematic theology undertaken primarily, he says, as 'an intellectual discipline' – what is uncovered by the new wave of systematic theology is a third option which eludes this false choice and attempts to ground the enterprise of systematic theology itself in the practice of prayer.

Prayer and Anglican systematic theology

My aim in this section is to document the contemplative thread that I am suggesting runs through the systematic projects of Sarah Coakley, Graham Ward, and Katherine Sonderegger. Treating these works out of their chronology of publication is intentional as it serves to reveal an interesting twist in the story of their relation. As we move from Coakley through Ward and then to Sonderegger the references to prayer in their respective systematic projects become more infrequent. Of the three, Coakley most explicitly engages the theme of prayer both as the primary means through which the systematic project is made possible and as a systematic theme, pregnant with doctrinal significance, in its own right. Prayer features more modestly within Ward's systematic vision, but nonetheless takes structural (as in, epistemological) significance. By the time we reach Sonderegger's project, the theme of prayer apparently recedes into the background of this heady, zany doctrine of God. Although Coakley and Ward are more explicit in their indebtedness to the *modus orativus* than is Sonderegger, it is my contention that saying less about prayer curiously frees Sonderegger to make a more intense turn to prayer than the others by writing a systematic theology almost as a form of prayer. My overall argument in this section is that while not explicitly claiming to be works of Anglican systematic theology, the commitment shared by Coakley, Ward, and Sonderegger to think systematically about the status of prayer and to do systematics through the medium of the *lex orandi* can be understood as expressions of their formation as Anglican theologians.

Sarah Coakley's contemplative théologie totale

A consistent feature across Sarah Coakley's writings is the prioritization of prayer as systematically important. 'My whole understanding of "systematics"

29 Sykes, *The Integrity of Anglicanism*, p. 39.

is founded on the practice of prayer.³⁰ Her theological coming of age was through the writings of Evelyn Underhill, Simone Weil, and Ernst Troeltsch – each, in their own way, greatly fascinated by the mystical and contemplative strands of Christianity. In several studies since, Coakley has investigated the theme of prayer in dialogue with gender, race, pain, pastoral theology, politics and the philosophy of religion.³¹ It is in the first volume of her systematics, however, that the theological seriousness with which Coakley handles prayer comes to a head: this is a systematics teeming with prayer. In *God, Sexuality and the Self*, references to the theme abound. Beyond the substantial textual references to prayer, in the methodology that sits at the heart of the volume and is set to inform the entire planned four-volume project much of the heavy-lifting is done by prayer. Coakley names this method *théologie totale* and accords contemplative prayer pride of place.

Under the contemplative conditions of a *théologie totale*, systematic theology starts to look both more and less systematic. On the one hand, a *théologie totale* encourages systematic theology to be *more* systematic in at least three ways. First, a more systematic systematics means expanding the canon of systematic theology to include a wider range of theological artefacts than is customary. Hence Coakley's self-styled 'prayer-based' model of the Trinity, which forms the central thrust of her systematics so far, makes use of the doxological sources that classically fall outside of the systematic canon.³² This means coming at, for example, patristic theologians 'through what they wrote *de oratione* ("on prayer") rather than first through their more doctrinal teaching'.³³ For Coakley, it is no good talking about the development of Christian doctrine apart from attending to matters of prayer. Additionally, Coakley brings into the

30 Rupert Shortt, 'Sarah Coakley: Fresh Paths in Systematic Theology', in *God's Advocates: Christian Thinkers in Conversation* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2005), p. 70.

31 Coakley's decidedly theological engagement with the theme of prayer started well before the production of her systematics. For reasons of focus, there is not space to trace the theme outside of the first volume, but the following should serve as a representative sample of the key texts in which prayer features: Sarah Coakley, *Powers and Submissions: Philosophy, Spirituality and Gender* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002); the work published under the auspices of the Doctrine Commission of the Church of England: Sarah Coakley, 'God as Trinity: An Approach through Prayer', in *We Believe in God* (London: Church House Publishing, 1987), pp. 104–21 and Sarah Coakley, 'Charismatic Experience: Praying "In the Spirit"', in *We Believe in the Holy Spirit* (London: Church House Publishing, 1991), pp. 17–36 – material of which is incorporated into her systematics; and the pastorally inclined publications of the 'Littlemore Group': Sarah Coakley and Samuel Wells, eds., *Praying for England: Priestly Presence in Contemporary Culture* (London: Continuum, 2008) and Sarah Coakley and Jessica Martin, eds., *For God's Sake: Re-Imagining Priesthood and Prayer in a Changing Church* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2016).

32 Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self*, pp. 100–51.

33 Shortt, 'Sarah Coakley', p. 72.

systematic frame empirical material gained through fieldwork analysis on the lived experiences of prayer in two Anglican churches undertaken by the then Doctrine Commission of the Church of England. The experience of prayer and the genres of writing in which those experiences are historically held become in her *théologie totale* vivid sources of doctrinal insight, yet these same sources have tended to be pushed to the edges of systematic theology for their apparent failure to produce the right kind of theological knowledge. Moreover, according to Coakley, what tends to happen in discussion on the development of Christian doctrine is not simply a side-lining but a concerted suppression of these sources because of the political threat they pose to ecclesial stability. When taken to be ‘a matrix for Trinitarian reflection’, prayer leads to a more intellectually and spiritually demanding, and indeed ecclesiastically destabilizing, articulation of the doctrine of the Trinity than is conventionally possible.³⁴

Second, as well as prioritizing the genres of writing in which the experiences of prayer are historically held, a more systematic systematic theology requires re-prioritizing the experience of prayer itself as a critical source of theology. Prayer, for Coakley, is a precondition for theological thinking. ‘If one is resolutely not engaged in the practices of prayer, contemplation, and worship, then there are certain sorts of philosophical insight that are unlikely, if not impossible, to become available.’³⁵ Without prayer of a deep sort, which Coakley instructs is to be practised in silent, contemplative waiting before God, knowledge of an analogous depth, she says, is ‘off limits’. But with a particular kind of contemplative waiting on the divine the theologian is able to proceed into the otherwise inaccessible territory of the inner life of God. Prayer, with its ‘distinctive ways of knowing’, therefore makes possible a more embracing kind of rationality than is otherwise available.³⁶ Here, Coakley is channelling a tradition the stretches back at least to Origen and became popularized by Evagrius’s influential mantra that the true theologian is the ‘one who prays truly’ (*De oratione* 61).³⁷ A question remains, however, over the translatability of this venerable patristic insight, which for principled theological reasons made a great deal of sense in the Egyptian deserts, into the very different locale of contemporary systematic theology. Pushing the doctrinally disclosive effect of prayer too strongly could commit Coakley to the intellectual elitism she purports to avoid: ‘over the long haul’, and *only* over the long haul, practices of prayer,

34 Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self*, p. 16. To be more specific, the perceived political danger is that ‘the transformative view of the Spirit might expand the reference of the redeemed life of “Sonship” even beyond what the church could predict or control’, see Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self*, p. 121.

35 Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self*, p. 16.

36 Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self*, p. 19.

37 For the *De oratione*, see *Evagrius Ponticus*, trans. Augustine Casiday (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 185–201.

and *only* practices of prayer, afford these ‘distinctive ways of knowing’ to certain people.³⁸ I will pick up this line of critique in the final section of this article.

Third, as well as better integrating theology and prayer (that is, the actual experience of prayer and the sources in which those experiences are written up), a *théologie totale* seeks to gather up otherwise fragmented discourses in systematic theology. Via the logic of prayer, false oppositions are overcome. Coakley writes:

It is an implication of this method that we must no longer rend ‘practical’ or ‘pastoral’ theology apart from ‘systematic theology’ and ‘philosophical theology’. For they have always – properly – belonged together; and any systematic theology worth having must prove how it works in the field, and – conversely – how what happens in the field both challenges and reinvigorates its systematic tasks.³⁹

The methodologically integrative work of a *théologie totale* can be understood as an outworking of the ever-dexterous internal dynamics of prayer. Without resolving these paradoxes, prayer combines word and silence, mind and body, thought and feeling, knowing and unknowing, and, ultimately, the divine and the human.

As much as it enables systematic theology to live more fully up to its namesake, on the other hand, a *théologie totale* also encourages a *less* systematic systematic theology. Implied here is a combination of the philosophical critique of ‘onto-theology’ (the charge that systematic theology idolatrously turns God into an object of knowledge) and the political critique of ‘hegemony’ mentioned above (the charge that systematic theology suffocatingly exercises its power in such a way that marginalized voices are occluded). In a *théologie totale*, which charts a course between these critiques, God is encountered not as an object of knowledge to be systematized, but ‘the dizzying mystery encountered in the act of contemplation as precisely the “blinking” 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.’⁴⁰ Thus for Coakley, systematic theology should seek to be not only less systematic but actually unsystematic. ‘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.’⁴¹

38 Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self*, p. 19. Coakley’s theory of prayer is not without some levellers, namely: prayer always operates under the (eschatological) proviso of Rom. 8:26 (‘we do not know how to pray as we ought’) and the kind of contemplation she has in mind is of the most basic possible (a ‘simple form of . . . waiting before God’, see Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self*, p. 19).

39 Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self*, p. 91.

40 Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self*, p. 41.

41 Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self*, p. 48.

The concern for systematic theology not to become too systematic has a bearing on our earlier discussion of the problem of power in Sykes's formulation of systematic theology. In these terms, Sykes's account of systematics gets close to the over-asserting hegemony Coakley sees her systematics resisting. The overly-systematic tendency of asserting and presenting needs chastening, Coakley would say, by a particular kind of contemplative attention to, and transformation of, the disordered desire that lies at the root of hegemonies of this kind. 'For the very act of contemplation – repeated, lived, embodied, suffered – is an act that, by grace, and over time, inculcates mental patterns of "un-mastery" ... [and] opens up radical attention to the "other".'⁴² In giving up this power trip, space is made for attention 'to the Real which is open to all who seek to foster it.'⁴³ The contemplative method of *théologie totale* contains tools to resist the totalizing implications of Sykes's understanding of systematics – or at least to put a finger on the issue. This is not to say the logic of Coakley's reconception of systematics is immune from other concerns, but it does suggest that Coakley is alert to the complex entanglement of power and the task of systematics in ways that Sykes is not.

The attention Coakley gives to prayer, both methodologically and materially, in her systematic undertaking is not by chance. It is an expression, I suggest, of her Anglican formation. The closest she comes to articulating her systematic attention to prayer in these terms occurs on the opening page of the volume, where she somewhat coyly notes that 'the absolute centrality granted to the practice of prayer' can be seen as 'quaintly English or Anglican'.⁴⁴ Unlike Coakley, Graham Ward is more intentional about naming the formative influences, including the influences of his ecclesial formation, on his thinking. It is to Ward that I now turn as my second example of a contemporary Anglican theologian currently in the throes of a large-scale project of systematic theology that is, like Coakley's, grounded in the practice of prayer.

Graham Ward's epistemology of prayer

In *How the Light Gets In*, Graham Ward is clear that 'As I am an Anglican priest and to a degree have been educated within an Anglo-Catholic tradition, then the theology that is being composed here is highly indebted to that formation.'⁴⁵ A sign of Ward's Anglican formation, as with Coakley's, is the prominent position prayer takes in his systematic undertaking. In addition to the various ways prayer is written into the content of his first volume, the liturgy is also prioritized in the form the first volume takes. *How the Light Gets In* is not structured around the conventional set of doctrinal coordinates – running from creation to the last

42 Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self*, p. 43.

43 Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self*, p. 88.

44 Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self*, p. xiii.

45 Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, p. 196.

things – that have come to govern the architectonics of systematic theology. Instead, gesturing to an Anglican theology of place and resembling something of Herbert's *The Temple, How the Light Gets In* is unusually structured around a building. More specifically, it is structured around and set within the liturgical place and space of the Anglican cathedral of which Ward is a canon, Christ Church, Oxford. 'We enter the Cathedral', so Ward begins the first volume of his systematic theology; and the volume ends there too.⁴⁶ And as the first volume comes to an end, we are provided with the details of the liturgical season, Advent, and the liturgy itself, the singing of an ancient Advent prayer, where we await the second volume on 'another kind of normal'.⁴⁷

In between the liturgical beginning and ending, prayer does a great deal of material and methodological work. Approvingly citing more than once Evagrius's mantra, Ward presents a strong argument against theology 'take[ing] place outside of contemplation'.⁴⁸ Moreover, like a *théologie totale*, an 'engaged systematics' is about reconfiguring itself, as odd as it sounds to modern sensibilities, precisely as a 'genre of prayer'.⁴⁹ 'Theology as prayer is presumptuous to announce; scandalous to perform; and yet, it is quite simply the heart of the matter.'⁵⁰ The undertaking of theology *as* prayer sets the systematic task on a doxological trajectory. Ward explains in the Preface that systematic theology should seek 'to become a hymn of praise, a doxology'.⁵¹ Thus, what is to be found in Ward's systematics is at once a work of prayer and an exhortation to pray.

There are other roles accorded to prayer in *How the Light Gets In*. For instance, Ward sees prayer 'letting in' the light of religious traditions outside of the Christian faith. 'We cannot expound and examine Christian theology today without hearing the adhan and the Shofar, the Muslim and the Jewish calls to

46 Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, p. 3.

47 Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, p. 320.

48 Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, p. 177. While Coakley ties her account of prayer to a particular kind of silent contemplation and situates her theorization within a reading of certain strands of the apophatic traditions of prayer, Ward is inclined to think of prayer more as a disposition or 'root practice', as he puts it elsewhere, than any one action in particular, see Graham Ward, *The Politics of Discipleship: Becoming Postmaterial Citizens* (London: SCM Press), 2009, p. 282. Hence: 'Prayer is that activity whereby we bring the world to Christ and Christ to the world', Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, p. 213. That said, he does offer the following indication of what constitutes 'right prayer' (and by implication right belief): right prayer is not some acquired ability to pray 'properly', but is reached when theology 'articulates what it contemplates and contemplates what it articulates', Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, p. 177.

49 Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, p. 174.

50 Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, p. 179.

51 Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, p. vii.

prayer. ... We cannot expound and examine Christian theology today without hearing also Hindu mantras and the turnings of Buddhist prayer wheels.⁵² Prayer is also set to take on further work in the third volume, *The Vision of God*, which promises a doctrinal examination of ‘the work of prayer and liturgy’ as an extension of the doctrine of Christology.⁵³ For the sake of focus, however, in the remainder of this section I want to tease out one particular strand of Ward’s theological handling of prayer hinted at earlier which is again suggestive of something very Anglican: the linking of belief and prayer.

For Coakley, the point of prayer is not to produce more knowledge, but knowledge of a different sort. A particular kind of contemplative waiting on the divine clears the ‘way for new and deeper knowledge-beyond-knowledge’.⁵⁴ This is the kind of knowledge that makes sense of all other knowledge and, like prayer, is ineradicably corporate and always partial. An epistemology that takes prayer seriously positions itself beyond, as it were, (propositional) belief and is guided by a pedagogy of practice – by the things we *do*.⁵⁵ Ward deepens and develops this suggestion. In dialogue with Anselm’s *Proslogion*, which he reads as more prayer than proof, Ward develops an account of ‘prayer as an epistemological practice’.⁵⁶

Before Ward can arrive at his epistemology of prayer, he has to give account for why such an epistemology is necessary. His account involves charting what he calls the ‘great disembedding’ of belief from the context of prayer that he finds characterizing much of modern theology.⁵⁷ He tells this story partly through a spin on Charles Taylor’s narration of disenchantment (the loss of a relation that was once integral) and in part via Iain McGilchrist’s bicameralism thesis (the notion of the ‘two-chamberedness’ of the brain).⁵⁸ Following McGilchrist, Ward argues that just as modern Western history and culture reveals an increasing reliance upon the purely cognitive functions of the left hemisphere such that human beings are no longer being true to themselves, modern theology reveals an increasing reliance upon thought over affect such that modern theology cannot be true to itself. For Ward, it would seem that the institutional decoupling of thinking and praying is an outworking

52 Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, p. viii.

53 Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, p. x.

54 Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self*, p. 43.

55 Sarah Coakley, ‘Beyond “Belief”’: Liturgy and the Cognitive Apprehension of God’, in Tom Greggs, Rachel Muers, and Simeon Zahl, eds., *The Vocation of Theology Today: A Festschrift for David Ford* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2013), pp. 130–45.

56 Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, p. 245.

57 Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, pp. 69–74.

58 Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007) and Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

of that which takes place internally in the hemispheres of the brain. In other words, constructions of Christian belief that are dogmatic and proposition-heavy are capitulations to left-hemisphere dominance. What is required is a rebalancing of the brain, and thus a turn to the realm of prayer, to include the right-hemisphere activity of the emotions, intuition, and affections. And riffing on Taylor's grand narrative of decline, the shift of systematics from *credo* to *summa* and finally to dogmatics (witnessed first for Ward in Melanchthon) came at a loss of an earlier porousness of spirituality and theology. The 1543/59 edition of Melanchthon's *Loci communes*, losing the affective charge of the earlier editions, sees '*lex credendi* ... now divorced from *lex orandi*'.⁵⁹ The text 'no longer performs, it simply states'.⁶⁰ The modern migration of learning from the ecclesial context of the monastery into the very different context of the university further 'divorced ["knowledge"] from a spiritual practice'.⁶¹ The results: systematic theology becomes concept-orientated and affectionless; the creed becomes a set of formal propositions to be intellectually assented rather than 'an act of worship' to be 'inwardly digested in a liturgical setting'; and the liturgy loses some of its formative potency to train the mind as well as the soul.⁶²

In a firm rejection of the 'modern borders which have been constructed separating the spiritual life of faith from the epistemology of knowledge' comes Ward's reimagining of 'prayer as an epistemological practice'.⁶³ This confusion of the categories of thinking and praying makes epistemology to be about 'the engagement with truth, with the aim of being con-formed in, by and to that truth' rather than the bare knowledge of that truth.⁶⁴ What a figure such as Anselm supplies in his *Proslogion* is not so much an epistemology as a working example of the vivid thinking and possibilities for discovery and surprise that comes from granting prayer epistemological status. Moreover, for Ward, a theory of knowing rooted in prayer actively refuses the stark contrast between thought and affect. 'Language aimed at intellection alone would simply feed left-hemisphere brain activity (that wishes to control and instrumentalize). Language appealing to the body and imagination is feeding right-hemisphere brain activity (which is empathetic and attuned to the world).'⁶⁵ Prayer nourishes both. It does not do away with the cognitive entirely and neither does it counter the propositional tug by pulling too

59 Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, p. 110.

60 Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, p. 110.

61 Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, p. 112.

62 Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, p. 8.

63 Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, p. 242.

64 Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, p. 245.

65 Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, p. 139.

strongly in the opposite direction. Rather than seeing prayer as a sort of affective complement to what is cognitively going on in the processes of Christian believing,⁶⁶ Ward's theological use of prayer seeks a sort of pincer movement that closes the gaps stereotypical of modern theology between the cognitive (matters of the mind), the affective (the liturgy, after all, is known *off by heart*), and the corporeal (there can be no prayer without the body). As Ward says, in working 'to correct the imbalances and infelicities of the epistemological conditions of modernity, an engaged systematic theology will refuse a *lex credendi* / *lex orandi* distinction'.⁶⁷

Although Ward makes his case for a movement 'beyond belief' via Taylor and McGilchrist, the idea that belief is more complex than simply matters propositional is hardwired into a distinctively Anglican sensibility.⁶⁸ As Paul Avis writes: 'Anglican beliefs are ... expressed not in cut and dried propositions, but poetically and doxologically'.⁶⁹ In the Anglican sense, doctrinal belief has never been an end in itself. Hence the Anglican tradition is more disposed to attach formative value to the *Book of Common Prayer* than a confessional statement or even the Thirty-Nine Articles. The *Book of Common Prayer* approaches belief-formation by targeting the affections – the devices and desires of our 'hearts' – and by transposing 'belief' into a liturgical register. There is no naked cognitive content, but knowledge clothed in prayer. Knowledge dressed up in prayer makes learning, in the Anglican sense, penitential and corporate.⁷⁰ And, as Ward writes, citing the Second Collect for Morning Prayer in the *Book of Common Prayer*, an epistemology of prayer presents 'understanding not for the sake of knowledge in and of itself, but the knowledge that is afforded by a deeper and deeper acquaintance with God "in knowledge whom standeth our eternal life"'.⁷¹

Katherine Sonderegger's 'wings of prayer'

Finally, we reach Katherine Sonderegger's *Systematic Theology*. Like Coakley and Ward, Sonderegger has, to date, published the first instalment of a larger project; and like Coakley and Ward, Sonderegger is a priest of the Anglican Communion. But unlike in the other systematics, in Sonderegger's writing you have to look hard to find explicit engagement with the theme of prayer. Little

66 See, for example, Paul J. Griffiths, *The Practice of Catholic Theology: A Modest Proposal* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2016), pp. 18–23.

67 Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, p. 120.

68 On this, see Cocksworth, 'Theorizing the (Anglican) *lex orandi*', pp. 311–16.

69 Avis, *In Search of Authority*, p. 90.

70 For further discussion on the penitential and corporate nature of (Anglican) learning, see Mike Higton, *A Theology of Higher Education* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 154–61.

71 Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, p. 285.

textual attention is given to matters of prayer. The index lists only five references to the theme. There is no extended explanation of the rooting of her method in the practice of prayer. In fact, Sonderegger gives far less attention than Coakley and Ward to matters of methodology. “‘Method’ is a fatal disease in dogmatics’, she admits later.⁷² Nor is there as much apologetical defence of the systematic project. Instead, Sonderegger simply begins. The short preface, in lieu of an introduction, concludes with these words:

So in the end, we must say that a doctrine of God cannot but take the wings of prayer. There is no study, no examination nor understanding, without a heart seared by intercession, by repentance, by worship and praise. The objectivity of God – this Beauteous Light – brings forth from the creatures who behold it a wonder that lies beyond saying. The Subjectivity of God – this Living One – kindles the fiery love that is the Lord’s own gift, set ablaze in the creature’s heart. This is the proper dogmatic form of the doctrine of God: the intellect, bent down, glorified, in prayer.⁷³

Sonderegger’s systematics may begin bent down, penitentially in prayer, but the first volume does not stay there for long. It is not before long that the systematics stands upright, full of praise and joy, adopting an intellectual posturing more akin to the ancient *orans* than the hunched-over penitent. Without hesitation or recourse, she flies high into the doctrine of God on the ‘wings of prayer’.

The quotation above, with which Sonderegger ends her Preface, is one of the few direct references to prayer in her systematics. If Coakley is the most explicit of the three in showing ‘how the activity of contemplation relates to the systematic task, and what changes it makes to it’, Sonderegger is the least.⁷⁴ This could give the impression of degrees of proximity in which the significance of prayer is reduced the further you move from the prayer-drenched systematics of Coakley until you get, finally, to Sonderegger. There is a gradation of sorts when reading these three projects together, but it unexpectedly slides in the opposite direction: the less Sonderegger says about prayer the more she is able to pursue a systematic theology almost as a form of prayer. And, curiously, this makes Sonderegger’s systematic undertaking the most complete (Anglican) integration of theology and prayer of the lot.

One of the features of Sonderegger’s deep inhabitation of the *modus orativus* is the distinctive style of her systematics. Form and content marry in Sonderegger’s writings. In some sense, this is the most conventional of systematic theologies with the most conventional of titles that engages with a very conventional set of thinkers (Augustine, Aquinas, Schleiermacher,

72 Sonderegger, *Systematic Theology*, p. 392.

73 Sonderegger, *Systematic Theology*, pp. xx–xxi.

74 Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self*, p. 35.

Calvin, lots of Barth, Jenson) on a thematic throwback to the classical territory of the divine attributes. It is a treatise *de Deo Uno*, after all. It takes a very conventional structure, ordered around the Omnipresent One, the Omnipotent One, and the Omniscient One. It has nothing of the interdisciplinary ambition of a *théologie totale* and it makes no effort to integrate ‘culture’ in all its rich diversity in the way an ‘engaged systematics’ does. But for all its conventionality, in terms of style, this is the most unconventional of systematic endeavours. Although Sonderegger says little about prayer, everything she says is couched in a doxological register, intoxicated by prayer – offered almost as a form of prayer. Reading Sonderegger’s *Systematic Theology* is a bit like reading Augustine’s *Confessions*. There is a similar tonality to be detected, a shared sense of listening in on what comes of a pray-er’s conversation with God. Take these two quotations, the style of which just as easily could be found on any page, as examples of Sonderegger’s apparent sliding in and out of prayer, of moving between theology and doxology in a way that eschews the distinctions that have come to separate them from each other:

God is Light, eternal Radiance, and it is by His Light that earthly things are lit up and made known. ... He is the Light by which we see; but it is the world of His own making, the creatures and all that dwells below the skies, the earthly facts, concepts, categories, truths of all kinds, that fill our minds and dazzle our senses.⁷⁵

To speak of God, to name the Divine Perfections, should be honey in the comb, the river of delight, the freshness and strong elixir of love. Love is the Truth of God, but also the Beauty. God is sublime, a zealous Good. Love alone is as strong as death, its passion fierce as the grave. To know this God, the Living Lord, is to hunger and to delight and to hunger once more. Theology should pant after its God, the Love that is better than wine, for God is beautiful, truly lovely, the One whose Eyes are like doves. Eat, friends – all theology should ring out with this invitation – drink and be drunk with Love.⁷⁶

Then there are the frequent honorific capitals for divine things and the countless exclamation marks, both of which feel more characteristic of the liturgy than mainstream systematics. They trip you up. They send the reader spiralling out of control of the subject matter and deep into the complicated matters of God. Indeed, the style is as strange as the subject matter: we are dealing, after all, with the strangeness of God’s deity.

⁷⁵ Sonderegger, *Systematic Theology*, p. 425.

⁷⁶ Sonderegger, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 472–3.

Despite these stylistic features, it is difficult to classify Sonderegger's systematics as self-evidently prayer.⁷⁷ There is no direct address to God of the kind you would find in a classical work of spiritual theology. The style is surely idiosyncratic, but it is not, strictly speaking, dialogical. Instead, it might be more appropriate to read the work as a systematically realized example of what John Webster understood as 'confession'. According to Webster, confession is 'the act of astonished, fearful and grateful acknowledgment that the gospel is the one word by which to live and die'.⁷⁸ Sonderegger certainly begins with 'amazement' at 'the exceeding Goodness of our God, His Lowliness, that He will come to us, and make His dwelling there.'⁷⁹ Approaching Sonderegger's systematics as 'confession' rather than 'prayer' does not make her project any less prayerful – after all, for Webster, confession is 'a spiritual act'.⁸⁰ It does, however, help to firm up the specificity of her integration of theology and prayer and distinguish this particular systematic theology from the comparably more conventionally styled projects of Coakley and Ward.

77 The closest Sonderegger gets to defining prayer is a variation on the Evagrian theme of 'conversation' (on this, see *De oratione* 3):

Like Moses' encounter with the Lord God in the wilderness, faithful prayer calls upon the Lord – it is invocation – it pleads with the Living God – it is entreaty and petition – it cries out for the broken and broken-hearted – it is intercession – and it falls down before Almighty God – it is contemplation and reverence. Prayer is living exchange, encounter between Creator and creature', see Sonderegger, *Systematic Theology*, p. 291.

This expansive rendering of prayer is similar to Ward's notion of prayer as 'root practice'. However, while Ward suggests that theology might and should lead into prayer and praise, he sees his own project as 'more closely associated with the academic treatise as its examinations are not conducted within an I-Thou framework', Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, p. 178. Sonderegger's systematics with its co-opting of the doxological genre of confession, seems to bend around these genre conventions. Without adhering to a strict I-Thou formulation, it is nevertheless styled more as a form of praise and doxology rather than simply leading into praise and doxology, as Ward's does. Although much of this is left unsaid in her actual systematics, elsewhere she has explained that her project seeks to test 'whether systematic theology can be best pursued as a form of intellectual prayer', see, <https://fortresspress.com/content-wysiwyg/interview-katherine-sonderegger> (accessed 1 August 2019); and, more recently, she has recognized the 'prominent place given to doxology and to prayer' in her systematics, see Katherine Sonderegger, 'Response to Review Essays', *Anglican Theological Review* 101.2 (2019), p. 289. Understanding systematic theology 'as a form of intellectual prayer' might help to make sense of Sonderegger's confidence to speak so richly and verbosely of matters of God.

78 See John Webster, 'Confession and Confessions', in *Confessing God: Essays in Christian Dogmatics II* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), p. 69.

79 Sonderegger, *Systematic Theology*, p. xx.

80 Webster, 'Confession and Confessions', p. 71.

The focus of the first volume is the doctrine of God's deity. The way she gets to the deity of God, however, follows an unusual dogmatic trajectory; and one that is made available by prayer. 'Not all is Christology!' is the refrain of this systematics.⁸¹ Some have found this manoeuvring away from the doctrine of Christ somewhat unsettling. Not least this is because it instigates a dogmatic move nearly unparalleled in modern theology by focusing on the divine unicity ahead of the Trinity of God. How can Sonderegger speak about God, and especially of God *in se*, with such verve and insight, without speaking first of the revelation of that God in the person of Jesus Christ?

Before responding to that question, I have a little more to say about one of the central claims on which her systematics hinges: the thoroughgoing affirmation of theological compatibilism. For Sonderegger:

Deity is not repugnant to the cosmos, nor paradoxical to it. We do not find a contradiction or opposition between the One Lord and all that He has made. Rather the Divine Reality is compatible with the cosmos: God has a 'positive' relation to the world. The thornbush burns with divine fire, and the bush is not consumed.⁸²

However, unlike Kathryn Tanner, also known for her 'non-competitive' doctrine of God and also an Episcopal theologian working on a systematic theology, Sonderegger proceeds on theocentric rather than christological grounds. Tanner, and Barth before her, tends to work from classical two-nature Christology to articulate the compatibility of the God–world relationship: as the divine and human natures of Christ relate without competition or confusion, so too does God and the world.⁸³ However, for the theocentric impulses of Sonderegger's systematics, this is an example of a 'Chalcedonianism too far'.⁸⁴ She writes:

The Hypostatic Union is not more greatly honoured, I say, by becoming the pattern or genus into which all Creator-creature relations are subsumed. Rather, I believe that Christ is fitly honored by recognizing and reserving for Him alone the personal relation of Deity and humanity in the Mystery of His own personal Life.

If not Christology, then what? Although Sonderegger does not put it in these terms, she makes allusions to the notion that a doctrinal account of theological compatibilism can be 'drawn down' from the experience of God's non-contrastive grace as felt in prayer. Because of Sonderegger's aversion to methodological

81 For example: Sonderegger, *Systematic Theology*, pp. xvii, 331, 363, 417.

82 Sonderegger, *Systematic Theology*, p. xix.

83 Kathryn Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity: A Brief Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001), pp. 2–5.

84 I am borrowing this phrase from, and allude to the argument made in, Paul T. Nimmo, 'Karl Barth and the *Concursus Dei*: A Chalcedonianism Too Far?', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 9.1 (2007), pp. 58–72.

matters, this method of prayer seeking understanding is left unsaid. Until, that is, about half-way through the volume where she finally shows her hand. Nestled in the middle of the volume and interrupting an exegesis of Numbers is a short contemplative interlude containing this suggestive admission: '[p]rayer takes place within the molten Life of Divine Power'.⁸⁵ She continues by citing Calvin to say that prayer means that Christian faith 'cannot "airily flit about in the head" as a proud, coldly abstract, gleaming conceptual surface, but must rather descend deep into the heart, the fiery pulse of a human life'.⁸⁶ What is a descent into the messiness of human existence is simultaneously an ascent of the mind, a 'lift[ing] up before and to Almighty God'.⁸⁷ Or better:

Prayer is living exchange, encounter between Creator and creature. On it hangs the whole commerce between the Lord and His covenant people, and in the shadow of its mighty work lies the outline of the Christian life bent down to breaking, raised up and restored, exiled into the land that is waste, returned, rejoicing, reconciled . . . The central reality we must face here is the *exchange*, the living *commerce* between an Almighty God and His frail creature, the one who cries out to Him day and night.⁸⁸

It seems that the encounter of God in prayer is providing a 'way in' to reflect doctrinally on the aseity of God.

In prayer, God is experienced as both profoundly present and strangely other, simultaneously near and far. The non-competitive environment of spiritual practice means that God's presence does not come at the cost of God being any less transcendent. Thus, when describing prayer, Sonderegger invokes the paradoxical imagery of standing 'in the fiery Presence of the transcendent God'.⁸⁹ The dexterous dialectics that are completely ordinary in the domain of prayer are then worked up into the doctrine of theological compatibilism. These dialectics are first felt in prayer and then described in doctrine, but never explained away:

God just is His own relation to the world. We cannot explain this, nor subsume it into another category and class, nor defend it using earthly tools. We *receive* it in wonder; we praise it; we turn aside to see this great thing the Lord God has done. Theological compatibilism describes and reports what it has seen; nothing more.⁹⁰

85 Sonderegger, *Systematic Theology*, p. 289.

86 Sonderegger, *Systematic Theology*, p. 290.

87 Sonderegger, *Systematic Theology*, p. 291.

88 Sonderegger, *Systematic Theology*, p. 292.

89 Sonderegger, *Systematic Theology*, p. 293.

90 Sonderegger, *Systematic Theology*, p. 79.

This is a form of *Nachdenken*: the doctrinal thinking that is formulated in response to and aims to make sense of a prior experience of God in the wider life of prayer and discipleship.

Understanding her project as a deep inhabitation of the Anglican *lex orandi* clarifies something of Sonderegger's more opaque methodology and how she can say the things she says. But it also introduces a qualification to her refrain that 'not all is Christology'. For Sonderegger, as for Barth before her and for Schleiermacher and Calvin (both of whom she cites) before him,⁹¹ prayer always implies Christology. You cannot talk of one without the other. Even prayer that does not invoke the name of Jesus, even wordless prayer is christological in the sense that it is inscribed into the praying Word of God. Learning to pray, then, is to learn a discourse that is *to* God (as object), *from* God (as a graced practice, as a poesis from God), and *in* God (because it participates in the prayer of the praying Son). Or as Sonderegger puts it:

Here we must say that Christian prayer, ... brings us within the veil, to the holy mercy seat, to Christ's own Person. He just is the Living Exchange between creature and Creator; He just is the Subject in Objectivity; He just is the Communion of God with and for all flesh. He, Jesus Christ, is Holy Humility. Prayer is the participation in the Incarnate Word, under the conditions of sin and of grace.⁹²

These reflections, tantalizing as they are, suggest a Christology hidden in the plain sight of prayer. Sonderegger can speak with such affluent, lavish confidence of the 'deep things of God' because of the prayer that inscribes her words into the Word of God.⁹³ Her treatment of God *in se* becomes an inference from her (christological) experience of that God in prayer.

There is much that is appealing about what I take to be the distinctively Anglican disposition of our three systematians to think systematically about the status of prayer in Christian theology and the rejuvenation this thinking brings about in the discipline of systematic theology. Likewise, there is something exciting about the results that come from thinking through afresh individual doctrinal loci in connection with the experience of prayer. The doctrine of

91 For Barth's characteristically christological treatment of prayer, see Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 4 vols. in 13 pts., ed. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956–75) (hereafter *CD*), III/3, pp. 265–88; *CD* III/4, pp. 87–115; and *The Christian Life: Church Dogmatics, IV/4 – Lecture Fragments* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1981). Indeed, one of the striking features of Schleiermacher's doctrine of prayer is just how christological it is, see, Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1928), pp. 668–75. And for Calvin's Christology of prayer, see chapter 20 of Book III of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), pp. 850–920.

92 Sonderegger, *Systematic Theology*, p. 294.

93 Sonderegger, *Systematic Theology*, p. 292.

God, as seen with Sonderegger, looks breathtakingly different when approached from the angle of prayer. However, in the final section of this article I want to attempt something a little different by moving away from a focus on the role prayer plays in the individual projects of Coakley, Ward, and Sonderegger and to begin the process of identifying a broader ‘danger’ in the handling of prayer as a systematic category.

The *Schattenseite* of prayer

Given the overwhelming enthusiasm with which prayer has been embraced by our three systematicians, a question presents itself as to whether these projects allow sufficient space for the possibility of prayer going wrong. What if prayer is not always the solution to systematic theology but sometimes part of the problem? This might seem like an odd concern to raise in light of everything that has been said so far. While I am not refuting the generativity of prayer when interpreted systematically, in this final section I want to propose that systematic theology, if it is serious about engaging with the category of prayer, cannot evade the *Schattenseite*, the ‘shadow-side’ of prayer. As Barth explains: ‘Light exists as well as shadow; there is a positive as well as a negative aspect of creation and creaturely occurrence’, including the creaturely occurrence of prayer.⁹⁴ That prayer has a ‘negative aspect’ is, it must be acknowledged, a large claim and one that requires more space than is available in the remainder of this article to build a detailed case for it. Nor is there scope to think through possible repairs drawing from or beyond our trio of systematicians.⁹⁵ For the time being, I am concerned simply with the phenomenon of the *Schattenseite* of prayer and what to make of it in light of the turns to prayer currently under way in contemporary (Anglican) systematics.

Ward calls for the ‘continual judgement of human speaking’.⁹⁶ One such judgement in respect of prayer has been articulated by Lauren F. Winner, also an ordained Anglican. In her study on *The Dangers of Christian Practice*, Winner offers a thoroughgoing critique of the almost limitless confidence a great deal of contemporary theological and ethical work (and especially in its post-liberal expression) places on the category of Christian ‘practice’, including the practice of prayer. Within much of contemporary theological discourse,

94 Barth, *CD* III/3, p. 295.

95 It is possible that a repair of the problems of prayer is available via prayer’s own internal dynamics. For example, Barth’s own theory of prayer, when pushed through his critique of religion in §17, might bear fruit on the inherent problematic of prayer, see Barth, *CD* I/2, pp. 280–361. However, it will be clear from the discussion below that we must go beyond Barth’s own notion of *Schattenseite*, as Barth retains the possibility for the praise of God even from the shadow-side of creation, to consider the praise of God as itself containing something of a shadow-side.

96 Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, p. 213.

ecclesial practices are worked hard. They are the primary means through which the Christian story is ‘performed’, religious identity constituted, various kinds of malformation countered, and desire reordered.⁹⁷ And, if the results of this article are anything to go by, the possibility of an Anglican systematics, to some degree, also depends on the practice of prayer. Indeed, Winner names Coakley as someone who has provided ‘perhaps the most audacious use of “practice” in recent theological writing’.⁹⁸

Problematising these ‘präsentations’ of practice, Winner seeks ‘another way of talking about practices’ and one that is alert to the possibility that ‘Christian practices carry with them their own deformations’.⁹⁹ Rather than healing, Winner speaks of how practices can inflict the very violence they are supposed to resist and overcome. It is not simply *that* prayer goes wrong now and again, but that prayer is *itself* damaged – intrinsically and always, by nature of what it is.

The Dangers of Christian Practice builds on an earlier study of Winner’s, this one with a more explicit Anglican focus. *A Cheerful and Comfortable Faith* examines everyday Anglican religious practice in the households of eighteenth-century colonial Virginia.¹⁰⁰ In a chapter investigating the *Book of Common Prayer*, Winner explains how easily the liturgy became entangled in the dynamics of slavery. Commenting on the use of prayer in the maintenance of the household as recorded in the 1779 diary of Elizabeth Foote Washington, a Virginian slaveowner, Winner writes:

Rather than exercising the naked power of the whip, Washington aimed to exercise the subtler power of religious instruction. ... Had the whip been her

97 I am thinking here of the flagship experiment in ‘ecclesial ethics’: Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells, eds., *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011) as well as James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008) and Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Acting Liturgically: Philosophical Reflections on Religious Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

98 Winner, *The Dangers of Christian Practice*, p. 177.

99 Winner, *The Dangers of Christian Practice*, p. 180. When Winner uses the term ‘prayer’, she has in mind neither the contemplative waiting on the divine found in Coakley, nor the general ‘root practice’ of prayer suggested by Ward, nor the emphasis on ‘encounter’ prioritized by Sonderegger. Winner wants to tell a different story. While ‘Christians want to say’ that prayer ‘is the place of intimate communion between a believer and her Redeemer’, the evidence she assembles suggests otherwise, see Winner, *The Dangers of Christian Practice*, p. 61. Her evidence includes the petitionary prayers recorded in the diaries dating from the 1860s of slave-owning women in the antebellum American South as well as formal and informal liturgies, personal and household prayers, historical records of prayer meetings, and widely circulated devotional literature of the same period and context.

100 Lauren F. Winner, *Cheerful and Comfortable Faith: Anglican Religious Practice in the Elite Households of Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

chosen means of authority, Washington would have needed to be ever present, whip in hand to ensure that her labor force worked; but if she could ‘perswaid’ them to worship a God who wanted them to obey her, she would guarantee their work even when her back was turned. Thus creating a ‘truly religious family’ and an obedient labor force were aims that went hand in hand.¹⁰¹

Then in *The Dangers of Christian Practice*, Winner turns to excerpts from the 1860 and 1861 diaries of Keziah Brevard to reveal further ways ‘prayer was put in the service of slavery’.¹⁰² She writes:

Women were also encouraged by clergymen and by contemporary prescriptive literature to lead their house slaves in ‘family worship’. Family worship was important because it, along with other forms of religious instruction, would ‘teach ... slaves ... an orderly and decent behavior; reclaim the roughness and fierceness of their nature; form their minds to modesty and mildness, and increase their love and respect to us, in a proportion as they advance in reverence and veneration towards Almighty God’. In other words, this ‘worship’ had as its chief goal not, in fact, worship of God. Its chief goal was to teach those praying about their lot in life.¹⁰³

In this context, and in others too, prayer is not the solution to but very much part of the problem of the injustices of the world. When the full history of praying is taken seriously, which must include grappling with its ugly underbelly, it is difficult to sustain without reserve the contemplative optimism of Coakley, Ward, and Sonderegger.

As well as being better alert to the possibility of prayer doing the very opposite of what it is supposed to do, there is a second, perhaps subtler, ‘danger’ at risk in these systematic embraces of prayer. Does a theology on the knees risk a suspension of judgement? The particular danger I am describing can be illustrated with an example. If there is one name in modern theology associated with the theological privileging of prayer, that name is Hans Urs von Balthasar. Regularly lauded for his *kniende theologie*, Balthasar’s work stands apart from much of modern theology by finding its method unashamedly in prayer. In his classic essay, ‘Theology and Sanctity’, for example, Balthasar speaks effusively of the knowledge of God never being ‘separated from the attitude of prayer’.¹⁰⁴

101 Winner, *Cheerful and Comfortable Faith*, p. 113.

102 Winner, *The Dangers of Christian Practice*, p. 74. Another example might look to the prayer of Zurara, the chronicler who recorded the arrival of 235 African slaves in Portugal on 8 August 1444, see Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), p. 17.

103 Winner, *The Dangers of Christian Practice*, p. 67.

104 Hans Urs von Balthasar, ‘Theology and Sanctity’, in *Explorations in Theology I: The Word Made Flesh* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), p. 207.

However, there is a shadow-side to the urgency with which Balthasar prioritizes prayer. To follow closely Karen Kilby's reading of Balthasar, the experience of prayer (either his or mostly Adrienne von Speyr's) appears to grant him privileged access to a 'perspective beyond what seems possible'.¹⁰⁵ From here, Balthasar can speak of matters theological with all the confidence of a 'God's eye view'.¹⁰⁶ It is on the basis of prayer that he claims to know more than can be known about, for example, the scope of salvation, the inner life of God, and the lives of the canonized dead. There are two issues here. First, that prayer becomes the means through which the theologian fundamentally 'over-reaches' and crosses the limit of what is theologically possible; and second, that there is something about prayer that protects those claims from proper scrutiny. 'Balthasar, it would seem, is proposing to do his theology in part on the basis of information not available to us, and information whose nature and value we cannot independently judge.'¹⁰⁷ The more a theology is advertised as prayerful the less room there is for probing, questioning, and disagreement. All this becomes particularly problematic when the position taken is controversial and problematic – such as Kilby and others have found in the heavily gendered logics of Balthasar's theology. A kneeling theology could end up not only concealing these problematic claims but justifying them and shielding them from the critique they deserve.

Does the *Schattenseite* of prayer manifests itself, then, in the writings of Coakley, Ward, and Sonderegger? The three systematic thinkers discussed in this article do not, I think, present anything like the same level of danger Kilby finds in Balthasar or Winner in the diaries of Keziah Brevard. That said, there may still be something shadowy lurking in the contemplative waters of these systematic theologies and because 'so much hangs on the appeal to contemplation' in Coakley's work, her systematics is a good place to begin some preliminarily investigation.¹⁰⁸

As explored above, one of the tropes of Coakley's systematics is that from the hard slog of prayer comes the iconoclastic loss of epistemic 'certainty'.¹⁰⁹ She writes:

What is blanked out in the regular, patient attempt to attend to God in prayer is *any* sense of human grasp; and what comes to replace such an ambition, over time, is the elusive, but nonetheless ineluctable, sense of *being grasped*, of the Spirit's simultaneous erasure of human idolatry and subtle reconstitution of human selfhood in God.¹¹⁰

105 On this, see Karen Kilby, *Balthasar: A (Very) Critical Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), p. 159.

106 Kilby, *Balthasar*, p. 13.

107 Kilby, *Balthasar*, p. 157.

108 Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self*, p. 19.

109 Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self*, p. 342.

110 Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self*, p. 23.

While prayer opens up potentially exhilarating avenues for theological reflection, these ‘distinctive ways of knowing’ could appear to be for the individual theologian to thrash out alone with God on their knees.¹¹¹ The reward may well be new epistemological discovery, but the risk is that these extraordinary pronouncements are not publicly ‘testable’, as Linn Marie Tonstad puts it in her probing analysis of Coakley’s work.¹¹² If so, the underlying logic of the theory of prayer sitting at the heart of her *théologie totale* may be less reliably iconoclastic than Coakley hopes and, if left unchecked, could come close to the problems Kilby finds in Balthasar. Although the risk of *Schattenseite* is ever-present, it is important to be clear that Coakley is adamant that whatever comes from prayer is not left completely unchecked. Hence, her ‘prayer-based’ approach is formulated on historical and textual as well as experiential grounds—manifestly Romans 8 and the neglected patristic writings it inspired. Or, to put it more frankly, Coakley is adamant that her ‘approach does not involve a philosophically naïve appeal to “subjective experience”, as if that were somehow separable from the exercise of biblical exegesis, patient examination of tradition, reasoned theological exposition, and testing by the criterion of “spiritual fruits”’.¹¹³

Then there is the separate concern raised by Mary Catherine Milkert who questions whether the fieldwork in Chapter 4 of *God, Sexuality and the Self* risks painting, as Winner would say, ‘too rosy’ a picture of prayer.¹¹⁴ The fieldwork investigates practices of prayer in two Anglican charismatic communities in a university town in the north of England, but Milkert asks ‘how a different location for pastoral fieldwork or qualitative sociological research might have affected some of her theological conclusions’. How would her *théologie totale* handle prayer in communities in which more harm than good has been done in the name of prayer?

If the pastoral fieldwork for this project had been a shelter for battered women or a counseling center for survivors and/or perpetrators of clerical sexual abuse, or a process focusing on reconciliation and restorative justice in global situations of extreme violence (including the use of rape as a weapon of war), would that have had any impact on Coakley’s conclusions?¹¹⁵

Admittedly there is some examination in Chapter 4 of themes such as ‘failure’ and ‘depression’ in relation to prayer as they are worked out in the two charismatic communities,¹¹⁶ but these are approached as difficulties, and not

111 Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self*, p. 19.

112 See Linn Marie Tonstad, *God and Difference: The Trinity, Sexuality, and the Transformation of Finitude* (New York: Routledge, 2017), p. 101.

113 See Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self*, p. 11.

114 Winner, *The Dangers of Christian Practice*, p. 167.

115 Mary Catherine Milkert, ‘Desire, Gender, and God-Talk: Sarah Coakley’s Feminist Contemplative Theology’, *Modern Theology* 30.4 (2014), p. 580.

116 Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self*, pp. 176–80.

insurmountable difficulties, internal to prayer. It remains the case that ‘contemplation’ reliably provides ‘the strength and courage to resist’ any such human abuse and horrors and little suggestion that they may become the mechanism by which those abuses are enacted.¹¹⁷

There are broader issues at stake here than the naming of particular intimations of *Schattenseite*. The phenomenon of *Schattenseite* offers a reminder that a systematic conceived in prayer, even one offered penitentially, is not in itself any guarantee of a good theology. If these thinkers are right in claiming that it is a mistake to neglect prayer in the discipline of systematic theology, the *Schattenseite* suggests that it is a mistake to bypass the full reality of prayer, shadow-side and all. To put the matter in a doctrinal register: what appears to be lacking in our three systematic projects so far is a sufficiently articulated doctrine of sin in relation to prayer.

Conclusion

Sarah Coakley, Graham Ward, and Katherine Sonderegger are writing very different systematic theologies. Each operates with distinct sets of questions and concerns. And each pursues these questions and concerns in their own terms. Despite these differences, I have suggested that they share a similar characteristic which is brought more visibly to the surface when these projects are read together: the affirmation of prayer as a central category for systematic theology. While the trilogy of projects considered in this article are not in the business of producing *Anglican* systematic theologies of the sort Sykes found wanting in the late 1970s – in fact, they would share a certain nervousness about the paternalistic tendencies assumed in his formulation of the discipline – there is nevertheless something distinctively Anglican about the instinct to think systematically about the status of prayer. Indeed, although rendered unusual by the canons of modern theology, the integration of systematics and prayer is consistent with the theological prioritization of the liturgy that occurs within Anglican theology. The systematic efforts of Coakley, Ward, and Sonderegger combine, then, to question the caricature Anglicanism draws of itself that it lacks a tradition of systematic theology. There is an Anglican tradition of systematic theology and, moreover, one with an emerging contemplative style. On the other side (or the *Schattenseite*) of all this, I have also suggested that the three systematians, at least in this stage of the development of their projects, seem to be held captive by a contemplative optimism that leaves too little space for the ‘dangers’ identified above. However these projects develop in future volumes, if their use of prayer is to continue to be generative, there needs to be better awareness of the kinds of damage and deformations, as well as the formative possibilities, made available by prayer.

117 Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self*, p. 326.