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# RADICAL ORTHODOXY AND PROTESTANTISM TODAY: JOHN MILBANK IN CONVERSATION

This rough guide provides Prof. Milbank's answers to questions from Sven Grosse for a conference, in German, held in Basel, Switzerland in 2017. This written interview will be published in German, but Prof. Milbank has kindly offered *Acta Theologica* the exclusive publication of this interview in English. It should be read along with the interview with Profs Milbank and Ward published in this Supplementum of *Acta Theologica*.

What follows is not an ordinary academic paper. Instead, it is a polemical summary designed to give a general idea of Radical Orthodoxy (RO) in terms of its origins, main ideas, milieu and general cultural "feel". If a great deal is mentioned about past thinkers and genealogies of the modern, it is not because RO thinkers suppose that this is at the heart of the modern, but rather because rival, liberal theological outlooks often, in part, depend, either openly or covertly, on stories about the past and the readings of some crucial thinkers. "Telling a different story" is then crucial to any genuinely subversive theological proposal. The majority of the stories I shall tell are based on scholarly research on RO, much thereof generally accepted by experts, if not always well disseminated. It is rather my "take" on these stories and their historical and contemporary implications that are most debatable and controversial.

## 1. WHY AT ALL A CHRISTIAN ALTERNATIVE TO SECULARISATION?

- a) what is so bad about secularisation?
- b) Cannot (and should not) Christianity be brought into an agreement with secularisation?

(a) Secularisation is bad, because the death of man necessarily follows upon the death of God. Without reference to God, our sense of the reality of mind and of the ethical tends to atrophy. Ordinary language is saturated with assumptions of the reality of the spiritual dimension – good, evil, intentionality, responsibility, forgiveness, grace, prayer, and so on. Yet we are increasingly governed by secular, scientific assumptions, which imply that this language is simply epiphenomenal “gossip”. Consequently, the masters of an impersonal discourse concerning sheer material reality taken as the real truth increasingly assume command. Such a denigration of the sense medium, in which the majority of people “swim”, eventually renders democracy and respect for freedom impossible, even though these are the very values that secularity claims to respect most.

(b) Christianity is itself the source of a positive secularisation, if by this one means the desacralisation of political power and legality and the new link of the sacral with the free powers of the human spirit. What is questionable is the idea that the secular realm is completely autonomous and self-referential. Arguably, following Ivan Illich and Charles Taylor, this is the result of an excessive Western Christian emphasis on the ethical, practical and disciplinary, isolating the contemplative, festive and liturgical. In any case, an ethics claiming to be independent of religious vision is evidently subject to two seemingly opposed tendencies. On the one hand, it sinks into “moralism” – currently taking the form of “political correctness” – which ignores the proximity of the ethical to questions of tragedy, fate or providence, historical legacy, existential vocation, and aesthetic vision. On the other hand, it proves unable to account for the ethical imperative in its own terms and so replaces “the good” with “right”, thereby inevitably grounding this imperative in the pre-ethical, given our sheer open liberty, on the one hand, or our sensory impulses to happiness or a projective sympathy, on the other. In practical reality, moralism pertains to the everyday level of epiphenomenal “gossip” that now dominates our media, while reductionism pertains to the level of the elite scientific decisions and normative processes that govern our lives.

## 2. IS IT POSSIBLE (AND DOES IT MAKE SENSE) TO ROLL BACK THE WHEEL OF HISTORY?

Es ist völlig ungeschichtlich, den von der Aufklärung vollzogenen Säkularisierungsprozeß mental annullieren oder gar ideenpolitisch umkehren zu wollen. Die von ihm bewirkten Veränderungen sind nicht das Produkt willkürlicher Einfälle und Launen, sondern das in langen Debattenzusammenhängen entstandene Resultat von Sachfragen und Problemstellungen, deren Gewicht auch dann weiterbestünde, wenn man vor den dort gegebenen Antworten die Augen verschließen würde (Ulrich Barth: Art. Säkularisierung I. Systematisch-theologisch. In: Theologische Realenzyklopädie 29 (1998), 603-634, hier: 620,1-6).

The idea that it is “unhistorical” to question the irreversibility of enlightenment is surely itself a failure to think in historicist terms. I have two responses to this claim: “postmodern” and “Latourian”, by analogy with Bruno Latour’s claim that “we have never been modern”. The postmodern response would be that the triumph of enlightenment is only the contingent triumph of a particular set of intellectual power struggles. Victors write history and the heirs of the *philosophers* have contrived to make their victory seem the inevitable outcome of progress. But the key claims of enlightenment lie in the fields of ethics, politics and metaphysics, not in the field of incontrovertible scientific advances. Although these claims often purport to be linked to such advances (for example, Kant’s association of his thought with Newtonianism), the linkage is not so transparent and, in any case, some of these advances have already been overturned (as, for example, Newtonianism by relativist and quantum physics).

My second response would perhaps be more important, along the lines of “we have never been enlightened”. Many historians now doubt whether there was any single “enlightened” phenomenon. Instead, they are increasingly thinking in terms of a “long Reformation”, “a long Counter-Reformation” and “a long Renaissance” – indeed, a revived Renaissance against the Cartesian “Counter-Renaissance”. The main currents of enlightenment increasingly resemble extensions of a Socinian, Unitarian and Arianising reformation (think of Newton himself) or even, sometimes, a Jansenist counter-reformation (the latter gave rise to political economy, perhaps the most typical product of enlightenment, and played a crucial part in the discontent of the local *parlements* that helped usher in the French Revolution). In addition, the more radical currents were extensions not only of Spinozism, but also of a Brunonian Hermeticism. In either case, the extent to which one key phenomenon is the institutional victory of a new religious body (freemasonry) over an older one (the Church) has

been much underestimated, because such a thesis is tainted with Catholic reactionary conspiracy theory. Only now are we starting to realise, thanks to the work of Jan Assmann and others, that it has some measure of objective truth.

However, a similar issue of a single, univocal enlightenment would also currently lead me in the direction of qualifying any simple “anti-enlightenment” stance. To some degree, RO resonates with the typical reaction of, for example, the Scottish Enlightenment to a Christian “orthodoxy” that had turned too voluntarist and rationalist and, therefore, too inclined to uphold a contractual and rights-based approach to the ethical and political. In this light, Shaftesbury’s “neo-pagan” development of an ethics of “formation” (crucial for later German theories of *bildung*) and sympathy in a Platonic-Stoic guise becomes understandable for all its inadequacy. This outlook greatly influenced the Scots, albeit in a diluted form. Moreover, recent remarkable researches by Donald Livingston and others are starting to detect “proto-romantic” elements, even in the thinking of David Hume who views internal human “feeling” as a reliable intuitive guide to a world itself linked by a still occult “sympathy” (there are some parallels to Goethe, in this instance) rather than a mere exacerbation of the rational-empiricist thinking of Locke or an outright scepticism. This can lead one to ask whether, inversely, the same stronger “proto-romantic” elements in thinkers such as Vico and Herder are not themselves currents of one particular version of “enlightenment” – if we understand the latter to be, in part, a revival of renaissance humanism against the anti-humanism of Bacon and Descartes.

In terms of the more anti-Christian currents of enlightenment, with Charles Taylor, it must be said that our current modern outlook is also the result of the Romantic reaction against enlightenment. That reaction was also twofold: there was a “dark” immanent romanticism, stemming from both Kant and Goethe and leading to Wagner and Nietzsche, but there was also a “light” romanticism, stemming more from Jacobi and Hamann and a critical reaction to Fichte in the thought of Novalis, Hölderlin and F. Schlegel and others, stressing more a participation in transcendence and ultimately tending towards an embrace of both Platonism and Christianity. At present, RO is very interested in Manfred Frank’s demonstration that “Romantic” philosophy was a re-working of traditional realism in more vital and poetic terms and not a mode of aestheticised Fichteanism – although Frank underrates the theological dimension. Should theology now realise that Schleiermacher (still too Kantian) was *not* the most interesting German Romantic thinker from a theological perspective, even though he was the theologian?

To me, the advantage of complicating historical narratives in this way is that it tends to deflate spurious and pointlessly embittered cultural debates.

I should also explain that RO is less opposed to enlightenment and the secular world than it is to a distorted Christianity, for which it tends to blame the worst aspects of the enlightened legacy: either in continuity with, or in reaction against this distortion.

### 3. IS RADICAL ORTHODOXY AN ADVOCATE FOR RE-ESTABLISHING CHRISTIANITY AGAINST SECULARISATION OR FOR RE-ESTABLISHING RELIGION IN GENERAL?

This is fast becoming a pressing practical question for Christians, in general, and not only for RO, in particular. For example, this year there was a dispute in Birmingham, England, concerning the alleged Islamification of a state school in that city. The different religions are by and large standing together to defend it against a perceived secular attack. Yet (without in any way commenting on this particular case) this can spell dangers for Christianity. It needs to steer a middle course between viewing itself as simply one example of a general “good thing” called religion, on the one hand, and deploring religious extremism or criticising the inadequacy of other religious perspectives, on the other, just as much as it deplores the autonomously secular and criticises the limits of secularity.

With respect to Islam, common cause can indeed be made with respect to some ethical, cultural and economic issues, yet at the same time some of the values of Western secularism – for example, the enhanced role of women, the displacement of law from the place of ultimate value – are clearly the result of a Christian legacy. Or, more subtly, Christianity, like its secular cultural heirs, may be more positive in its attitude towards the visual image than is Islam, yet may also share much of the Muslim horror at its current debasement and deployment for mass manipulation.

In fundamental terms, Christians, in keeping with St Paul in *Romans*, must value any human recognition of divine and spiritual powers, together with transcendent norms. Indeed, one could argue – at something of a tangent to Barth – that the reading of the ritual and intellectual practices of other cultures as “religion”, or as some approximation to the *vera religio*, which is binding to the one true triune and incarnate God, according to Tertullian, is a specifically Latin Christian legacy.

To sum up, I am of the opinion that it is important to view religion, so understood, as a universal good. But this depends on perceiving Christianity, in particular, not as a specific instance of a religious *genus*, but rather as an intensified universal insight that belongs with a genuinely universal religious ritual – that of the Mass, or Eucharist and all its liturgical outliers. There is no “view from nowhere” from which we can assess religion – which is so often the source of both the worst and the best, since *corruptio optima pessima*. In fact, our apparently secular criteria for making such an assessment remain considerably Christian. But, more positively, Christians should at present increase their appreciation for the insights of other religions and regard them as ultimately different roads to Christ; this can potentially increase our understanding of his universal fulfilment. (Judaism, in this respect, is in a special position, on which I have no space to comment.)

#### 4. IS SECULARISATION THE ONLY FOE OF CHRISTIANITY?

Most certainly not. The secular is as nothing compared to the devil! If indeed the corruption of the best is the worst, then we must assume that the Satanic is most of all at work in the anti-Christian, in the perversion of faith itself, as I think the New Testament would lead us to believe. In this case, I opine that RO faces a problem that confronts all theology at all times: on the one hand, it has a responsibility to address contemporary problems or distortions; on the other, this exigency can itself prove distortive, tending to unbalance a theology that must ultimately adhere to an outlook that applies to all times, even if one can never escape the lens of one’s own particular epoch. I believe that, currently, Pope Francis has grasped very well how the Catholic Church, without compromising any of its stances, must not appear to be, or at worst turn into a kind of single-issue pressure group.

In the current period, it may well appear that outright rejection of Christianity is the major crisis that we face nowadays. But then, issues such as clerical child abuse scandals (however much the media may distort, misanalyse and misrepresent them) call us short. Even a dwindling Church can prove to be its own worst enemy. RO may, of course, have become over-obsessed with the secularisation issue and it needs to continue to enlarge its horizons. However, it is important to note that it has never mainly engaged in polemics against the secular, but rather has developed genealogies which tend to show that the secular is not as secular as one might think, or that it either perpetuates or understandably

reacts against corrupted Christian emphases. For us, these can include an excessive pietism that corrals the Christian faith into a narrow closet; a voluntarist account of God; an intellectually idolised reduction of God to the ontic, and a failure to elaborate on theology as a Christian philosophy that considers every aspect of reality – not excluding, I would say, even the physical and the mathematical. For want of a metaphysics in the name of a purer, more agnostic piety, one is always confined to a weak, implicit and perhaps distorted metaphysics by default.

## 5. WHAT IS SPECIFICALLY CHRISTIAN IN RADICAL ORTHODOXY? FOR EXAMPLE, CANNOT THE ONTOLOGY OF RADICAL ONTOLOGY BE REGARDED AS SOMETHING NEOPLATONIC, AND THIS MEANS: SOMETHING PAGAN?

I think clearly not, because our ontology (or our ontologies!) depends on Creation *ex nihilo*, on God as Trinity and Creation as being in the image of the Trinity, besides the importance of transformative events as shown supremely in the Incarnation. This is one reason why we have tended to reconfigure analogy as “non-identical repetition” (see Catherine Pickstock’s new book *Repetition and identity*, which further develops an “RO metaphysics”). Although we do emphasise Platonic *methexis* or participation, we also tend to argue that the doctrine of Creation is the *most* participatory doctrine, since things created out of nothing exist *only* as image and share, without remainder. Perhaps Albert the Great of Cologne developed this truth excellently, as Alain de Libera has now shown: for Albert, neo-Platonic emanation of form downwards can be combined with Aristotelian “elicitation of form” upwards from matter, by appealing to Dionysius the Areopagite’s view that the divine act of creation immediately brings about and yet is only possible through the “grateful” reception of this gift, which is, from the outset, a “return” to God by the creatures. In this way, Albert showed how the Christian understanding of creation is able to combine the Platonic stress on transcendent “vertical” causality with the Aristotelian emphasis on immanent, horizontal causality. Aquinas developed this approach further in his own way.

In a similar vein, though we recently stressed the importance of the “theurgic” after Iamblichus and Proclus, we would argue that this perspective was appropriated by Dionysius, Maximus and Boethius, because the Incarnation is *hyperbolically* theurgic compared to any pagan scheme: in this instance, the divine descends to the point of identification

and the saving ritual is offered first (but then by us as the Church) by God himself to God. Indeed, without any pagan borrowing, Augustine offers similar conclusions with respect to his *vox Psalmos totius Christi* in his *Enarrationes in Psalmos*. This is linked to the real heart of atonement: the only acceptable gift that we can offer to God is God himself, and only the Incarnation renders this possible – both once and for all and yet, for that very reason, repeatedly. Moreover, this rendering simultaneously reveals that God is in himself a gift by the Son to the Father that is immediately (as in the Dionysian paradigm of creation) the grateful return of the Son to the Father, thereby mutually showing gift as a generous reciprocity, which then “proceeds” outwards from both as the *donum* of the Holy Spirit without limit. (In this instance, I draw on Richard of St Victor and Aquinas, *De Potentia Dei* 9.9.)

It can also be noted that, as with our relation to contemporary, living religions such as Hinduism, nothing is gained for Christianity by caricature. No reader of Plotinus’ sixth *Ennead*, for example, can seriously claim that Plotinus entirely lacks any notion of the personal or of willing in his account of both the One and emanation. Yet this is not at all to deny that Christianity, by comparison, vastly accentuated the dimension of personality and of free donation, nor that the incorporation of outgoing and response into the very life of the Godhead (conceived as the Trinity, in the manner that I have just tried to indicate) does not involve exponentially different insights, attitudes and practices.

Despite this analogy between attitudes to pagan philosophy and other religions, it remains for RO nonetheless still fundamentally the case that there is a special kinship (however one accounts for this historically) between the Platonic elevation of *theoria* with regard to the divine and the re-conception of the divine as identical with the Good. I do think that one can perceive a convergence between this notion and those of the Old Testament in the writings of the New: for example, in St Paul’s account of the beatific vision. By comparison, attempts to “de-Hellenize” Christian doctrine simply lead to its entire unravelling. It can also be noted that the work of recent Biblical critics such as Margaret Barker has tended to break with the delusion that the Old Testament was only concerned with the historical and revelatory and not with the cosmic and the symbolically participatory. This is manifest not only in the wisdom literature, but also in the whole complex of ideas regarding the temple. Too often supposed defenders of “the Bible” are really defending a particular ideological construction thereof that has more to do with outcomes of intellectual and cultural history than with really attending to the Bible itself.

Although RO has tried, like Joseph Ratzinger, to re-emphasise the importance of Hellenic and especially Platonic reason to the Christian legacy, I most certainly do not think that we represent a kind of “Christian Platonism” that would seek to be more Platonic than the Fathers or Aquinas or Nicholas of Cusa. Having said that, one is only being true to their spirit in realising that the engagement with the ancient philosophical corpus, like the engagement with the Hebrew scriptures, is never finally completed, such that one could now, in a globalised era, move onto “something else”. There is a certain sense in which Christianity is necessarily Mediterranean and European – Hebrew, Greek and even Roman – a sense which to deny would be to deny the particularity of the Incarnation itself.

Perhaps one could mention that two major interpretative possibilities face theology at present. On the one hand, one could argue that Descartes and Kant sustain the “de-Platonisation” and “de-Peripateticisation” of Christianity, undertaken in the late Middle Ages in the wake of the condemnations of 1270-1277, to facilitate *rapprochement* with modern thought. I call this the “Franciscan” option: modernity is a Franciscan outcome, substantially built on the legacy of the Medieval English Franciscans and their particular reading of Avicenna, which moved the Augustinian legacy in a much more voluntarist direction away from the Patristic notion that the way the world is reveals certain “essential” structures that disclose to us something of the divine mind. Instead, for Franciscan and cognate philosophy typically, metaphysics now weakly concerns already (with Duns Scotus) “transcendental” structures (in a proto-Kantian sense, as Honnfelder has shown) of the sheer possible “givenness” of reality in terms of the supposed complete formal separability of what there is from the fact that it is and the re-composability of any given thing into something else, due to the latency of a plurality of forms. For this outlook, the givenness of reality is split, in opposition to the neoplatonic, Dionysian, Albertist and Thomist outlook, from the issue of its causal origination. That is instead handed over to a pure theology of the divine absolute power and inscrutable will. One can ironically note, in this instance, that German thought after Kant has really become too English and French in the wrong kind of way, such that German idealism is *not* really in continuity with the thought of the Albertists – of Dietrich, Eckhart and Cusanus. It is more plausible to mention that the German romantics, whose stress on the mediation by human creativity is already inaugurated by Cusa, picked up their neo-platonic realism in a new mode.

On the second, “Dominican option” (one thinks, in this instance, of both the Thomist and the German Albertine legacy through to Nicholas of Cusa and even beyond), the movement away from a Platonising outlook

in terms of a metaphysics of interpretative – which arguably most defines “the modernity we have” – is rejected in part because it is perceived to coincide with a general drift away from “symbolic realism”, which also precludes a proper understanding of the Scriptures. The condemnations of 1270-1277, in their understandable yet excessive sphere of a new pagan religiosity, focused on a contemplative felicity not adverting to revelation, nonetheless “threw the baby out with the bathwater”, because, in rejecting Averroes and much of Avicenna, it also rejected opinions in Aquinas that were perfectly Patristic. After this period, without realist assumptions about relation, substance, accident, the nature of “proper” substantive and personal unity and so forth, nominalists such as Ockham found it difficult to articulate the key Christian doctrines in genuinely orthodox terms.

In this instance, much hinges on how one reads the Bible, but I would at least point out that the late Medieval anti-Platonic and anti-peripatetic (Ockham’s paired-down Aristotle rejects the Arab “peripatetic” synthesis) turn coincided with an emphasis on the role of dialectics in theology and a downgrading of the importance of grammatical method and so a more narrative-based *lectio* of the sacred scriptures. Of course, humanism and the Reformation then reacted against this – but one could argue in a cultural situation that had somehow lost its procedural way. Thus, the remedies of both the humanists and the reformers were consequently varied and sometimes confusing. This by no means denigrates the novel and genuine grasp of the poetics and rhetoric of the Bible in a person such as the Croatian Lutheran Mathias Flaccius Illyricus. Indeed, this will ultimately point the way back to a more “romantic” and language-aware recapturing of symbolic realism in Hamann and other thinkers.

Yet, while one could state that RO clearly favours the “Dominican option”, in which abandoning the Platonic dimension coincides with a kind of subtle apostasy (including, by the way, with respect to mathematics, but that is a long story ...), it is also true that it is prepared to note that one cannot simply ignore the criticisms of the tradition made by Scotus and Ockham. We have thus recently tended to view favourably the “post-nominalist” attempts of Eckhart and Cusanus to rethink symbolic realism in a considerably new way. (The work by the German Catholic theologian, now a Professor at Heythrop in London, Johannes Hoff, is crucial in this regard.)

The “analogical” solution given by Albert, Aquinas and others to the Plotinian quandary of maintaining a “general” unity of the categories across the boundaries from the divine to the intellectual to the psychic to the material, in terms of a not entirely definable scale of participations, was sustained, in this instance, and yet radicalised in the direction of paradox

in the face of Scotist and nominalist critiques. Thus, in response to the claim for a logically necessary “univocity of being” between creation and God (which threatens the ontological difference of the divine), it is newly and daringly asserted – harking back to Eriugena – that the world both is and yet is not God, just as the Trinitarian procession both is and is not distinguished from the outgoing of the creation. (Yet Aquinas already mentions this in his *Sentence commentary*.) In response to Ockham’s argument that universals, real relations and analogy violate the principle of non-contradiction, both Eckhart and then Cusa argue plausibly that there *exist* such violations, because logic breaks down not only in the infinite, but also at the “impossible” and problematic border between the finite and the infinite. In response to the Ockhamite division of all reality into atomic things and arbitrary signs, Cusa declares (in a post-analytic move that is currently comparable to a post-analytic or post-phenomenological move in philosophy) that *even* sensorily evidenced aspects are mediated by sign, but that symbolic construction (in the mathematical and other cultural realms) is, in fact, not arbitrary, but a participation in the divine act of simultaneous generation/vision which is the Father’s eternal uttering of the *Verbum*. Cusa thus begins to “poeticise” and “historicise” the metaphysics of participation by rendering participation “conjecture” and yet conjecture also participation.

Perhaps this kind of perspective – which also views the Incarnation as the “maximum” of conjecturing, only achieved by divine theurgic descent into the heart of human utterance, which is the act of liturgical praise for its own and other creatures’ existence – lies at the very heart of RO. In British terms, its key representative in the past is Samuel Taylor Coleridge. He spoke of the “Old, Platonic, spiritual England” which we want to defend – the hidden kingdom of the fairies that also lies at the heart of Shakespeare – against the usurping of this kingdom by proponents of a combined rationalist reductionism and an overweening cult of the will – from Alexander of Hales to John Stewart Mill.

There are many mysteries and ironies in this instance. Why is it that English Medieval Catholic thought was often (though by no means always – Geoffrey of Ascham seems to have invented the “analogical solution” to metaphysical *aporia*) so “already modern”, while a great deal of Anglican thought has simply been the opposite – seeking to retrieve the pre-modern Christian-Platonic synthesis in a new way? Hooker goes back to Aquinas; Thomas Traherne develops a remarkable new theology of cosmic disclosure, and so forth? And why is it that English literature, without usually articulating a philosophy, seems so often – from the *Gawain* poet through Spenser to Lewis and Tolkien – to adopt the “stance of the

fairies” at an extreme removed from the modes of utilitarianism that can tend to assume control within the British Isles? There is no equivalent of a continental blending of the philosophic and the literary, as with a Diderot or a Goethe, although there are several “amateur” literary philosophers (Burke, Carlyle, Ruskin, Barfield, Massingham) who articulate the alternative “fairy” perspective, which Novalis in Germany dubbed “magical idealism”. The exceptions to this amateurism would be the Cambridge Platonists, Berkeley, and, to some degree, T.H. Green and Collingwood. The latter notably wrote “a philosophy of enchantment”.

Does this division ultimately concern the tensions between Celt and Saxon and then between Saxon and Norman? It is more or less imponderable; yet the fact of this cleavage is crucial to understanding Anglican thought and that of RO, in particular. Anglicanism, though established, is very peculiarly a kind of “established rebellion” – on the side of the “minority report” of Englishness, allied more to its literary than to its philosophical tradition. This is partly why its theology tends to take an essayistic, fragmentary and not systematic, methodical, or well-founded form. From a typical German theological point of view, it can appear to be a random mess, which surely is a necessary witness to a participatory realism: to the Thomistic view that theology is a remote sharing in the *Scientia Dei*, the knowledge God has of himself and so necessarily is but stuttering and fleeting: a few flashes of light over a dark pond. Again, any Teutonic kinship would be with the spirit of early German romanticism and with the German Middle Ages, scholastic and literary.

## 6. WHAT IS THE ESSENTIAL DIFFERENCE BETWEEN RADICAL ORTHODOXY AND POSTMODERNITY, BETWEEN RADICAL ORTHODOXY’S CRITIQUE OF MODERNITY AND POSTMODERN CRITIQUE OF MODERNITY?

To some degree, I am of the opinion that RO’s initial engagement with postmodernism was tactical: it was operating in a cultural environment where French post-structuralist thought highly influenced the student population in the humanities. (Although analytic philosophy dominates in British philosophy departments, any glance in a British bookshop will tell you that this does not mean that it enjoys the same equivalent amount of cultural influence!) Nowadays, that situation has slightly changed: the boundaries between Continental and Anglo-Saxon thought are blurring and an anti-metaphysical attitude shared in different ways by both

Analysis and Phenomenology (with its offshoots) is giving way to a new “speculation” that can take both naturalist and spiritualist forms (Deleuze, Badiou, Laruelle, Henry, and so on). We have more recently responded to this new scenario and would even claim to be one of its harbingers since, from the outset, we tended to claim that the anti-metaphysical was only itself based on the wrong kind of metaphysical dogmatism. Put far too briefly, the claim is that a metaphysics that has become, in early modernity, an “ontology” divorced from primary analogical causal explanation is already and explicitly halfway to being an epistemology. Thus, all Kant does – far from achieving any “criticism” of metaphysics as conceived by Plato, Aristotle and Aquinas – is *complete* this process. Thus his “critique” of metaphysics is only possible as the wrong kind of metaphysical dogmatism.

One can realise this in four ways:

1. After Hamann who saw “metacritical” in that, if language will not allow one to divide category from evidence, one cannot set any “bounds” between the knowable and the unknowable.
2. After Jacobi who saw that Kant had *not* answered Hume, because he has to assume a given foundation that Hume does not, and also that Kant’s agnosticism cannot be defended from a practical nihilism if we know nothing of how things really are.
3. The excessive weight given to Newtonian physics rather than to the biological which tends to exhibit the *objective reality* of the teleological as Kant with astounding bravery starts to see in his old age in the *Opus Postumum*.
4. The over-protection from naturalism provided by the misnamed “Copernican turn”, which is too anthropocentric.

To break with the total myth that Kant constituted a unique “undeniable break” in human thought, one should attend instead to a thinker such as the French Romantic Maine de Biran who showed the continuity between the natural and the psychic in terms of the primacy of the body and of habit. In his wake, French “spiritual realism” from Ravaisson through Bergson and Blondel to Merleau-Ponty continued to sustain a realist metaphysics that was not “critical” in the Kantian sense and yet modern as adverting to both evolution and historical change.

But RO’s relationship to postmodernism was more than tactical insofar as we tended to agree with the Nietzschean revival that humanism was incoherent without a theological foundation. I am of the opinion that what angered our theological elders in the UK was that they had invested a great

deal in supporting an attempt to protect a humanist redoubt – whether in terms of Wittgenstein or Gadamer, and so on. They regarded this as a possible “launching pad” that could take their secular *compères* from humanity to God and simultaneously permitted them a comfortable seat at the academic high table: their neighbour might be an agnostic, but at least they could agree about “basic human values”.

In retrospect, I opine that later events have fully vindicated RO, because secular culture, at least in the UK, has increasingly turned towards a relentless naturalism, which thinks of humanism either as redundant or to be sustained in a sentimental conclave. At any rate, we suggested that there was no safe transcendental resting place or middle ground; instead, theology needed from the outset to argue for, or persuade its holistically different vision of everything – and, where necessary, I should add, rethink what that vision might be in contemporary terms.

If anti-humanism was one area of (albeit provisional) agreement with postmodernism (since our ultimate argument was rather that humanism must be Christian), another and perhaps still less tactical area concerned issues of scepticism and indeterminacy of meaning. Again, we risked the fury of our theological elders (and since I was the one nearer the age of many of these elders, they tended to view me as a piper and traitor!) who had expended some energy in castigating Derrida *et al.* for undermining not only reason, but also meaning. Some of these elders voted against granting Derrida an honorary degree while I was at Cambridge – though to their own honour, I have to say, by no means all of them. Our alternative response to Derrida *et al.* tended to be not so much a denial of the indeterminacy of meaning as – in a way much anticipated by the Russian sophiologist Pavel Florensky – an alternative reading of this indeterminacy in both Platonic and Christian terms. We wanted to mention that this indeterminacy was a mark of our finitude. If one admits that our language and so on participates in an eternal *Logos* (or that the famous Derridean “supplementation at the origin” participates in the eternal generation of the *Logos* by the Father), we can allow through “faith” that we catch hold of some meaning and truth without being able rationally to ground this claim in any completely exhaustive manner.

Of course, there have been other merely humanist and metaphysically neutral attempts to respond to postmodernism in this kind of way, but RO would further claim that they fail, being unable to give any account of how we can know that we can obscurely approximate to truth and reality. To do this, one needs something like Plato’s theory in the *Meno*, or Augustine’s account of illumination in the *Confessiones*. One can note, in this instance, just how close Augustine was in his day to Academic Scepticism. The latter

has always been an ally of faith – an observation, which, by no means, implies fideism, but rather a different and more accurate conception of the nature of reason.

I would now point out that our response to postmodernism could readily be compared to Friedrich Schlegel's realisation as one of the sceptical potential in Fichtean irony and his surmounting of that irony in terms of flashes of "wit" that he saw as participating in eternal truth. As indicated earlier, rather like the early German and English romantics (Coleridge thought similar things), RO tends to be in favour of a substantive metaphysics (in a "pre-critical" sense), but to think of this as only articulable in "fragments", however extended. Such an attitude may well, in fact, be in tune with that of Plato as reflected in his mode of composition, but certainly for Christians, if participation is increased in the course of time, a particular event or insight can keep revising even the general metaphysical framework within which one thinks. I suspect that this is also implicit in Nicholas of Cusa – but these considerations are extended, to a great degree, by the attention to non-identical repetition in Kierkegaard and Charles Péguy.

## 7. WHAT IS DIFFERENT IN RADICAL ORTHODOXY'S USE OF REASON TO THE ENLIGHTENMENT'S (OR A POST-KANTIAN PHILOSOPHY'S) USE OF REASON?

This is too big a question to readily answer at this point. But, as explained earlier, questioning the notion that Kant is necessarily pivotal for all modern thought is central to the RO enterprise. Again, this puts us into some conflict with our immediate elders in the UK who had often tended to favour a hybrid of Aquinas and Barth, with Kant as the essential mediating link. (Donald MacKinnon was the central figure, in this instance – although I should hasten to say that we remain indebted to him in several respects; not least the refusal ever to separate theology and philosophy from each other and his intermittent realisation that metaphysics was a kind of link between logic and poetry.) Again, I feel that we were somewhat prophetic in this respect, for now. After Deleuze, Badiou, Meillassoux and others, it has become commonplace to suggest that Kant's anthropocentrism was, in some ways, a perverse misreading of Copernican decentering, just as his finitism ran clean against the crucial spirit of mathematical calculus. Descartes' combination of mathematisation, the priority of the infinite and yet (problematically) also of the humanly subjective is starting to resemble the more centrally paradigmatic modern project right up to the present

day. As Jacobi realised, Spinoza's dogmatic immanentism is an equally possible variant on post-Cartesian rationalism to the critical and finitist philosophy of Kant. To view them both as variants on "nihilism" was a crucial stroke of genius from which RO has learned a great deal.

As mentioned earlier, a considerable amount of new German research has recently pointed out not merely the importance of the *Spinozismusstreit* alongside Kant's work for what came later, but also the fact that Jacobi's perspective helped give rise to a Romantic "realist" philosophy that was an alternative to idealism, and not simply its cultural application. Of course, some of this Romantic philosophy assumes that Kant's critique even goes back to it against Fichte, but one can claim that, at its deepest heart, it is more akin to Hamann's metacritique. This allows a restoration and renewal of a traditional substantive metaphysics, albeit while denying its early modern foundationalist and rationalist practice. It now becomes something more intermittent, more "conjectural", inspirational and inseparable from the work of imagination and feeling. Naturally, this draws "speculation" and "revelation" closer together. Simply this spirit, which RO seeks to revive at present, is the only plausible way forward.

Two other historical remarks need to be made with respect to Kant and RO. The first – again as indicated earlier – is that it has learned a great deal from the work of scholars such as Ludger Honnefelder, J-L Courtine and André de Muralt who have argued that Scotus and Ockham are the real historically pivotal thinkers and that Kant stands in their wake. Far from "overturning" metaphysics, he inherits a post-Scotist metaphysics, regarded as prior to, and separable from theology, that is already tending towards an inversion into epistemology and a conversion of the "transcendentals" into formally separable "transcendentalist" perspectives.

The second is that – once more to pick up on an earlier thread – I tend now to have reverted to the view that David Hume is by far the more genuinely revolutionary philosopher – even though I read Hume in a way that is thoroughly heterodox by most Anglo-Saxon standards. On my reading, Hume is no empiricist foundationalist, but rather someone who, rather like Hamann with respect to language, thinks that we always "arrive too late" to sift out the "given" sources of knowledge in reason and sensation (he *attacks* this view in Locke), but thinks this with respect to the role of habitual *feeling*. Given this account of Hume, one can argue that two alternative (non-empiricist) tracks run from Hume into later thought, again bypassing Kant almost totally. The first is Jacobi's reading, which plausibly argues that Hume can only evade scepticism by "faith", or trust in feelings. The second is Maine de Biran's, which argues that we think by virtue of corporeal habit

that is at once spiritual and material. With far more kinship to Hume than he realises (and with much resemblance to Goethe), he also thinks that, since our thought arises from within nature, our self-knowledge with regard to the process of our feeling gives us a better insight into the workings of nature, in general (for example, into causality – this is merely Hume’s real, more than sceptical position, as even main-line exegesis now realises) than a merely external, “scientific” gaze upon its workings. But one can also argue that the ancient and medieval realist understandings of causality assumed that we can know natural causality from within nature and, therefore, have some microcosmic inklings of its workings. The “fourfold” Aristotelian model of causality depends on this. RO’s attitude is that it is both naive and cavalier to suppose that the logic of Christian theology can survive the abandonment of this sort of causal model. But the modern variants reveal the more “vitalist” implications of this approach. I opine that it is now important to develop a “transcendent vitalism” (partly on the basis of the importance of “life” in the NT and in rejection of that supposed association of the vital with the immanent), which can show (without Michel Henry’s dualism) that only such a perspective will do justice at once to both our natural condition and our spiritual transcendence.

How then, does all this affect the attitude of RO towards reason as compared with the Kantian legacy? Above all, we would reject the notion of identifiably different sources of empirical information, on the one hand, and rational processing based on *a priori* categories, on the other – even if, for Kant, they can only be understood in correlated combination. Rather, for RO, thought is an event of appropriation of surrounding reality in terms of embodied feelings and expressed language. If thought conveys truth, this is because – as for Aristotle and Aquinas – the essences or forms (*eidē*) of reality are themselves transmuted into thoughts. But, more than those thinkers, we would stress the role of bodily comportment and linguistic construction in the thinking and imagining of form. Reason for us is in this way realisation rather than representation. To realise is to attend simultaneously to the pressure of what one is confronted with, or of what happens to one, and to the promptings of divine inspiration, its teleological lure. All true reasoning is, therefore, at once both art and prayer.

## 8. WHICH APPROACH CAN RADICAL ORTHODOXY FIND TO THE BIBLE AS CRITERION OF WHAT IS CHRISTIAN?

Undoubtedly, RO has not written enough about the Bible and sometimes can appear not to engage with it sufficiently. In fact, a great deal more has

been written on the Bible by RO sympathisers than may appear at a cursory glance, and I believe and hope that our writing is suffused with a Biblical outlook, even when we are not quoting texts directly. But I still admit a deficit, because, to some degree, RO emerged within the orbit of what is called “philosophy of religion” or else “philosophical theology”, although I doubt the cogency of either term. Certainly, our trajectory has been to try to do both theology and philosophy at once, in the belief that this is truer to the spirit of the classical theologians from the Fathers through Albert and Aquinas (“theology” was, of course, a rare term for describing a “discipline” up until the mid- to later Middle Ages). But, an insistence that theology is after all something like “Christian philosophy” has tended to (although, of course, it should not) lead to an underdevelopment of Biblical and historical engagement. I sincerely hope that this can be remedied in the future.

However, it can be said that I have clearly stated (in *Being Reconciled*) that I am unhappy with the notion of “three sources of authority” in Scripture, Reason and Tradition – for, however beloved of Anglicans, I suspect that this formulation goes back no further than Henry of Ghent, and is already a sign of decadence. The reason for that diagnosis would be that surely for Christians Scripture fulfils reason, and cannot be added to, or exceeded by tradition since it is – as St John mentions in Scripture itself – bigger than the whole created world. This statement can only be true if the Bible is not a single bound text in a post-printing, post-early modern sense: if it is a text that we are literally inside; a text which of itself expands through its mystical senses to encompass all of the future; a text not apart from its constantly renewed liturgical performance and its endless reiteration in word and deed by the Church.

In this sense, I am happy to agree with *sola scriptura* and intensely dislike the idea that reason and tradition could be “additional” sources of authority. For the same reason, however, I also dislike the essentially Protestant notion of “hermeneutics”, if this means that we stand outside the text as mere readers, rather than as active repeaters and so, in a sense, writers of the text who remain within it. It is, I think, simply for this reason that Kierkegaard – another entirely non-Kantian, and essentially Platonic thinker, in the tradition of the radical pietists, Hamann, Jacobi and Wizenmann – replaces Schleiermacher’s “interpretation” with the category of “repetition” (for all his admiration of the German theologian).

It is clear that all depends on one’s ontology of scripture. RO, along with many others, contends that the Reformation inherited and exacerbated a mistaken, non-liturgical notion of scripture as a single bound book, which “represented” scenes and which one saw before one in an, in turn,

“represented” space. In other words, it forgot that Scripture had once been inseparable from liturgical performance, from liturgical carrying in procession, from pictorial embellishment and from division into several separate books adorned, like any Rabbinic volume, with extensive Patristic commentary in the margins. It forgot that it was a *Byblos* or a library, in the midst of which one could stand and wander about – though never exit. (For all this, Catherine Pickstock’s *After Writing* is relevant. Along with my own *Theology and Social Theory*, this is effectively one of the two “founding texts” of RO.)

## 9. IN WHICH WAY DOES RADICAL ORTHODOXY GET AN ARGUMENTATION BY BIBLICAL ARGUMENTS INTO AN AGREEMENT WITH ITS INTEREST IN REASON AND METAPHYSICS?

It has to be admitted, as mentioned earlier, that we are shockingly uninterested in issues of theological method. The reason is that we do not think that these questions can be seriously separated from substantial issues. For us, therefore, one cannot state the way the authority of the Bible holds in general, without already beginning to display the substantive difference that this authority makes in practice. If the Bible is a lexical space and time larger than the world in which we live and make progress, then its authority is at once inconceivably more than any intra-worldly authority, and yet simultaneously apparently elusive. In a sense, like the divine government or natural law, we cannot fail to follow the Bible, because if we try to stray, its unexpected judgement will reveal that we still remain within its boundaries.

But, in more prosaic terms, we believe that God speaks through all of nature and all of human tradition – as the Bible itself tells us. But all this is consummated and transcended by the incarnation of Reason itself in Christ. The Bible, for Christians (despite the profound damage that has been done to this notion, on which Christian self-understanding depends, by the majority voice in Biblical criticism and on very little empirical or rational basis), the Bible speaks throughout its entire scope supremely of this event which it uniquely displays, inspired by the Holy Spirit that works equally through the Church. The Divine Word, which is also the word of scripture, along with the sacraments gives rise to the Church; yet only through its reception by the Church – the Marian Bride of Christ – can it be inseminated and thus born. Yes, the Word is first, but not first to its being the word of worship, for unless one is always already inspired to worship

by the word and to worship with others, one has not really heard the word at all. I suspect that it was the realisation that Karl Barth's profoundly ecclesiastical thinking really pointed in this direction that led the original Lutheran theologian Eric Peterson to become a Catholic in the 1930s.

With this liturgical proviso – that we must read the Scriptures under the guidance of the Holy Spirit who speaks also to our brethren to whom we must attend – the authority of Scripture must then most certainly always overrule other authorities.

This liturgical perspective on Biblical authority is closely connected to RO's paradoxical insistence on cultural mediation as primary – against both a Barthian tendency (which still in *an entirely liberal fashion* hands over the unredeemed world to Kant) to deny the need for mediation, and a liberal tendency to regard it as crucial, but secondary and instrumental. Instead, we believe that revelation *first arrives* in the difference that it makes: the difference that the NT makes to the OT, without which the NT cannot be read, in default of Marcionism or Gnosticism; the difference that it makes to Greek philosophy, without which there would have been no reflective Christian theology; the difference that it makes to Roman law and ritual, without which there would have been neither Christian social order nor regular worship. This is the main reason for our focus on “theology and ...”. We opine that, without this focus, not only theology, but also the Church is doomed either to liberal compromise – “translation” of the gospel into secular terms and so effective loss of the gospel – or to becoming a purist, self-congratulating enclave that will, ironically, have left the supposedly “purely natural” world in the hands of liberalism after all. The gospel continues to arrive in the *unpredictable* difference that it makes to theory and to practice. This is why, for me, the very notion of theological method would deny the authority of the gospel.

Thus, while it can seem that our focus on “theology” neglects the inner foundations of theology itself, this is because we reject the very notion of inner foundations as anti-theological, for they would lock theology within itself as merely one more discipline or faculty – precisely on the Schleiermachiian or Humboldtian model. But this is the equivalent of rendering God ontic rather than ontological, and of seeing the Bible as simply another book, rather than an infinite library – but of Jerusalem, not Babel (*pace* Borges). Being a participation in God's thinking, as Aquinas has it, theology is not especially about any “thing” at all and has no proper domain of its own. It is rather the divine science of everything that we can but fragmentarily grasp in the glancing difference that it makes to every single thing or proposition. It is indeed the Queen of the sciences, but a gypsy Queen usually travelling the world in exotic disguise.

## 10. CAN RADICAL ORTHODOXY POSITIVELY APPRECIATE THE REFORMATION/ REFORMATIONAL PROTESTANTISM? UNDER WHICH CONDITIONS?

RO is unusual in that, from the outset, it has been an ecumenical theological movement, even if its core consists of largely High Church Anglicans. This aspect has sometimes led to accusations of ecclesial rootlessness, but that is certainly not true of individuals involved in the movement – which is itself a very loose structure seeking to enable and to form alliances with the like-minded, and not to become a new power complex in its own right. There is involvement not only from Catholics and Orthodox, but also from Protestants and Evangelical Anglicans.

This fact should be correlated with the growth of the phenomenon of “post-Protestantism” in the Anglo-Saxon world; this means an increasing openness to the whole of the Christian legacy, including the Middle Ages and the late ancient period. Books about Aquinas by Protestants, for example, are now far from unusual. It is also relevant to point out, in this instance, that thriving, expanding Protestantism currently derives ultimately from John and Charles Wesley – High Church Anglicans, steeped in Patristics – rather than directly from the magisterial Reformation. By this I mean that Pentecostalism is the offspring of the Holiness movement, itself the child of Wesleyan Methodism. Some contemporary charismatic Christians are showing a remarkable ecumenical openness, blending Protestant with Catholic features in both theory and practice – including monastic practice, as in contemporary Sweden. One can, of course, note that the German equivalent to Methodism is, to some degree, Pietism, which greatly influenced Methodism. A “reforming of the reform”, which, in some ways, reintegrated Catholic concerns with both contemplation and good Christian living, has been important in both Europe and Anglo-Saxon countries.

As far as RO is concerned, its thinking would not be what it is without the influence of later Protestants such as Jacobi, Hamann and Kierkegaard. There is no question, however, that its understanding of the magisterial Reformation remains underdeveloped, because, to some extent, RO was born as a beleaguered position of intellectual Anglo-Catholics in the face of an increasing dominance of Evangelicalism (in the Anglo-Saxon, not German sense) within the Church of England. However, speaking primarily for myself, and probably for many others within RO, I remain concerned that the Roman Catholic Church exercises, especially in modern times, an over-centralised, over-politicised structure and an over-legislative attitude

to Christian teaching. I favour ideally a “constitutional” model of “Pope in Council”, together with a renewed understanding of the place of lay leaders within the Church – which implies a certain – perhaps both Byzantine and Anglican – blurring of the political/religious lines that go beyond (in current changed, more threatened circumstances) the rather simplistic espousal of “purely cultural, not political” Christian influence in the mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century by so many. To my mind, *ecclesia* remains a dispersed reality, despite the fact that arguably all current main-line churches – that, in some sense, accept the sacraments and the threefold ministry – possess manifestly distortive, and not merely minor and inevitable imperfections, for historical reasons. This observation clearly allows the inclusion of the avowedly Protestant churches within the ecclesial fold.

This is despite the fact that RO might agree with Brad Gregory, writing outside RO, who considers that the Reformation had an unintended secularising effect. The latter can be very simply illustrated.

In my own small town of Southwell in the English East Midlands, the reformed Church of England, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, abolished the annual fifteen-mile folk dance from Nottingham to Southwell Minster (then a sub-cathedral, now a full one), which bore symbolically all the annual monetary contributions of the surrounding parishes to the mother Church. In this way, at a stroke, the organic links between Christianity, folk custom and the local economy were divided, never to be recovered. The dance was revived – as a “Morris dance” – in 1980. But, in England, the struggle between Puritan and Cavalier (which by no means coincides with one between political right and left, nor simply between the “mundane” and “the fairy”) continues: this year, the local police force announced that they would now, in the wake of further “Thatcherite” insistence that they fund their own operations, no longer be prepared to give the road dance the necessary police protection. Thus the “reformers” once again seem to triumph ...

I mention this offbeat example, because it seems to me to be as “theological” as matters of abstruse doctrine and because it perhaps encapsulates a certain Reformation desire to establish a “pure enclave” of piety, free of cultural, political and economic mediation. RO is avowedly resistant to this, and sceptical of the recent – syntactically and semantically dubious – consensus that seeks to distinguish “Christianity” from “Christendom”. (Incidentally, an elementary glance at Danish linguistic usage reveals that “Christendom” was *not* what Kierkegaard opposed, but rather, “official Christianity”, something quite different.) Surely, a true ecclesiology grounded in the NT regards Christians as belonging to a real community, a real household, a real academy, a real *cultus* and a real polity,

not as a random assembly of people who happen to think the same things? There is something reeking of Sartrean “bad faith” about the tendency of so many Christians nowadays to rationalise their decline into the claim that now they can become a purer, more “moral” minority and that this may well be God’s providential will. If there is any providence involved in this instance, it may be that we have to discover, through suffering, the true nature of Christianity as the secret, alternative, and yet more cosmically real “kingdom”. We may well have to become the resistance, but only a non-concern for the salvation of souls could seduce us into imagining that we should no longer be interested in the exercise of power in the genuine sense. For, if everything is interconnected, as it truly is, then a loss of cultural influence can only mean less saturation by the word of the gospel and fewer people hearing that word.

We simply cannot know the ways of providence, however much we believe in them, nor the likely course of the future. Indeed, many atheists pessimistically predict that demography indicates a global rise in the importance of religion over the next one hundred years – and this rise may well apply to Christianity more than to any other faith. An illustration of this is the remarkable fact that, in the 1970s or so, the most religious parts of the British Isles were the Celtic margins, but currently the most religious part (in terms of a combination of numbers and dynamism) of the British Isles (not only because of immigration, but also because of a concentration of social engagement) is, incredibly, London itself ...

Despite these comments, RO does not view the Reformation as the prime moment of disaster. Instead, we would agree with Michel de Certeau that the reformers were trying to respond to a destruction of traditional Christian thought and, to some degree, practice that had been underway since approximately 1300 and in the wake of the 1270-1277 condemnations. This involved a gradual separation of nature from grace with the beginnings of a “two-ends” doctrine allowing a human natural end to be pursued without any reference to our final, supernatural destiny; a decline of the sense that, as de Lubac put it, “the eucharist makes the Church”, and a splitting between an excessively dialectical theology, on the one hand, and an excessively affective and sometimes pathological spirituality, on the other.

Given this situation, RO would tend to say that the Protestant reformers, like the Renaissance humanists, exhibit a mixture of reactions: some tending genuinely to overcome the late medieval problems, others tending simply to perpetuate them. In this context, it is interesting to consider a figure such as the Italian-born reformer Peter Martyr Vermigli, for a time Regius Professor at Oxford. Very humanistic, his thought remained imbued

by Thomism and resistance to both Scotism and nominalism. His critique of transubstantiation, for example, was essentially a critique of nominalist variants of this doctrine. One can say that, by this time, nobody really understood Aquinas's doctrine, which depends on his subtle metaphysics of *esse*. (An important ecumenical consideration – though it is interesting to note that Luther's "consubstantiation" seems to be in continuity with Dietrich of Freibourg's criticism of Aquinas's position, on the grounds of the analogical and manifest continuity of all accidents with their substances – a view of accident that Aquinas generally shares. Surely, some metaphysical mediation between these positions is now possible?)

In general though, it would have to be admitted that RO is concerned about the Reformation's tendency to view the authority of the Bible as too "extrinsic" in relation to the Church and its practice; about a tendency to displace the primacy of Charity in favour of an understanding of faith itself too reduced to passive belief and trust; about an exacerbation of late medieval tendencies to consider charitable gift as a unilateral, disinterested practice rather than as a reciprocal bond of affinity; about doctrines of total depravity, which ultimately encouraged amoral notions of political and economic practice as the divine way to sustain order in a fallen world. And so forth – we claim no novelty for these anxieties.

It is important to add that some Protestant thinkers themselves now crucially realise that the dubious Reformation positions on grace and faith, which set human and divine wills over against each other, as if they lay on the same level, do not at all result from a more accurate reading of Paul, but rather from a bad metaphysics that derives from the medieval *concursum* model of divine causality, a model over-influenced by Avicenna and, ironically, ultimately linked to his failure to embrace a full model of creation and specific providence. For this model, God and creatures can be assigned "shares" of collaborative action, as if there were a "zero sum" competition between them, in rejection of the Albertine and Thomist *influentia* model for which God's causation "flows" to the secondary level in such a way as to all-determine it, but paradoxically in a determination also of its secondary integrity, which in the case of spiritual creatures means their free will.

Again, this means that the magisterial reformation was misled by poor *Catholic* theology, largely perpetuated by counter-reformation scholasticism. If only Eriugena's correction of the later Augustine had always been attended to ... for any tendency towards a doctrine of double predestination can only be a reverse Pelagianism that colludes with the enemy.

It should also be noted that, by identifying a moment of disaster that occurred in approximately 1300 and coming to a head with the work of Duns Scotus, we are, like Protestants, claiming that something in the course of the Church's history has gone seriously wrong. (And this identification needs to be considerably nuanced – much went wrong before 1300; much remained right afterwards.) It is less easy, though by no means impossible, for Roman Catholics to make this kind of claim: they are under some kind of imperative, for example, to try to synthesise the Dominican and Franciscan currents, as in the work of Przywara – wherein I find, nonetheless, much to admire. In a way, RO is very Anglican in dating “disaster” later than do the more unambiguously Protestant churches. We could say that we have, in fact, espoused “a long Patristic age” – extending into the 12<sup>th</sup> century (though there were already danger signs!) and up to Aquinas.

The “disaster” has many aspects for us, but intellectually, as already considerably indicated, we identify the switch to univocity in ontology, to the primacy of possibility in modality, to representation in gnoseology and to *concursum* in theories of causality, besides the increasing separation of nature from grace, reason from faith. All of these aspects ultimately have to do with what we identify as “false pietism” which, while wishing to elevate God and His will over against us, by consequently losing the divine immanence or His “not-otherness” (Cusa), paradoxically also loses His incommensurable otherness which is not on the ontic scale, but rather coincides with the ontological difference between the ontic and the ontological.

I opine that this intellectual deviation also had an existential equivalent, although this requires more exploration. It has to be significant that what the English Catholic historian John Bossy calls “new Christianity”, which, in practical terms, was above all characterised by the loss of the sense of charity as mutuality, was above all encouraged in a Franciscan milieu, which, in general, as Pierre Rousselot saw long ago, tried to purge agapeic love of any links with *eros* and *amicitia*. In general, the striving of the Franciscan “beautiful soul” (Goethe and Hegel) for purity in terms of apostolic poverty and a simple spirituality of affection and will had the dialectical effect of leaching ordinary economic and political life of morality and intellectual life of substantive rather than formal, logical content. In his great late medieval alliterative poem *Piers Plowman*, William Langland attacks the poverty of the Franciscan friars as a sham, in the name of the real working man. (Again the strange English *literary* affinity with Thomism and not their own insular philosophers. The account we have of Ockham's view of Eckhart after meeting him sounds just like A.J. Ayer on Heidegger ...)

It is very significant in this respect that Eric Voegelin, the great German Catholic philosopher and historian, expressed his concern about Francis himself or, at any rate, how he was perceived. In his *History of Political Thought*, Voegelin argued that the aim of Franciscan spirituality was, in partial *displacement* of the Patristic goal of deification, to achieve a perfect imitation of Christ's *humanity*, which is impossible, given that we are merely human, and not, like Christ, divine. The practical upshot of this attempt was to lead to a disengagement presenting itself (unlike traditional monasticism) as an alternative to ordinary human life, sometimes going so far (as Giorgio Agamben has now pointed out) to claims to return to a pre-cultural, "humanly animal" mode of existence.

Voegelin further claimed that this new spirituality tended to displace the more general ecclesial attempt to imitate Christ's *divine* humanity, but always imperfectly in terms of the transfiguration of every single human institution and practice; a *collective* aim at deification following the Athanasian logic that God became man in order that we might become God. Thus he explicitly identified an effective switch to *Nestorianism* in the Franciscan mode, in contrast to an earlier practice that implicitly assumed a "communication of idioms". In this instance, we can note that, while some of the Eastern Orthodox accusations against the West in terms of the *filioque* and so on are patently false, the claim of a western semi-Nestorianism is much more well founded – and is perpetuated by Calvin, in contrast to a somewhat monophysite drift in Luther: perhaps the consequence of a *hyperbolic* participation that is inevitable if one is a nominalist who wants to stress unity! But, in this respect, it is incredibly striking that Thomas Aquinas recovered through scholarly research a more authentic Cyrilline Christology, and espoused a very strong doctrine of the communication of idioms – something that can sympathetically temper the Lutheran approach. It is striking that this Christology is adopted by Richard Hooker, in surprising parallel to the contemporary work of Pierre de Bérulle in Catholic France.

After my pupil Aaron Riches' work on Christology – soon to be published – which attacks the Nestorian drift of much modern thinking, I am increasingly inclined to think that some elements of the "disaster", especially the duality of nature and supernature, could be traceable to a Christological root and to modes of Christological piety.

These reflections on the Middle Ages will once again show that RO is suspicious of the unintended dialectical consequences of over-perfectionism or pietistic retreat. We respond instead with "original mediation" and "making a cultural difference" as the very first *instance* of revelation and grace, because we do not believe that Christians can

abandon their mission, nor their responsibility for every single aspect of human life in this world, which should always occur in preparation for the world to come.

## APPENDED CONCLUDING REMARKS

Like the great Anglican Baroque poet, Thomas Traherne, RO believes that the dilation of the heart upwards towards God is simultaneously a horizontal dilation outward towards sympathetic union with the whole of society and the cosmos.

Nowadays, above all, this means that we cannot let metaphysical truth go by default in the name of a false piety and a false charity. For, at present, the gospel message fails above all, because people assume that they live on an accidental dot in the middle of a dark void and, as human creatures, as the accidental outcome of a material, random process.

And because the majority of people understand cosmology and science more than they do metaphysics, we also have to attend to the cosmological, physical and biological aspects of philosophy. We need an apologetic counter-attack that will question the seemingly unquestionable, but in plausible, contemporary terms. We have to be prepared to walk on the intellectual wild side, since the established tameness may be a false complacency unable to explain anything at the most fundamental and so existentially exigent level.

If, as we now realise, “laws of nature” are, in fact, linked to contingent cosmic circumstances, then only the unsubtle theologian will imagine that, in order to defend divine *ordo*, he should try to retrieve such legality. Instead, she should point out that, given the supposition of anarchic randomness, scientists and philosophers are now forced to postulate an infinity of real possible worlds, *for which there is not the slightest shred of empirical evidence*. But if, instead, we see that the regularity of the known single cosmos is a matter of habit and not inexorability, then the alternative hypothesis is naturally that an immanent but unknown “intelligence” is working, in this instance, at the “metaphysical edge”. In this way, we could consider once again, but in a revised way (as Cusanus, who had abolished the difference between terrestrial and celestial mechanics, already did), the medieval view that there are “intelligences” moving the spheres. In Biblical terms, this is the immanent work of created Sophia, which is paradoxically identical with the very transcendent, and “personifying” (as Bulgakov put it) essence of the Triune God.

If we still take mind and soul to be irreducible realities, we cannot be content to leave people with a picture according to which we have only been, as creatures, “horizontally” derived. Following the lead of Albert and Aquinas, we need to find subtle ways of explaining how, while in one dimension soul and intellect are “emergent”, in another and more fundamental dimension that yet works vertically “through” the horizontal, it is rather the case that intellect (as for most of the fathers, including Augustine, and for Aquinas) is the first created thing, then giving rise to soul and, finally, to the material world. If the creation is gift, it must first be received consciously in order to exist at all. The first intellectual creatures (angels and ourselves) know themselves as gift and so exist as “giving themselves to themselves” in a reflexive act that constituted finite intelligence. In so doing, they seek to return by gratitude to their source, but their failure to do so gives rise to the excess of psychic life, whose partially failed attempts to rise to self-awareness through self-sensing in turn give rise to the “mechanically material”, for which being as substance is yet more outside itself. This is a neo-Platonic scheme (mostly taken over by Christian thinkers in a way that goes under-recognised), but in Christian guise “the lapse” of further descent, although partial failure is no longer simply such, but rather also and positively the attempt through outgoing to imitate the overflowing of the good that characterises the divine source. This is how Dionysius qualifies Proclus, in such a way as to render the vertical movement of “return” identical with the horizontal movement of further self-giving in both equal degrees on the same ontological plane as diminishing ones in terms of donation downwards to the psychic and material. It should be added that, for Proclus, Dionysius and still more Eriugena, because the highest always acts more fundamentally than the intermediary, the material level also represents the point where the highest alone still acts and so the “simplicity” of matter, in some sense, reflects the divine One in a manner that “doubled” intellect cannot. Hence, the strong Christian need for the sacramental ...

This same Christian modification allows us to perceive, as for Aquinas, how the whole of created reality reflects the Trinity in terms of ever more crucial yet ever more intimate outgoing relations: from mechanical cause to plant-seeding to animal action to human intellection that requires the inner and outer utterance of a “word” linked to the spiritual desire to realise an end. In this way, creatures increasingly return on themselves and so to God. But God in himself is perfect self-return, not by an Hegelian alienation and mirroring, but through a generation of Offspring/Word that only reflects insofar as it *is* the constitution of an origin, but by a circling back upon himself through the love of spirit in an act of perfect and so simple circulation. Simple, because the mutual love of Father and Son

inevitably spills over, since it is truly love; because this is also love back of this overflowing spirit to Father and Son and because mediation (via the Son), although it allows circular return, in this instance, is still simple as “substantial mediation”, mediation coincident with divine substance, which must be the case if the relations that constitute this mediation are themselves substantive.

In this way, for RO, participation is more fully realised not only by Creation *ex nihilo*, but also by participation in the Trinity as more adequately defining finite substance as self-return. At the same time, the Fall is loss of this participation and an “impossible” stopping of the Trinitarian flow. Redemption is the restoration of this flow, the repair by the original maker as the only impossible repair, as Aquinas states in the prologue to his *Sentence commentary*. Therefore, participation is at once shown again and re-established (and so established *originally*), from before all times, by the event of the Incarnation and its prolongation as the giving of the Spirit through the Church.

In this kind of way, RO tries to link the metaphysical with the historical aspect of theology. In order to do so, it also considers that it may be necessary to “radicalise” (not liberalise) orthodoxy, along the lines of Origen, Eriugena, Eckhart, and Cusanus. In *Repetition and Identity*, Catherine Pickstock notes that Origen is, in fact, the strongest source of Christian credal orthodoxy, Christian allegorical exegesis and the key Christian spiritualist of the spiritual senses. Yet for him, this “orthodoxy” belongs in a slightly different metaphysical context than for later thought. As she asks, does not Origen more radically respect the difference between time and eternity by viewing human beings (not just souls) as pre- as well as post-existent; by allowing a pre-existent humanity as well as divinity of Christ for similar reasons and perhaps in better exegesis of Paul; by viewing the creation as eternal (although absolutely contingent) alongside God if the divine action is one and simple, and by regarding damnation as only penultimate if God is at once good and omnipotent? To adopt these positions is also to radicalise the crucial RO insistence since my *Theology and Social Theory* on the peacefulness of being as such and the interruptive, distortive character of violence as being identical with evil as such. But, of course, it is a mistake to interpret from this an imperative of pacifism, any more than one of anarchy – in a thoroughly, though not totally depraved world, the “war against war” may sometimes involve actual war if the innocent are to be protected and the weak not corrupted by the very coercion to which they are subject. This coheres with Origen, Eriugena and others’ very “collective” view of salvation. For some, the corruption is always the unavoidable corruption of others and we are never saved alone.

This is why we have the Church. And the redemption of all is the rescue of divine glory itself, which has been “impossibly” captured and must be retrieved if God is to be God. The Shepherd cares most of all about the one lost sheep, because with this loss, He too is lost and wandering. But since He also is not lost and cannot be lost, the sheep is from always and once more again at the eschaton, to be found.

I am adding this to emphasise the way in which RO also thinks that we may not yet be orthodox enough and that some supposedly “heretical” positions are only so for an insufficient metaphysical reflection and may be necessary to an orthodoxy when more “radically” thought through. And this is no mere academic matter, if indeed Charles Taylor is right and the fear of hellfire together with the “over-moralisation” of Christianity has something to do with its eventual rejection. People started to imagine that they could have a tighter ethical discipline here below through secular control and that the fear of hell was redundant. So they started to set up what often turned out to be a hell on earth ... But the heart of Christianity is rather one of a perverse refusal of divine gift through a refusal to celebrate. The renewal of that gift can only occur through a return to celebration, even though this now necessarily involves the passage of suffering. What is celebrated is receiving of, and participation in the divine. Ritual celebration throughout human life is the human mode of partaking.

<i>Keywords</i>	<i>Trefwoorde</i>
Radical orthodoxy	Radikale ortodoksie
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Metaphysics	Metafisika
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Reformation	Reformasie