

IS JOHN MILBANK'S RADICAL ORTHODOXY A FORM OF LIBERAL THEOLOGY? A RHETORICAL COUNTER

PAUL HEDGES

University of Winchester, UK

The title of this work is intended to be deliberately provocative. In one sense the answer is very clear: no. With an insistence upon unquestioning Chalcedon Orthodoxy, a turn to the resources of the past (especially the fathers and medieval theology) and an avowed rejection of Kant's metaphysics, Milbank's work is the utter antithesis of much liberal theology.¹ I will seek to show that Milbank's theology has features that are often said to be characteristic of liberal theologies, however, and that it has not escaped the shackles of the modernist/liberal worldview it seeks to repudiate. Moreover, I will ask important questions about the increasingly pejorative tag of 'liberal'; many scholars observe that the use of 'conservative' as a blanket term is highly problematic, yet they still deploy 'liberal' in a monolithic sense.²

In tackling this task a certain amount of groundwork must be prepared. First, we must outline an understanding of Milbank's thought, though a consideration of the Radical Orthodoxy project as a whole is implied in this. While our focus is upon Milbankian Radical Orthodoxy, or 'Milbankianism', this work will address issues across the whole project, as Milbank has come to be seen as a spokesperson and originator of Radical Orthodoxy in a way which its other major contributors have not. He has even been termed its 'founding father'.³ Therefore, to some degree, a critique of Milbank is a critique of Radical Orthodoxy. Next, I will provide a definition of modern or liberal theology, which I will apply to Milbankianism. I will also address a range of questions that arise, such as the term 'rhetorical' within the subtitle, how to understand the post-modern philosophy upon which Radical Orthodoxy relies, and indications of what I envisage replacing the movement. Clearly, some large questions are addressed, and I must beg the reader's forgiveness for the inadequacy of my replies because of this; however, I will assume some familiarity with Radical Orthodoxy, as well as debates and disputes within and between modern and post-modern worldviews, which will allow me to cut to the chase without laying out a detailed preliminary examination.

DEFINING (MILBANK'S) RADICAL ORTHODOXY

Radical Orthodoxy's multiple contributors, plus Milbank's extensive and involved writings, apologetics, and rhetoric, results in ambiguities, even contradictions, within the expression of Radical Orthodoxy, and is perhaps unavoidable. I am not herein attempting to launch a full-scale critique of the movement and all its problems, however; this is instead a particular analysis from a certain angle to interrogate the work of Milbank. There are

various reasons for the focus on Milbank. For one, Milbank has a leading position in Radical Orthodoxy as its ‘founding father’. Also, Radical Orthodoxy is by no means unified, with the thought of Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, Graham Ward, and others having their own features.⁴ However, while focusing upon Milbank, I will make use of the work of other Radical Orthodox writers, as this helps supplement what we may call Milbank’s central concerns. In this I will particularly use Pickstock’s works, as her concerns seem closest to Milbank’s own. Indeed, both seem to regard the other’s work as to some extent important as a support for to their own position.⁵ The critique applies less to Ward than Milbank, however – indeed, in one aspect of my criticism Ward and I both disagree with Milbank.⁶ This slightly broader treatment is important because Milbank cannot just be treated as a stand alone figure; his work is clearly tied to that of other Radical Orthodox thinkers and so should be treated in relation to them. Moreover, in so far as Radical Orthodoxy sees itself as working in a space made possible by post-modernism, my critique affects the whole movement. Therefore, while this paper is primarily an assault upon Milbankianism, the critique is also a broader one against Radical Orthodoxy more generally; moreover, I consider the assault fundamental and, if correct, deeply damaging if not fatal.

Given the above, my account of Milbank’s Radical Orthodoxy is offered as an antagonistic outsider. Nevertheless, I am not wholly unsympathetic, and whilst not wishing to associate myself with Radical Orthodoxy, I find certain aims and intentions congenial or mirroring my own. Yet, although we may ask some similar questions and seek similar ends, the answers we give to those questions, and the way we envisage those ends, are often almost antithetically divergent. I offer these thoughts, firstly, as a response to those who would charge that my reading does not correctly interpret it. Naturally, the way I view Radical Orthodoxy and the self-presentation of its proponents – what we might call their propaganda – will differ considerably in some respects.⁷ Secondly, I offer these to foreshadow issues raised when we consider whether Milbank can be considered as a liberal theologian. Thirdly, despite this, I do not see Radical Orthodoxy as static, nor do I define it in essentialist terms; nevertheless I must give a description of it.

I would highlight seven key factors. Each of these are found in Milbankianism, as well as being broadly representative of Radical Orthodoxy. This list is not meant to be exhaustive of everything which may be said to describe Radical Orthodoxy, nor is it how its own proponents may define it. Nevertheless, I believe they are representative, as I will seek to demonstrate. The key factors are as follows:

- Chalcedonian Orthodoxy and tradition
- Reliance upon ‘pure’ Christian resources
- Overcoming the genealogy of modernity and secularism
- Not being a movement but a disposition
- Return to the *Via Negativa* and a Neo-platonic Augustinianism
- Non-violent ontology
- Rethinking tradition in contemporary form

Chalcedonian Orthodoxy and tradition

Adherence to Chalcedonian Orthodoxy is stated at the very forefront of the book that names the movement.⁸ In deliberate contrast to traditional liberalism, Radical Orthodoxy set out its agenda by placing unquestioning observance to this ecumenical outworking of doctrine as fundamental to theology. Its first and foremost point of reference is the

tradition. In particular, two figures stand head and shoulders above the others in their frequency of citation and apparent congeniality for the movement: Augustine and Aquinas.⁹ However, a number of critics have convincingly demonstrated that Radical Orthodoxy does not so much use, as abuse, the thought of these and other figures for its own ends.¹⁰

Reliance upon 'pure' Christian resources

Milbank, in the work that provided the forerunner to the movement, *Theology and Social Theory*, strongly argued that much contemporary thinking is bound up with a secular worldview. Theology, for Radical Orthodoxy, must renounce this in its entirety and use solely 'pure' Christian resources; that is to say, theology and God must be placed in the central position so that everything is read from this standpoint.¹¹ Therefore, theology should use words, language and ways of thinking that are wholly within the Judaeo-Christian tradition and not tainted by an admixture with other cultural forms or ways of thinking.¹² Milbank does make use of Plato, but primarily as he is mediated through the Christian tradition and thus becomes, for him, a legitimate Christian resource. Also, as Gavin Hyman notes, Milbank has come to admit that there is no absolutely 'pure' Christian language or tradition, though he still seems to see this as a goal.¹³ Nevertheless, for Milbank everything is theological (Christian) at source.

Overcoming the genealogy of modernity and secularism

A significant feature of Radical Orthodoxy, though partly adapted from earlier sources, is its genealogy of theology and modernity.¹⁴ According to this, theology and philosophy were in their proper relationship (i.e., the latter was subject to the former), until and including Aquinas. However, with Duns Scotus this relationship became distorted, and philosophy and theology became seen as two separate, although related, domains. Consequently, ontology could be thought about outside a theistic (or, more specifically, Christian) context.¹⁵ This perversion, Milbank maintains, has been dominant in theology up until the present day, with only a few figures, notably the Lutheran pietists Hamann and Jacobi, escaping this bondage.¹⁶ Rethinking began with the Catholic *nouvelle theologie* but is only seen to be complete in the work of Milbank and company. Most significantly, Scotus is seen as the person who made secularity possible, therefore modernity and secularism are not independent systems capable of challenging theology, but rather simply heretical misdirections that can be corrected (or ignored) by those who veer to true doctrinal orthodoxy. For instance, as Long (following Milbank) argues, capitalism is best understood as heresy.¹⁷ It should be noted that this genealogy has been extended by Cunningham back to Plotinus, who, rather than Scotus, becomes responsible for the turn to the self and the modernist nihilism that results.¹⁸ We shall address usage of the term 'overcoming' in due course.

Not being a movement but a disposition

Although I have spoken of Radical Orthodoxy as a project, its proponents warn us that it is not so much a discrete thing as a way of doing theology.¹⁹ For its proponents it is a new way of looking at the world and of doing theology, and is in the process of creation, even continual recreation. To some extent this is a typically post-modern claim of credentials, to demonstrate that objectified, modernist, totalizing systems are rejected and replaced with a free-flowing collage of ideas, ways of thinking, feeling and being. This also serves as a protective shield, for if opponents say Radical Orthodoxy is such-and-such, or that its

doctrines are this-that-and-the-other, they can respond, firstly, that the critique is based in a modernist ontology and so can be ignored by someone who has transcended this through the post-modern turn, and, secondly, that the claimed doctrines or essence of the movement are not what it is, or teaches, but merely a temporary and contingent expression. Related to this, Laurence Hemming contends that because Radical Orthodoxy uses resources from both the Christian tradition and contemporary critical theory and philosophy, critiques that come from either one stance or other cannot damage Radical Orthodoxy as it can use resources from its other half to overcome these attacks.²⁰ If correct, a single pronged offensive cannot break down the walls erected around the project. Indeed, the project can be somewhat chameleon-like, for although the Radical Orthodoxy project is not a single united force but has different manifestations under the various writers within it, it still seems to be a slippery entity capable of shifting position. Nevertheless, it is hoped this critique will both suggest that there flaws within it and will also undermine the disposition it propounds. Finally, I think it can, and should, be spoken of as a movement: it has an identifiable core of members (mainly the contributors to the first volume, *Radical Orthodoxy*) with others on the periphery, and an identifiable corpus of works (primarily the 'Radical Orthodoxy' series by Routledge and Milbank's various works). While Ward has recently said Radical Orthodoxy was nothing but a book series, I think that this detracts from the fact that these books were intended to portray a particular vision of theology, largely based around Milbank's groundbreaking work, and that it has inspired a group of people with similar ideas to work together in various ways. While philosophical or linguistic arguments arise as to what constitutes a 'movement', I not wish to address these. Here I simply assume that if it looks like a movement it is a movement.

Return to the Via Negativa and a Neo-platonic Augustinianism

Radical Orthodoxy envisages itself inheriting the *via negativa* and mystical tradition within Christian thought. It thereby seeks to create a vision of a theocentric universe having, through its genealogy, supposedly cut the ground from under secularism, such that every sphere of life becomes innately theological. Thereby, it seeks to explain how everything is grounded in God through an Augustinian Neo-platonism. However, as with its use of other sources, it has been shown various Radical Orthodoxy works abuse and misinterpret both Plato and the Neo-platonic tradition – indeed, in such a way, that it has been suggested their theological vision cannot be grounded in their style of Platonism.²¹ However, it is the essence of this notion that I find most congenial in Radical Orthodoxy: its seeking a spiritual centring of the universe.

Non-violent ontology

Involved in Radical Orthodoxy's claims about Christian supremacy is a quasi-metaphysical belief that all other systems of thought seek 'mastery' over the Other. That is to say, they wish to define and control the subject of their enquiry, in an act of epistemological and/or ontological violence. By way of contrast, it is claimed that by grounding being in God, Christianity recognizes that all things are not subject to mastery but ultimately participate in divine unknowability.²² This, they claim, accords with Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine's view that the human is ultimately grounded in God. However, as Hedley has argued, this represents a misreading of Augustine.²³ While accepting the thrust of Hedley's critique, I feel he may be off target in two ways. Firstly, he claims that, for Augustine, man has an 'essence' because of God, and thus he could be accused by Milbank of falling into a modernist interpretation. Secondly, Milbank could be

seen as just emphasizing another side of the argument that, for the Christian tradition, we are ultimately nothing compared to God – without the divine upholding and sustaining our being we would not exist. Yet we must not miss the important undercurrent in Hedley's argument. For Augustine, as for Aquinas, we are ultimately knowable because we are grounded in God, and are 'guaranteed' by the divine reason that underpins this universe. Another, and perhaps more important aspect of this claim of non-violence, relates to Christianity as a system. Christianity is seen as non-violent, because it does not assert its own point of view over and against others, whereas all other forms of thought do.²⁴ That is to say, it does not make metaphysical claims of superiority, but resists these by being grounded beyond all such claims in divinity.

Rethink tradition in contemporary form

The final layer of our description is Radical Orthodoxy's rethinking of tradition. According to Milbank, orthodoxy is an unfinished project,²⁵ because the full truth of God can never be grasped and all statements are of necessity provisional. Here, Radical Orthodoxy treads somewhat dangerous ground between post-modern nihilism and flux (which it asks Christianity to embrace as a natural partner in some respects) and traditional theological claims of God's unknowability/transcendence, and heresy. Moreover, they claim the tradition must be restated for other reasons. For one, much of it has fallen into heresy, and so there must be a return to true orthodoxy.²⁶ Secondly, to remain fresh the tradition must be couched in contemporary idiom and relate to contemporary ways of thinking²⁷ – perhaps, most notably, in the 'cultural-linguistic' portrait of the tradition, and the reliance on concepts of language and linguistics that develop Nietzschean, Wittgensteinian and Derridean themes, such as Milbank's claim that, 'Jesus is essentially a linguistic and poetic reality' whose work is exemplary.²⁸ Thirdly, it is now clear why and how the tradition fell into disrepair, so a reworking that clears out such problems is needed.²⁹ Finally, certain things are just accepted as being so, which were not necessarily so earlier, perhaps a key example being the acceptance of homosexuality.³⁰ It will be seen at once that certain tensions appear between this and claims to uphold the Christian tradition and Chalcedonian orthodoxy. For a start, I think it fairly uncontroversial to claim that the group's acceptance of homosexuality and Milbank's claim about Jesus being essentially 'a linguistic and poetic reality' would have been enough for the council of Chalcedon to deliver an anathema against the movement. However, we shall dwell more upon this in due course.

WHAT IS LIBERAL THEOLOGY?

If we are to argue that Radical Orthodoxy displays the characteristics of liberal theology, then it is necessary that we should give some account of what we take that to be. Since Radical Orthodoxy sees itself as antithetically opposed to the liberal/modernist project, we must have a clear set of agreed criteria by which we can claim that they shares much in common. To allow such a basis of analysis I propose the following set of criteria drawn from the Radical Orthodox/post-liberal critique of 'liberal' theology:

- Inclined to define things in essentialist terms
- Dependent on straightforward dichotomies for assessments
- Marked by the will-to-power

- Marked by a turn to the self and/or an anthropocentric worldview
- Rationalist in description and analysis
- Marked by a conformity or accommodation to a prevailing worldview, and often apologetic for it

It should be emphasized that the descriptions are taken, partly, from post-liberal accusations against liberal theology and associated critiques of the 'Enlightenment Project'. Insider definitions of liberal theology, or those based in historical analysis, are likely to emphasize different aspects, for instance preferences for historical Jesus research over the divinized Christ of faith, or the belief that Christianity must be restated in terms of modern knowledge.³¹ To turn to our criteria of liberal theology, the first three are very much criticisms from opponents who would see these features as a factor in its Enlightenment and modernist leanings, and all of which are found in Milbank's writings as criticisms of modernity (and therefore, implicitly, of liberal theology).³² The final three are aspects that are used as criticisms, but would also be insider definitions. The fourth is an analytic description of liberal theology, which is seen as marked by the priority of human reasoning over revelation, or the tendency to see the human as the measure of all things.³³ The final two are aspects what liberal theologians would claim as virtues, but which are cast as vices by Milbank.³⁴ It is useful to consider how each might fit into the landscape of liberal theology; however, I shall also problematize them as a 'liberal' category by suggesting that they be found in 'conservative' or 'orthodox' theological models as well.

The first three characteristics may be considered together. The first and second are no doubt concepts most would repudiate of themselves. Likewise the third which is linked to post-modern claims that we exert power over that which we claim to know or interpret.³⁵ Space does not permit us to expound on all, so we will limit ourselves to a discussion of the second. Some liberals seem to suggest that there is such a thing as 'truth' which could be contrasted with 'falsehood'. Gavin D'Costa makes this kind of accusation against inclusivism as a liberal stance within the theology of religions, suggesting its proponents claim to know exactly where the Spirit operates in other faiths, and so know what counts as 'truth' or 'falsehood'.³⁶ The kind of fulfilment theology employed by John Nicol Farquhar is a case in point, clearly dividing Hinduism in this way. Although the fulfilment tradition is commonly associated with a nineteenth-century liberal tradition, however, Farquhar himself was far from being a liberal, possessing a simple evangelical faith,³⁷ and advocating a form of 'fulfilment' better described as the death of Hinduism - both of which make him appear a theological conservative.³⁸ These characteristics, we therefore suggest, do not divide between 'liberal' and 'conservative' theologies, although our examples may suggest these things are typical of modern theologies.³⁹

The fourth point, a theology marked by a turn to the self and/or an anthropocentric worldview, is more clearly a mark of something we would describe as 'liberal'. Whether we look at Friedrich Schleiermacher or Karl Rahner, we have a sense that our knowledge of God is mediated through human agency, rather than being something delivered by divine writ in a pure and unmediated fashion. However, when we turn to Tillich things are not so clear. The method of correlation seeks a meeting of human questions and divine answers. While we must interpret revelation in our situation, it is nevertheless something that can be seen as standing over and above our expression. Tillich's New Man, known through the Christ, stands as our answer, whether explained in Christological or existentialist terms.⁴⁰ Meanwhile, Barth would acknowledge that our reception of revelation is at a subjective

level, despite its objectivity, meaning it is always presented to us in human aspects.⁴¹ Here we can see affinities between theological traditions.

Fifth, although rationalism is a key liberal self-definition, Barth was criticized for being excessively rationalistic in developing his style of theology.⁴² Rationalism is not clearly an aspect of liberal/modern theology, and despite claims that it develops from the Enlightenment belief in reason, we may uncover earlier antecedents. Abelard can convincingly be claimed to have aspects of the 'liberal' about him, at least in part from his stress on reason over tradition⁴³ - which raises questions about 'liberal' as a new category of modern theology. Moreover, if we accept Abelard as 'liberal', then why not include such figures as Clement of Alexandria and Origen? I would certainly suggest that we can see aspects of what we would commonly term 'liberalism' in all of them. If our concern is with rationalism, however, we might also suggest that Augustine and Aquinas could find themselves in this grouping.⁴⁴ As argued by Aquinas, John Henry Newman and others, we should not consider faith and reason as antithetical,⁴⁵ the grounds adduced by Paul Badham for the need for modernist liberal theology.⁴⁶ Of course, one of the accusations levelled by post-modern critics of the liberal-modernist world is that its reason is based in an Enlightenment belief in a universal reason capable of coming to unbiased and neutral observations. Whether Enlightenment reason was a new beast is debateable, however; it can be argued that its roots lie in an older tradition coming from Humanist, Aristotelian and Socratic sources. To use reason to expound or critique religious tradition is therefore not simply a post-Enlightenment development, and can be found, to at least some degree, in David Hume who believed the application of reason helped him overcome the delusions of religion, Abelard who sought to disentangle the mess of confused thinking that characterized much previous scholastic thought, or even Aquinas who believed that human reason on its own was capable, via Natural Theology, of coming to a set of basic truths about God.⁴⁷ This aspect of 'liberal theology' is thus central to two of Milbank's great exemplars of the Christian tradition, Augustine and Aquinas.

Our sixth characteristic could be seen as primary amongst those theologians labelled 'liberal', such as Tillich, who made theology accord with existentialism (amongst other things), or Badham, who sees theology as needing to accord with the knowledge of modernity.⁴⁸ However, are not theology and theological thinking always children of their time? Tertullian's cry, 'What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?' simply reflected his Latin North African situation, as did the legalistic theology he endorsed. Like many 'conservatives', he was a reformer but did not realize it.⁴⁹ Likewise, Barth came from a background of growing dissatisfaction with liberal theology - the first quest for the historical Jesus was, of course, dead or dying by his time⁵⁰ - which was exacerbated by the First World War and the sense of anomie it engendered.⁵¹ In this sense he was adapting to his times. We should again mention Milbank's two favourite theologians of the classical Christian heritage, Augustine and Aquinas, as great assimilators, who sought conformity with what they saw as the dominating intellectual worldviews of their day.⁵² Are liberals, then, those who acknowledge the context of their time in changing theology, while conservatives are those who deny it and claim to be teaching what has always been taught? Such a distinction is surely too crass to be sustained, but, as we have seen, it is hard to discern a clear cut distinction between 'liberals' and 'conservatives', so we are left wondering where to draw the line.

Having overviewed our six characteristics, if these are 'liberal' tendencies - and I by no means endorse the supposition that any of these are in and of themselves such - they then exist on a continuum with what are commonly understood to be 'conservative' theologies.

As Milbank and other opponents of liberal theology would see them as key characteristics, however, we may assume they are not found, or at least not in the same way, within the 'conservative' or 'orthodox' theologies. Yet, as we shall see, much of Milbank's own work is characterized by these characteristics. If these may be located on a continuum with 'orthodox' or 'conservative' positions, then the fact that he possesses these traits may not, by itself, make him a 'liberal'. In as far as these categories are held by Radical Orthodoxy to characterize liberal and modern theologies, however, it problematizes the claims of Milbank and the whole Radical Orthodoxy movement if its own proposal possesses these same traits. Their claims to be radical and orthodox rest largely on an opposition to all that modernist liberal theology is and does.⁵³

I think the term liberal should be used with nuance. Just as it is difficult to apply the label 'conservative' to Radical Orthodoxy or to thinkers such as Hans Urs von Balthasar, so the charge of 'liberal' should also be used with caution. To this end it is useful to mention briefly one of the most thought-provoking taxonomies of Christian theology, the types set out by Hans Frei.⁵⁴ He outlines five: 1) theology as a philosophical discipline, exemplified by Gordon Kaufman; 2) theology as an academic or philosophical discipline, but one that takes the symbols of Christian faith seriously, exemplified by David Tracy; 3) theology as Christian self-description, but one that should also be an academic and philosophical discipline, exemplified by Friedrich Schleiermacher; 4) theology as Christian self-description, where philosophy has a role as a junior partner, exemplified by Karl Barth; and 5) theology as pure Christian self-description, exemplified by D. Z. Phillips.⁵⁵ Here, instead of finding 'liberals' and 'conservatives' as opposites we find Schleiermacher next to Barth, with Tracy and Tillich in close proximity.⁵⁶ I would suggest that Milbank would fit best in category 3 because for him, while theology is primarily about Christian self-description, it must and should make use of philosophy as a core partner in this enterprise, though one that is definitely 'positioned' by Christian discourse. Yet because of this his approach also suggests Frei's type 5, a matter I shall address.⁵⁷ To further undermine these lazy 'liberal' and 'conservative' categories, throughout this paper I shall highlight similarities between Milbank and Tillich; we should be careful in assuming that monolithic or single accounts can sum up any style or mode of theological reasoning.

MILBANK AS LIBERAL THEOLOGIAN: OUTLINING THE CHARGES

Firstly, I will dispute Milbank's claims that post-modernism 'overcomes' modernity. If it is accepted that post-modernity is not a new phase of thinking, but merely an extension, or exaggeration, of certain facets of modernity, then the claim to be engaged upon a new enterprise is destabilized. If modernity is not 'overcome', then its critique still stands, making Radical Orthodoxy's reversion to a 'pure' Christian *petite narrative* untenable, and its own claim to have 'overcome' post-modernism becomes unstable. Next, I will work through our criteria of liberal theology. Specifically, I will accuse Milbank of a modernist 'essentialism'. He believes he can clearly identify, in a quasi-Husserlian phenomenalist sense, what things are in themselves, such as 'the Christian tradition', 'modernity', and 'post-modernism'. Thirdly, I accuse Milbank of employing a binary system of dichotomies, 'true-false', 'good-bad', etc. Fourthly, although in common with other post-liberal style theologies, Radical Orthodoxy rejects the Schleiermacherean notion that experience provides the basis for religion, I argue that in employing the trope of 'pure tradition', the way is open for a highly personalized set of readings that highlight the self as

interpretative authority, and is deeply implicated in the will-to-power. Here I shall mainly dwell on the third of our criteria of liberal theology, the will-to-power, and will not address separately the fourth, its anthropocentrism, which is treated obliquely here and elsewhere, but will be picked up again in our final assessment. Fifthly, in terms of modernist rationalism, while post-modern wordplay and lightness of touch are employed, the style remains stodgy academic prose in a distinctly modernist idiom, yet at the same time, claims not to be apologetic and any pretence at writing 'theology' are laid low by the same rationalist preferences. Finally, if modernism involves adaptation to the world, Radical Orthodoxy also adapts; it merely updates the liberal project by applying a new context - post-modernism - to theology. It is no different from the work of Tillich, an 'arch liberal', who was both a 'theologian of the church' and a 'theologian of culture' and like Milbank sought to maintain tradition and relate it to a new context.

Having briefly outlined our accusations, I now present a more detailed account of each.

Disputed claims to post-modern status

Before discussing why Milbankianism may be seen as a form of liberal theology, we must first deal with the issue of 'liberal' in relation to 'post-liberal' or 'post-modern' theology. Milbank sees his work as being, in one sense, 'post-modern', for in *Theology and Social Theory* he says: 'A postmodern (or 'post-liberal') theology, as George Lindbeck has rightly argued, must reject two forms of 'foundationalism', errors which he attempts to show his theology has avoided more successfully than Lindbeck.⁵⁸

We cannot attempt here a full definition or analysis of the 'post-modern', but it must be addressed for two reasons.⁵⁹ First, if Hyman's interpretation of Milbank and post-modernism is correct, then 'post-modernism' has overcome 'modernism' so that liberal theology is no longer viable and has been surpassed, and so my argument becomes futile. This certainly seems a correct interpretation of Milbank, who speaks of the need to 'overcome the pathos of modern theology' through a restoration 'in postmodern terms,' while he suggests that 'only Christian theology . . . [can] position and overcome nihilism.'⁶⁰ Second, I should position myself in relation to this key term, and thereby give an account of myself and where I stand in relation to certain critical debates in this area.⁶¹

To begin with the second, I have set out accounts of how I understand the term post-modern elsewhere, and so will only briefly treat it here.⁶² First, we should distinguish post-modern philosophy (post-modernism) from post-modern culture (post-modernity). The latter is the contemporary cultural, social and technological matrix of Western society, identified by such things as multi-culturalism, communication technology, consumerism, etc. The former, being a variety of philosophical views, is typically centred around the following (interlinked) traits: 1) a dissatisfaction with the modern world, especially the Enlightenment (project) as exemplified by Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Hegel; 2) the attempt to reconstitute knowledge, or challenge traditional forms of knowing; 3) Jean-Francois Lyotard's suspicion of meta-narratives; 4) Michel Foucault's belief that knowledge and power are entwined – to define something, is, in some way, to claim control over it; 5) Jacques Derrida's challenge to linguistic usage and understanding, especially his famous saying everything is text, glossed elsewhere as everything is context; 6) respect for the Other, especially a concern with the way marginalized or repressed (or exotic) groups are ignored or packaged and controlled by an elite (e.g., Western, male, powerful, academic); 7) the heteroglossy of Mikhail Bakhtin, implying a multiplicity of voices, as opposed to monoglossy, or a single voice or narrative; 8) the denial of fixed essences, and a trend to see everything as being a complex and changing set of

relationships; 9) a stress on indeterminacy, that is, knowledge is always partial and incomplete; and, 10) a use of intellectual (and cultural) *bricolage* (employing a variety of sources and styles in *ad hoc* formulations).

Our first point: is the Enlightenment Project a failed endeavour? Assuming its critics are right, then its belief in grand narratives, absolute knowledge, progress, unbiased reason, etc., are now in tatters, shredded at the post-modern turn. Hyman's interpretation of Milbank suggests that just as post-modernity has 'overcome' modernity, so too has Radical Orthodoxy 'overcome' post-modernity. We need to dispute this, however, because if correct, Milbank's theology cannot be a form of liberal theology but operates in a distinct realm.

Before addressing this, however, we must check the legitimacy of the term/notion 'overcome' in relation to Milbankianism, as well as determine what it means in this context. While Milbank deploys this in *Theology and Social Theory*, he disavows it in a later work where he says 'talk of [philosophy's] overcoming is absurd.'⁶³ It would be useful, therefore, to consider briefly the reasons why Milbank says this. For Milbank, philosophy as metaphysics is simply an empty or misguided enterprise, whereas to 'overcome' something suggests that one is faced with a real alternative or way of doing things that is to be replaced or transcended by another system.⁶⁴ Yet Milbank rejects the notion that there is any secular sphere apart from theology; to endorse theology's 'overcoming' of such a secular sphere would therefore be to give legitimacy to this realm as a genuine alternative. This, as Richardson shows, is the response Milbank makes to his critics who suggest he tends towards fideism or theocracy.⁶⁵ Richardson believes that Milbank's response to critics such as Lash is just sophistry, however.⁶⁶ He believes like Hyman that a violent ontology is actually inherent in Milbank's work.⁶⁷ Even if we accept that Milbank does not like the term, the notion of 'overcoming' is in one sense inherent in his work, since *Radical Orthodoxy* argues that it can ignore modernity and return to Chalcedon orthodoxy because the historical critique modernity offers has been invalidated by post-modernism.⁶⁸ We can therefore say that this notion implies that 'post-modernism' is a new epistemological movement beyond modernity that invalidates and wholly erases its predecessor (ontologically if not chronologically).

We must now ask whether 'modernity,' and therefore liberal theology, has been 'overcome'. In place of a digression that would take us beyond the boundaries of this paper, I will cite thinkers who take an opposing view: that the modern world cannot simply be overturned or bypassed by post-modernity, and that the post-modern is probably best seen as another manifestation of the modern. From within theology David Tracy, who has entered into an extensive encounter with post-modern thought, tells us that we must move through modernity to post-modernity, in contrast to those who would wish to ignore the inconveniences of historical-critical thought in their theology.⁶⁹ He believes the modern critique and worldview is a live and valid phenomenon. Another major theological voice is David Ray Griffin, for whom post-modernism is simply another permutation of the modern; indeed, he offers an alternative post-modernism as a way past what he sees as its dead end.⁷⁰ That two such respected thinkers take issue with the claim that post-modernism has 'overcome' modernity should at least give us pause. Outside theology many of the most respected and perceptive critics of post-modernism reject Milbank's interpretation, seeing it instead as a set of new turns within modernity and arguing for a more balanced and subtle relationship. This would include the sociologist David Lyon and the literary critics Keith Tester and Terry Eagleton, the intellectual historian J. J. Clarke,⁷¹ while sociologist Ian Burkitt believes that post-modernism's failure to take account of

embodiment means it is still in thrall to one of the essential modernist conditions of life.⁷² Space does not permit us to elaborate here, but I suggest that the opinions of such a wide range of critics should lead us to at least entertain the notion that the post-modern turn is not a completely new phenomenon that replaces and erases (overcomes) the whole of modern thought.

Before moving on we should address one of Hyman's (post-modern) arguments. This is that only persuasion, as Wittgenstein suggested, may be used: we cannot out argue Radical Orthodoxy, and certainly we cannot prove it to be wrong, because that approach is itself inappropriately redolent of a modernist hermeneutics.⁷³ All we can do is to 'out-narrate' it – that is, tell a better and more convincing story. I do not fully agree with Hyman, I believe that it is still possible to 'demonstrate' Radical Orthodoxy wrong in certain respects – certainly, criticisms internal to the Christian tradition could be employed this way. I nevertheless think the idea holds some merit, because proponents at opposite ends of the theological spectrum assume diverse axiomatic norms.⁷⁴ We must therefore recognize that we are not always arguing using the same rules, nor applying these rules in the same ways. To a certain extent, therefore, I will be engaged in the 'art' of persuasion, as much as in the 'science' of logical and reasoned argument. I will admit, however, that, in doing this I stand virtually no hope of convincing Milbank of the 'error' of his ways. I do hope, nevertheless, to be able to convince less committed supporters of Radical Orthodoxy that it should be avoided. This explains my subtitle, why this is in part a rhetorical counter.

My argument above has been that the modern world is not destroyed by the claims of 'post-modernism'. Instead, modernity has changed and become perhaps more sophisticated. We should then expect to find aspects of it still present in post-modern theologies. Even if the above argument is not accepted, I hope the following critique will show that Radical Orthodoxy has still not escaped modernity.⁷⁵

Radical orthodoxy's modernist essentialism

Radical Orthodoxy berates what it sees as a key feature of modernity, namely essentialism (there are 'things' with solid identifiable essences that we can know as they are in themselves).⁷⁶ Like post-modernism, however, it essentializes its enemy, modernity. Proponents of post-modernism typically stress its indefinable nature, but have no problems in pinning down 'modernity' and saying not just what it is, but also that its essence is the desire to identify and control the Other.⁷⁷ Milbankianism continues this trend with its claim that both post-modernism and modernism have the same essence, 'nihilism'.⁷⁸ The claim that all systems apart from theology have their ultimate value in emptiness and are at heart nihilistic is a recurrent theme in Milbank's work.⁷⁹ Furthermore, through its genealogy Radical Orthodoxy defines modernity and post-modernity's nature within its own terms as heretical theologies, or antitheologies.⁸⁰ It employs here a quasi-Husserlian phenomenology, wherein the eidetic step is seeing things from the 'absolute' standpoint of theology and the Christian tradition.⁸¹

Perhaps the central essentialist reification of Radical Orthodoxy, however, is its identification - or creation - of the 'Christian tradition'. Not only does it assume that there is such a thing, but it also believes it can determine its nature. The sectarian bias here is staggering. What 'Christianity' is for Radical Orthodoxy is a Western Neo-platonic and semi-Aristotelian tradition best exemplified in the passage from Augustine to Aquinas. The growth and development of the Eastern churches is largely ignored, with occasional references to a few of the early Greek fathers, the main exception to this being Gregory of Nyssa.⁸² An ahistorical myopia is operative here; ignoring the breadth and diversity of

actual historical Christianities, Radical Orthodoxy believes it can pick out those bits it finds congenial and equate this with the true form of Christianity. This fuses the worst of both modernity and post-modernism. The worst of post-modernism is highlighted by Janz, in the way genealogies are written based not upon attentiveness to sources, but rather according to whether the writer strategically employs post-modern hermeneutical moves.⁸³ What concerns us here, however, is Radical Orthodoxy's resemblance to modernity. Within the history of religions it has been observed that Western modernist academe has found it easy to identify – and even create – 'religions'.⁸⁴ It has done this by taking certain elements as definitive of the system; thus the minor dharma of Advaita Vedanta has been taken by many Western commentators as definitive of Hinduism, or the texts of the Dao De Jing and Zhuang Zi have been used to construct the 'real' Daoism.⁸⁵ Radical Orthodoxy has resurrected the well-known modernist myth of the 'true' form of religion and employed it to its own ends. As late modern/post-modern criticism has informed us, however, this is not possible.

Milbank uses 'religion' as referring to a *sui generis* category of things in themselves, whereas recent studies have argued that such usage is a product of a Western, modernist, Enlightenment set of understandings; his understanding of the relationship between Christianity and other 'religions' relies therefore on an outmoded modernist essentialism.⁸⁶

Radical Orthodoxy is also guilty of another essentialism, that of defining post-modernity. A recurring insistence of post-modernism's exponents is to say that it is beyond definition.⁸⁷ While Radical Orthodoxy relies on this for its overcoming of modernity, however, it then claims to know post-modernism's real nature, 'nihilism', which it may then unmask and 'overcome'.⁸⁸ Within this project, it is constantly asserting its ability to neatly categorize the Other as whatever best suits its own interpretive agenda, disregarding nuances and subtleties in its interlocutor.

Binary Dichotomies

Radical Orthodoxy accuses modernity of employing an overly-simplified binary system of dichotomies as modes of understanding; however, it also does this. Perhaps the most notable is its 'hero-villain' stereotyping of theologians and thinkers, closely bound up with its genealogy: theology goes wrong with Duns Scotus and Suarez, who are cast as heretics, while Augustine, Aquinas, Hamann, Jacobi and a few other select individuals are raised to iconic status. This slightly overstates the case as some criticism is made of Aquinas, and modifications made to Augustine to make his system thoroughly 'post-modern'; however, I am unaware of any use being made in any positive sense of the 'villains'. This is not untypical of post-modernism, where those seen as having taken the post-modern turn can practically do no wrong – especially its progenitors like Nietzsche. Those seen as modernists on the other hand are relegated to the outer darkness, as though nothing useful can be learned from them.⁸⁹ For Radical Orthodoxy a host of other dichotomies follow from this: 'true' versus 'false' religion, 'good' and 'bad' ways of interpreting the universe, etc. It may seem something of a caricature to hold up these stark dichotomies within the complex and subtle thought of Milbank, yet it is hard to read his work and not get a strong message of theological heroes and villains in an almost black and white fashion.⁹⁰ While it may appear as caricature, as in most cases where 'conservatives' or 'liberals' portray the other, the self-expression of groups can tend towards something that gives truth to these caricatures, as William Placher has noted: 'Every time I start to be persuaded that 'experiential-expressivism' is a caricature, I read something in which that position exactly

as described by Lindbeck appears in pure form. They really are out there.'⁹¹ I may say the same about Milbank and other members of the Radical Orthodoxy movement.

Will-to-power

By employing the trope of the *petite narrative* against modernity's meta-narrative, post-modernism denies it is implicated in the Nietzschean-Foucaultian concept of the will-to-power, whereby all systems of reason are seen as systems of interpretation, meaning that those who employ them are doing no more than asserting their preference over and against others. However, this masquerade has long since been uncovered, as has the claim that there is no grand narrative is the greatest overarching system of all.⁹² Moreover, post-modern interpretations explicitly deny certain modern interpretations, such as the Schleiermacherian notion that experience provides the basis for religion.⁹³ They therefore set themselves in competition with other systems.

In seeking to 'overcome' post-modernism Milbankianism is, in a way, reasserting the need for meta-narratives – in his case, the Christian story. In one sense this is true: Milbank does see meta-narrative returning, but he is aware that he cannot simply return to a traditional meta-narrative, for then he is subject to post-modernism's criticism. Instead he posits his meta-narrative as a 'fiction', a story that knows it is a story.⁹⁴ He nevertheless rejects relativism ('nihilism') and wishes to reassert Christianity's own narrative as the best. Milbankianism sees its own deployment of truth-bearing propositions as shielded from such charges by its claim to ontological peacefulness. However, Hyman has argued cogently and persuasively against this, for this simply transfers the setting for violent overcoming to another, transcendental, level.⁹⁵ Even if this were not granted, other faiths make claims for all-encompassing systems of thought grounded in de-ontological transcendence. Post-liberal theology as a whole tends to ignore other faiths either by insisting on the use of one narrative alone or positing that by introducing revelation, the Christian tradition has gone to a different realm of activity that trumps other religious claims.⁹⁶ This is a problematic; for any claim that the Christian revelation is ontologically different from, say, Islamic revelation (a closely related notion because of the kinship between these faiths) rests on the naked assertion of the superiority of the Christian story over the Islamic one for reasons internal to itself. We are dealing therefore with two systems of persuasion, each asserting its own will-to-power. The attempt by a Radical Orthodoxy-type approach to get beyond this, seen in Gerard Loughlin, also fails:

It must be remembered, however, that the Christian story is provisional because not yet ended. It is performed in the hope that the one of whom it speaks will return again to say it. The last word is yet to be said; and when it is, the Church will also find itself positioned. Thus the Christian story resists mastery by being the prayerful tale of one who comes in the form of a servant and who will return as a friend.⁹⁷

Islam also sees its final fulfilment in eschatological verification, and, in certain respects, has a more secure footing than Radical Orthodoxy. Islamic teaching insists that we can never know who is the true Muslim, as this judgement is left to God and will be revealed on judgement day;⁹⁸ within the Sh'ia tradition the correct text of the Qur'an is itself unknown, and thus full revelation – which for many forms of Christianity has already happened once and with finality – is still awaited.⁹⁹ We have not touched on how Radical Orthodoxy's claim to have the ontological trump card plays out against Hindu, Buddhist, Daoist or other faiths. James Byrne notes that any neo-orthodox theology must present a view of revelation that 'responds to the challenge of religious pluralism,' by being 'more than

another case of special pleading wrapped up in a sugarcoating of postmodern nonfoundationalism.¹⁰⁰

Arguably, the clearest example of the will-to-power within Radical Orthodoxy is the trope of 'pure tradition', in a way that is open for a highly personalized set of readings that highlights the self as interpretative authority. Indeed, Gareth Jones has critiqued Milbank for seeing himself as a 'saviour' figure within Christianity – we were all in epistemological and hermeneutical darkness until this great theologian threw off the veil of untruth and revealed the light.¹⁰¹ By claiming to uncover an undetected heresy infecting all contemporary Christian thought, moreover, Milbank is claiming that he alone is able to make authoritative statements. He is, as it were, pulling the rug out from under liberal, Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed and other theologians, and at the same time claiming that he possesses a flying carpet. As Janz has argued, Radical Orthodoxy also traffics in a movement in contemporary post-modern (what Janz calls post-subject) theorizing that privileges, as opposed to traditional thorough-going academic critique, a surprising or radical interplay of ideas and novel interpretations as a legitimating force.¹⁰² Milbankianism deploys its internal and connected network of usages as a form of hyper-narrative wherein a power to adjudicate between right and wrong presides. This supports the depiction of this approach as grounded in the will-to-power, for through the demonstration of certain novel hermeneutic leaps and turns, the employer reaches a space above and beyond conventional critique.

Rationalism and post-modern style

Hyman has brought to light the contrast between post-modernism's wordplay and lightness of touch, and the actuality of Milbank's plodding and stodgy academic prose.¹⁰³ This suggests a distinctly modernist idiom, where through dense footnoting and argumentation one may come to the truth. Another critique has argued that Radical Orthodoxy's corpus is not liturgical, thereby distancing it from the realm it claims as its *raison d'être*.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, a contrast has been drawn between its writings and Augustine's, whose aim was to lift the soul of the reader up to God;¹⁰⁵ the pretence at writing 'theology' as the study of God is undermined by its rationalist preferences.

Adaptation to the age

If adapting to modernity is a key feature of liberal theology, it can be argued that Milbankianism merely updates this by adapting to post-modernism. Milbank may claim that in strict adherence to traditional doctrine Radical Orthodoxy differs from liberal theology; however, Tillich's role as both 'theologian of the church' and 'theologian of culture' problematizes this.¹⁰⁶ He, like Milbank, sought to maintain and protect tradition, as 'theologian of the church', but also wanted to relate it to a new context, and here we see that Milbank too is a 'theologian of culture'. In arguing that the term 'liberal' should be employed with more nuance, this comparison provides a paradigmatic case where the difference between 'conservative' and 'liberal' theologians is based not in some essentialist trait, but rather in the degree or emphasis of interpretation. Why, when Milbank sees doctrine as an unfinished project still open to innovation and change,¹⁰⁷ is he 'conservative' and Tillich 'liberal'? To draw another parallel, if 'the sacral interpenetrates everywhere' such that there is no secular space,¹⁰⁸ and in 'secular'/contemporary needs Milbank finds a Christian answer, this is but a contemporary reworking of Tillich's finding questions in secular (existential) spaces that Christianity answers.

Other examples of Milbankianism's adaptation to the world would be its return to a spiritual worldview, citing as its rationale the fact that post-modern culture has returned to a spiritual worldview, evidenced by the multitude of books on angels and interest in the 'paranormal'.¹⁰⁹ Modernity and its demythologizing is seen as simply misguided, for a spiritual worldview has returned. Far from cutting through the morass of secular materialism, however, Milbank occupies a niche which the outside (may I say 'secular'?) world has provided. While Milbank might not forgive me for saying this, it is clear that Radical Orthodoxy responds to the same cultural anxiety and dissatisfaction as does the New Age movement.¹¹⁰

However, if a return to traditional Christianity is possible because post-modern society finds it thinkable, then the absolute supremacy of Christianity that Radical Orthodoxy espouses is based on a non-Christian premise. Moreover, we see it not as a radical rethinking and departure from contemporary believing, but merely another permutation of fashionable thought. The 'secular' world provides both the opposition and the ground on which Radical Orthodoxy positions itself: it exists by its very accommodation to the standard of this world. Hence, far from isolating Christianity against external criticism, Radical Orthodoxy renders itself vulnerable to intellectual fashion.

Perhaps the issue that most clearly marks Radical Orthodoxy akin to liberal theology, however, is its endorsement of homosexuality. While this may be argued for in terms of contemporary knowledge over and against tradition and scripture, such argumentation creates problems for Radical Orthodoxy's claims, whose rationale for this innovation within Christian teaching is that it doesn't conform to the presuppositions of our age!¹¹¹ This is accommodation to the spirit of the age in which Christian tradition is clearly squared off against modern beliefs and values. The only rationale for its innovation is that given by liberal theology.¹¹²

CONCLUSION 1: ASSESSING MILBANK AS A LIBERAL THEOLOGIAN

We must now assess whether Milbankianism and Radical Orthodoxy fit the six categories we have specified as typical of liberal theology.

One: Radical Orthodoxy sees Christianity, modernity and other things as essences which it can control and interpret. Two: it uses straightforward dichotomies for its understanding of many figures. Three: perhaps the greatest divergence between Radical Orthodoxy and most liberal theologies is its rejection of anthropocentrism and the turn to the self; however, Radical Orthodoxy is not wholly a return to something else, because the human situation, rather than scripture or tradition is, at least in part, determined by our cultural setting, while we have seen that it highlights the individual interpretation over and against the tradition. Four: related to our previous point, and in respect of its fideistic assertions, it demonstrates a will-to-power. Five: contrasting Radical Orthodoxy's writing style with post-modernism, liturgy and Augustine, we see an overtly rationalist/modernist idiom, lacking both post-modernism's lightness of touch and playfulness, and the spiritual and transformative air that marks Augustine's work and liturgical texts. Six: from this last point we can see that it inherits much from the modern world from which it takes flight. Moreover, Radical Orthodoxy relies upon a particular interpretation of the post-modern world. Also, Milbank's notion of salvation is based within the linguistic claims of post-modern thinking, departing from tradition by seeing Christ's death as merely exemplary. We have also suggested that Milbank still inhabits a modern worldview.

If 'liberal' and 'conservative' theologies lie in some undetermined relationship on a sliding scale, then we would expect to see correlations. As I have suggested, Milbank may be seen as fitting into type 3 of Frei's typology, placing him alongside many other 'liberals'. Yet he is understood as a conservative in the theological spectrum. His theology, while stressing the predominance of revelation, nevertheless does concede that philosophy has an important role in supplementing and expressing it, and so theological expression can change radically, as we have seen with his poetic Christ.¹¹³ We therefore suggest that his is a theology of correlation that conforms to Frei's type 3. Yet, his theology is different in some respects from Frei's representative of type 3 theology, Schleiermacher, for whom theological doctrines were but human expressions of religious experiences. Schleiermacher's theology is more of a bottom-up exploration, whereas, like Barth, Milbank favours a top-down approach, where God's Word infuses and prescribes all other activity.¹¹⁴ Here our fourth category of anthropocentrism seems central but, as we have seen, human interpretation exists in all theology: we can never escape the 'turn to the self'. This suggests that his theology may be of type 5, one that sees theology alone as self-sufficient, and it is perhaps this flavour that gives his theology a 'conservative' stamp. We may therefore describe him as a post-modern, post-liberal Tillich; our hope may be that, if he loses the tone of Frei's type 5, he may become the exemplar of type 3 that Frei believed Schleiermacher never achieved¹¹⁵ – to become a post-modern liberal Tillich.¹¹⁶

CONCLUSION 2: REFLECTING ON THE TERM 'LIBERAL'

In a review of Markham's *A Theology of Engagement*, Robert Neville suggests: 'His [Markham's] position . . . is vulnerable to being called 'liberal', by which the conservatives mean theology that has evacuated the central Christian commitments in order to accommodate modernity or the secular world.'¹¹⁷ In Neville's sense, Milbank is not a 'liberal' for he does not engage but repudiates modernity, although, as we have seen, he does in some ways accommodate the modern in its post-modern turn. Significantly, and unlike Markham, his theology is not one of openness to other sources (engagement), but one that seeks to assert the self-sufficiency of the Christian narrative. Whether he has repudiated the 'central Christian commitments' is open to debate; his advocacy of Chalcedon Orthodoxy suggests not, but critics suggest he has.¹¹⁸ These observations help us consider what is meant by 'liberal theology' in the light of our earlier assessment that the commonly acclaimed characteristics attributed to it do not clearly distinguish it from 'conservative' theologies. Is the term meaningless? Is it 'bottom-up' theology? Is it best understood as an inclination, or even a mode of doing theology?¹¹⁹ It is not within the scope of this paper to answer these questions; however, I would suggest that the term 'liberal' needs to be rethought, as it is by no means a monolithic (or pejorative) term whose deployment offers insight into a theologian or method so described, and is not something that can readily be used to dismiss a given theological approach or work.¹²⁰

CONCLUSION 3: BUILDING ON MILBANK'S WORK

I have argued that Radical Orthodoxy's claims to be something new fail, for it can be seen as a continuation of liberalism within a post-modern context.¹²¹ Indeed, it may also be said to be a rather confused and ill considered liberal theology, inconsistently appealing to

tradition, the spirit of the age, and the intellectual resources of its exponents as its guiding impulse. This confusion stems, at least in part I believe, from its misguided belief that post-modernism has ‘overcome’ modernity, and that it has ‘overcome’ post-modernism; it therefore finds itself trying to do theology in a space that doesn’t exist. As pointed out elsewhere, having done away with everything but theology, Milbank’s attempts to put theology into his scheme flounder, as he needs that which he has disallowed. Once he realizes he is merely another liberal theologian – albeit one doing theology within a post-modern space – and that perhaps, today, nothing else is really credible, then we may expect great things from him. Until then the pretence of the so-called Radical Orthodoxy will no doubt continue.

Some critics have suggested that it is always easier to destroy than to build, and that if one cannot put a system in place to match Milbank’s, the critique is weakened and we should follow him until something better comes along.¹²² In response I will make three comments: first, the space of this article does not allow building work, though indications of what are needed are inherent in it; second, it is possible to criticize a system as untenable, without having a replacement – if I am stuck inside a burning building I can rightly tell others not to climb the stairway if I can see that fire has weakened it to the point of collapse, even if I cannot, as yet, see a safe way out; third, I would request some patience, for the development of a system takes time, but I can assure the readers that this critique takes place within a framework of new building work, or, at least, an attempt to find a moderately safe way out of an inferno. Having said this – indeed, even after comparing Radical Orthodoxy to a blazing inferno – I would like to end by suggesting three positive things that can be taken from Milbank’s work. Firstly, his expression of Jesus as a ‘linguistic and poetic reality’ could be a useful move in contemporary Christological thinking. It allows us to think of soteriological questions in ways that move between the simply realist or mythological. Secondly, the way Radical Orthodoxy embraces a ‘spiritual’ vision of the world accords with much contemporary thinking around the re-enchancement of the cosmos, which via the *analogia entis* (the analogy of being) allows us to think beyond certain ‘modernist’ ways within philosophical theology.¹²³ Finally, by seeking to see a distinctive and legitimate theological role in all discourse, it offers an inspiring vision for the discipline. Rather than always being ‘placed’, I think that Milbank is right that theology should seek to assert its own voice. While Milbank seems to see these things as closing the doors to discourse with external voices, however, I believe the path he proposes should lead us to open these doors. His ‘spiritual’ vision of the world suggests that God is found beyond the borders of traditional theology and revelation. Indeed, his rethinking of Christology will allow for a more inclusive Christ; therefore, theology’s distinctive voice should lead to a dialogue with these other voices, not a monologue. While this is not the place to develop these ideas, I believe they indicate that while I would warn against the ‘flavour’ of Milbank’s Radical Orthodoxy, I also believe that much of what he says holds great promise for the development of theology if it takes its place within a broader discourse of contemporary theology.¹²⁴

Notes

1 The very *raison d’être* of the movement is a reaction against what it sees as the prevailing liberalism within much academic theology. See John Milbank, Graham Ward, and Catherine Pickstock, ‘Introduction: Suspending the material: the turn of radical orthodoxy’, in John Milbank, Graham Ward, and Catherine Pickstock (eds), *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 1–20. Moreover, Gavin Hyman defines Radical

Orthodoxy as the 'scourge of modernity'. See Gavin Hyman, *The Predicament of Postmodern Theology: Radical Orthodoxy or Nihilist Textualism* (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), pp. 49–52.

2 The same may be said for 'post-modern' and 'modern', on which I shall say more below.

3 Wayne J. Hankey & Douglas Hedley (eds), *Deconstructing Radical Orthodoxy: Postmodern Theology, Rhetoric and Truth* (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2005), p. xii.

4 This has been recognized since the movement's inception; see, for instance, Gavin D'Costa, 'Seeking After Theological Vision', *Reviews in Religion and Theology* 6: 4 (1999), pp. 354–9, p. 357. However, I must thank Professor Elizabeth Stuart for bringing the need to speak of Radical Orthodoxy as something other than a homogenous system to my attention.

5 For instance, Milbank references Pickstock's work as a support for his own; see, Milbank, J., 'The Programme of Radical Orthodoxy', in Laurence Paul Hemming (ed.), *Radical Orthodoxy? – A Catholic Enquiry* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), p. 36, fn 1, while they have worked together on some important theoretical work for the project, Milbank, J. & Pickstock, C., *Truth in Aquinas*, 'Radical Orthodoxy Series' (London: Routledge, 2001).

6 It should be mentioned that Ward's recent work appears to distance him somewhat from the Radical Orthodoxy project, or, at least, the Milbankian strand of it. Indeed, I have more sympathy with his theological stance than that of Milbank or Pickstock. In so far as my critique applies less to Ward - I find some aspects of his thought congenial - I suggest he exemplifies what may be termed a more 'moderate' version of Radical Orthodoxy in contradistinction to Milbank's more 'extreme' form.

7 In view of this, I would distinguish my approach from that focusing upon 'caritas' that Hoffmeyer advocates (J. F. Hoffmeyer, 'Charitable Interpretation', in Rosemary Radford Ruether & Marion Grau (eds), *Interpreting the Postmodern: Responses to 'Radical Orthodoxy'*, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2006), pp. 3–17), while, as I have suggested, I can find points of empathy this piece focuses upon the errors, as I see, them of the movement and is mainly a polemical work.

8 Milbank, et. al., 'Introduction', p. 2.

9 They form a focus for much writing by the movement, e.g., Catherine Pickstock, 'Radical Orthodoxy and the Meditations of Time', in Hemming, *Radical*, and Milbank & Pickstock, 'Truth', both of which focus on Aquinas, while Milbank has previously entitled his project as centred in Augustine, see John Milbank, 'Postmodern Critical Augustinianism: A Short 'Summa' in Forty-Two Responses to Unasked Questions', in Graham Ward (ed), *The Postmodern God: A Theological Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997).

10 See, for instance, Laurence Hemming, 'Quod Impossibile Est! Aquinas and Radical Orthodoxy', in Hemming, *Radical*, and T. Breyfogle, 'Is There Room for Political Philosophy in Postmodern Critical Augustinianism', in Hankey and Hedley, *Deconstructing*, and Wayne Hankey, 'Theoria versus Poesis: Neoplatonism and Trinitarian Difference in Aquinas, John Milbank, Jean-Luc Marion and John Zizioulas', *Modern Theology*, 15, 4 (1999), pp. 387–415.

11 This is a particular concern of Milbank, which we shall discuss in due course. He expresses this idea in such places as, Milbank, John, *Theology and Social Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), where he speaks of theology speaking 'directly out of the Biblical tradition, without any recourse to external supplementation' (p. 389), and in *The Word Made Strange* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997) he uses the term, 'thinking out of the resources of revelation alone' (p. 36).

12 It should be noted that while this is a specifically Milbankian contention, Ward has more recently argued for the impossibility of this (Graham Ward, *Cultural Transformation and Religious Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), chapter 1).

13 See Hyman, *The Predicament*, p. 82, referencing Milbank, J., 'The Programme', p. 37. Thus, Milbank sees himself as left with the vestiges of an apologetic, although he wants to speak only to Christians.

14 This comes partly from Milbank's seminal, *Theology and Social Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), but is also found within the *Radical Orthodoxy* volume in J. Montag, 'Revelation: The false legacy of Suárez'. In the former, Milbank accuses Duns Scotus of being the first to invent a 'fundamental ontology' (pp. 302–3).

15 While no medievalist, I scent severe problems. One of these is that the Radical Orthodoxy ontology is based around a Christian Platonism that it sees reflected strongly in Augustine. It is the less 'mystical' more rationalist influence of Aristotle that is seen as the disturbing influence, so I am confused here as to why Aquinas is seen as so virtuous. He, more than anyone, surely, was responsible for bringing Aristotle into Western Christian thought? Therefore, the negativities they detect in Scotus have their seeds in Aquinas, although their interpretation of the latter plays down the Aristotelianism, and suggests he was really a thorough going Platonist. We may even take it further, and suggest the subjection of theology to human reasoning goes back further to Abelard, if not to another of their heroes, Anselm. As far as I can see, while Scotus may make some new claims the basis of all he does comes from a genealogy of intellectual thought deeply ingrained in Western theology already. Recently, Milbank has himself admitted that there were earlier trends with what he calls 'Avicennised Augustinianism' (John Milbank, 'The grandeur of reason and the perversity of rationalism: Radical Orthodoxy's first decade', in John Milbank and Simon Oliver, *The Radical Orthodoxy Reader*, Radical Orthodoxy series (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 367–404, p. 379).

16 See John Milbank, 'Knowledge: the theological critique of philosophy in Hamann and Jacobi', in Milbank et. al., *Radical*. It is also worth mentioning that Milbank's far-fetched claim that actually Hamann and Jacobi have secretly been the most influential thinkers of the last few hundred years, and that everyone has been affected by them and not Schleiermacher, has also been questioned.

17 D. Stephen Long, *Divine Economy: Theology and the Market* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 258 ff. See also p. 242, where he distinguishes a liberationist style rejection of capitalism (citing Ruether, Sobrino and Gutiérrez), noting

particularly James Cone, who also saw capitalism as heresy, from Milbank's concept, because the latter insists 'on a normative Christian orthodoxy against which capitalism fails.'

18 Cunningham, Connor, *The Genealogy of Nihilism: philosophies of nothing and the difference of theology* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 3ff. Further, we may note that the interest with genealogy spreads into other works, such as Robert Miner, *Truth in the Making: Creative knowledge in theology and philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2004).

19 Pickstock, 'Radical Orthodoxy', p. 62.

20 Laurence Hemming, 'Introduction: Radical Orthodoxy's Appeal to Catholic Scholarship', in Hemming, *Radical*, p. 7.

21 E. Diamond, 'Catherine Pickstock, Plato and the Unity of divinity and Humanity: Liturgical or Philosophical?', and Hankey, 'Philosophical Religion and the Neoplatonic Turn to the Subject', both in Hankey and Hedley, *Deconstructing*.

22 This is central to the whole way of 'knowing' in Radical Orthodoxy, and can be seen as a theme in Milbank, 'Knowledge: the theological critique of philosophy'.

23 Douglas Hedley, 'Should Divinity Overcome Metaphysics? Some Reflections on John Milbank's Theology beyond Secular Reason and Confessions of a Cambridge Platonist', *Journal of Religion* (2000), pp. 271–98.

24 See particularly the discussion of this in Hyman, pp. 73–7 & 111–4.

25 See Milbank, 'The Programme', p. 44: 'orthodoxy ... [is] a project always to be completed ...'

26 This relates to the tradition they see stemming from Duns Scotus and liberal theology's open dalliance with modernity.

27 Again, this is a key point set out in the original volume, Milbank *et. al.*, 'Introduction', see especially, pp. 2–3.

28 Milbank, *The Word*, p. 3.

29 This may be seen as a further take on the first point, but entailing work beyond the simple correction of mistakes, to strengthen the tradition against such future failings.

30 A new position within the 'tradition' stated clearly within the founding mission of the movement (see, especially, Gerard Loughlin, 'Erotics: God's Sex', in Milbank *et. al.*, *Radical*, p. 158). It may be noted that one American exponent, Stephen Long, a contributor to the original volume, has very different views on this subject (see, Rosemary Radford Ruether, 'The Postmodern as Premodern: The Theology of D. Stephen Long', in Ruether, & Grau, *Interpreting*), pp. 76–90, p. 86.

31 On the first point see Henry Major, 'Christ and the Creeds' and Richard Truss 'Response', both in Jonathan Clatworthy, *The New Liberalism: Faith for the Third Millennium* (London: The Modern Churchpeople's Union, 1998), pp. 99–108 & 109–15, the broader debate being discussed in John Hick, *The Metaphor of God Incarnate* (London: SCM, 1993) and on the second, Paul Badham, *The Contemporary Challenge of Modernist Theology* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1998), p. 2, and Michael J. Langford, *A Liberal Theology for the Twenty-First Century* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), p. 22.

32 Its critics see modern theology as inherently related to the Enlightenment which is seen, by them, as discredited (Kevin Vanhoozer, 'Preface' & 'Theology and the condition of postmodernity: a report on knowledge (of God)', in Kevin Vanhoozer (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), pp. xiii–xv & 3–18. On the first criteria, see Hyman, *The Predicament*, p. 84, where he explains how Milbank's theology attempts to avoid essentialism which was dominant in the modernist period; see John Milbank, 'Postmodern Critical Augustinianism: A Short Summa in Forty-Two Responses to Unasked Questions', *Modern Theology* 7 (1991), 225–37, p. 227 (8). On the second, see Milbank, 'Postmodern Critical Augustinianism', pp. 229–230 (16 & 17) where he attacks dualistic representations, for more on the idea of modernity as inherently dualistic, as well as Milbank in relation to this, see Hyman, *The Predicament*, pp. 70–3. On the third, see Milbank, *Theology*, p. 314, where he says Rousseauian-Kantian freedom results in 'the extension of power' and sees this as inherent in post-moderns as well, saying only Nietzsche avoided illusion; for a discussion of the concept in Milbank, see Hyman, *The Predicament*, pp. 113–4 who relates it to his notion of the 'ontology of violence', while Simon Oliver sees it as a key concern in Milbank ('Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: from participation to late modernity', in Milbank and Oliver, *The Radical*, pp. 3–27, pp. 6–7, see also n. 8, p. 25).

33 Graham Ward, 'Introduction, or, A Guide to Theological Thinking in Cyberspace', in Graham Ward, *The Postmodern God: A Theological Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), pp. xxii–iv. A typical liberal anthropology may be seen in Karl Rahner, see Stephen Duffy, 'Experience of Grace', in Declan Marmion and Mary E. Hines (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner* (Cambridge: CUP, 2005), pp. 43–62, pp. 55–8. We may also note that in Georg Rieger's analysis of twentieth century theology, the 'Turn to the Self' is seen as typical of what may be called 'liberal' theologies, whereas the 'Turn to Language and the Text' marks post-liberal theologies (*God and the Excluded*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2001). This is not entirely adequate to deal with the issues raised here as, for Milbankian style thought, other 'Turn to Language and Text'/post-modern theologies, such as Mark C. Taylor would also be seen as sharing links to the liberal tradition (see Hyman, *The Predicament*).

34 Milbank, 'Postmodern Critical Augustinianism', p. 225 (2); for liberal theology's claims see Badham, *The Contemporary*, pp. 1ff., and Langford, *A Liberal Theology*, pp. 3ff.

35 In this it is clearly linked to both Nietzsche's thought as well as Foucault's understanding of knowledge as power, see Michel Foucault, 'Truth and Power', in Paul Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), pp. 51–75, and David Lyon *Postmodernity* (Buckingham: Open University Press 1994/1999, p. 75.

36 Gavin D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions: Disputed Questions in the Theology of Religions* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 19–25, on this see also Paul Hedges, *Controversies in Interfaith Dialogue and the Theology of Religions* (London: SCM Press, 2010 – forthcoming).

37 See the discussion in Paul Hedges, *Preparation and Fulfilment: A History and Study of Fulfilment Theology in Modern British Thought in the Indian Context* (Berne: Peter Lang, 2001), p. 280.

38 See Hedges, *Preparation*, pp. 293–301 & 334–40.

39 By this term I am suggesting, alongside Milbankian thought, theologies that owe their genesis to the ‘false trend’ set in place by Scotus and inspired by Kant and rationalist Enlightenment tendencies, including the propositionalist theologies critiqued by Lindbeck, as opposed to post-liberal or Radically Orthodox theologies.

40 See Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. II (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), pp. 97–118.

41 See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: A Selection*, selected by Helmut Gollwitzer and edited and translated by G. W. Bromiley (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), p. 39f., see also on this Thomas F. Torrance, *Karl Barth: An Introduction to His Early Theology 1910–1931* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000, new ed.), p. 153.

42 Hunsinger notes rationalism as one of the key features of Barth’s work (George Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology* (Oxford: OUP, 1991)), which is, of course, at odds with his stress that human nature is fallen, for theology and philosophy cannot be compared (see Torrance, *Karl Barth*, pp. 179–80).

43 See Michael J. Langford, *A Liberal Theology for the Twentieth Century: A Passion for Reason* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 10–11.

44 Augustine employing the Neo-Platonic modes of discourse of his day as well as having Stoic influences (David E. Cooper, *World Philosophies: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford, Blackwell, 2003, 2nd ed.), pp. 151–2 & 138, and Aquinas integrating Aristotelian thought into his work, of course, through an Islamic prism (*ibid.*, p. 169).

45 On the correspondence of faith and reason in Aquinas see Thomas Aquinas, ‘Faith and reason in harmony’ (extracts from *Summa Contra Gentiles* book 1), in Brian Davies, *Philosophy of Religion: a guide and anthology* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), pp. 25–30, and Davies’ introduction to this piece, pp. 17–19. That Newman believed in a reasoned faith is argued by many commentators on him, see, for instance, Sheridan Gilley, *Newman and His Age* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1990) pp. 298–334, or J. M. Cameron, ‘John Henry Newman and the Tractarian Movement’, in Ninian Smart, John Clayton, Patrick Sherry & Stephen T. Katz (eds), *Nineteenth Century Religious Thought in the West*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: CUP, 1988), pp. 89ff. & 99ff.

46 Badham, *The Contemporary*, pp. 15ff.

47 See the reference to Aquinas in note 45; an extended version of this text, which further develops the themes of natural theology is available in William L. Rowe & William J. Wainright (eds), *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings* (Oxford: OUP, 1998, 3rd ed.), pp. 436–44.

48 It should be noted though that Tillich did not, unlike John Macquarrie and Rudolf Bultmann, seek to relate theology simply to existentialism, nor did he see it as the sole method for understanding and communicating the Gospel, merely one suited to our age, while he saw it as embedded in the tradition from which Christian thought came (see Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (London: Collins, 1980 [1952]), pp. 126ff.).

49 Discussions of Tertullian’s Latin theology abound in the literature of church history, see, for instance, J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1958), pp. 4–5 & 174–7, Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (London: Penguin Books, 1967), pp. 89ff., and Margaret R. Miles, *The Word Made Flesh* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 26–7).

50 For a good recent overview on the Historical Jesus discussions, see David Boulton, *Who on Earth was Jesus?: The Modern Quest for the Jesus of History* (Winchester: O Books, 2008); on this topic, see pp. 21ff.

51 The influence of the liberal Adolf von Harnack on Barth’s reasons for moving from a liberal to his neo-Orthodox position are well discussed by Torrance (*Karl Barth*), however, he makes no mention of the influence of the First World War on his thought, engaging with it as though it were nothing but an abstract intellectual decision based on the dynamics of faith, which ignores his historical and social and political situation.

52 On this see Ian Markham, *A Theology of Engagement* (Oxford: Blackwells, 2003), pp. 8–9, and pp. 30ff. on Augustine.

53 Milbank, et. al., ‘Introduction’.

54 Frei, Hans W., *Types of Christian Theology* (London & New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

55 Frei, *Types*, pp. 28–55, see also pp. 58–91.

56 Frei categorizes Tillich as a type 3 (*Types*, p. 68), and it has been argued that Tracy too should be classified a type 3, a positioning Placher suggested that Frei himself eventually came to take (on Tracy’s misclassification, see Paul J DeHart, *The Trial of the Witness: The Rise and Decline of Postliberal Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), and on Frei’s rethinking on this, see William C. Placher, ‘Review Article: The Trial of the Witness: The Rise and Decline of Postliberal Theology’, *Conversations in Religion and Theology* 5: 2 (2007), pp. 136–40, pp. 138–9).

57 We may note in passing as relevant to these tensions Radical Orthodoxy’s claim to be ‘more mediating but less accommodating’ (Milbank et. al., *Radical*, p. 2).

58 Milbank, *Theology*, p. 382.

59 Many books have, of course, been published in this area. Some of those which have inspired my understanding of post-modernism include: David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989); Lyon, *Postmodernity*; Keith Tester, *The Life and Times of Post-modernity* (London: Routledge, 1993); Paul Lakeland, *Postmodernity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997); and, J. J. Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment* (London: Routledge, 1997).

60 Milbank, *Theology*, pp. 1 & 6. As we will see below, Milbank regards both modernity and post-modernism as nihilism.

61 It has become almost standard for introductions to post-modernism to say that any definition says more about the definer than the defined term itself (see, for instance, Kevin Vanhoozer, 'Theology'). I would say here that this kind of 'post-modern' statement is part of a mystique that advocates of post-modernity like to create around the term, its use, and the 'movement'.

62 I have given accounts of this in such works as Paul Hedges, 'A Post-modern Reading of John Hick's Pluralistic Hypothesis', *Interreligious Insight* 2: 2 (2004), 44–55, and in the forthcoming *Controversies*.

63 Milbank, *The Word*, p. 50.

64 On the use of the word 'overcome', see Tester, *The Life*, pp. 79–101, where he suggests ways in which certain thinkers have 'overcome' technology, yet this raises questions about what exactly this term may mean – an issue I hope to address elsewhere.

65 Graeme Richardson, 'Integrity and Realism: Assessing John Milbank's Theology', *New Blackfriars* vol. 84: 988 (2003), pp. 268–80.

66 Richardson, 'Integrity and Realism', pp. 274–5.

67 Hyman, *The Predicament*, pp. 73–77.

68 John Milbank, "Postmodern Critical Augustinianism", pp. 225–6.

69 David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. xv. According to James Byrne it is the idea that we must accept and move through the validity of modernity's critique that distinguishes liberalism from Radical Orthodoxy and similar movements ('A Reasonable Passion: The Revival of Liberal Theology', *Reviews in Religion and Theology*, 10, 1 (2003), pp. 6–13, p. 8.).

70 See David Ray Griffin, William Beardslee & Joe Holland, *Varieties of Postmodern Theology* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), and David Ray Griffin, *God and Religion in the Postmodern World* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989).

71 Lyon *Postmodernity*, Tester, *The Life*, Eagleton, *The Illusions*, and Clarke, *Oriental*.

72 Ian Burkitt, *Bodies of Thought: Embodiment, Identity & Modernity* (London: Sage Publications, 1999), pp. 129ff. This is a subject I hope to address more fully in due course, to discuss the fact that post-modernism is an essentially rationalist discourse that relies upon a modernist split between body and mind to maintain its position. For instance, the claim that any alternative way of practice or theory must be regarded as equally valid is not possible when the questions of bodies as functioning 'units' is addressed – it is only because post-modernism, like modernism, remains 'suspended' from the body that this idea can be maintained. Therefore, many post-modern theories which address the 'body' do so only by emptying it of true embodiment, such as Ward's claims about the body of Christ – which, for him, becomes an unsexed shell capable of bearing whatever (modernist) claims may be enforced upon it. The mind/reason supersedes the body/sensation in a continued dualism. Perhaps, in some 'post-modern' thought we see moves towards a correction of this, for instance in Body Theology (see Lisa Isherwood and Elizabeth Stuart, *Introducing Body Theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998) and in Paul Sheppy, *Death Liturgy and Ritual: Volume I: A Pastoral and Liturgical Theology* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), see, especially, his discussion of *nepehsh*, *bios*, and *zoe*, pp. 39–42 and 62–77.

73 Hyman, *The Predicament*, see especially chapter 4, 'Narrative, Metanarrative and Theology: On Out-Narrating John Milbank', pp. 65–94.

74 A point argued by, for instance, D'Costa, *Christianity*, p. 4, in a work that sympathetically, though critically, addresses Milbank's theology (pp. 48–53).

75 I will certainly not be the first to make this claim, as Reno also claims that, 'Radical Orthodoxy repeats ... patterns of modern theology, with similar consequences' (R.R. Reno, 'The Radical Orthodoxy Project', *First Things* 100 (2000), pp. 37–44, accessed online). It has also been argued that Radical Orthodoxy, along with most post-moderns, misinterpret Kant, and are in fact still unwittingly employing him, of course, puts them in tune with one of the great architects of the Enlightenment! (See Paul D. Janz, 'Radical Orthodoxy and the New Culture of Obscurantism', *Modern Theology* 20 (2004), pp. 362–405.). It is also Hyman's claim that Milbank does not present us with an 'accomplished' post-modern theology (Hyman, *The Predicament*, pp. 129ff.).

76 This is, of course, an idea associated with phenomenology, one of the best discussions of which is found in Gavin Flood, *Beyond Phenomenology: Rethinking the Study of Religion* (London: Cassell, 1999), pp. 91–116.

77 See, for instance, Vanhoozer, 'Theology', or Milbank, *Theology*.

78 See, for instance, Milbank, 'The Programme', pp. 41–3. We may note in this that Milbank while speaking of post-modernism as a new turn, nevertheless sees it being at the same time an extension of modernity (*Theology*, p. 260).

79 Beyond the previous reference, the nihilism of post-modernism is discussed by Milbank in *Theology and Social Theory* (pp. 278–9 and throughout chapter 10), and the nihilism of modernism is expressed or explored in various works and places; see *Theology*, p. 381, 'The Gift of Ruling: Secularization and Political Authority', *New Blackfriars* 85, 996 (2004), 212–38, pp. 232, 233, 235.

80 For a discussion of this, see Hyman, *The Predicament*, pp. 33 and 49–52. Milbank's article, 'History of the One God', *Heythrop Journal*, XXXVIII (1997), 371–400, also suggests this when he says that when modernity and the Enlightenment lost sight of the biblical deity then all that was left was, 'his eternal shadow, the mocking abyss' [of nihilism] (p. 398).

81 Again, many have asked where Milbank supposes his omniscient, 'God's eye' view comes from; see, especially, the discussion in Hyman, p. 79.

82 Gregory of Nyssa merits three mentions in *Theology and Social Theory*, while 'the Force of Identity' in *The Word Made Strange* is largely based upon his thought. A few other Greek fathers get a brief mention, such as two references to Gregory of Nazianzus in each text, and stray references to Pseudo-Dionysius as an inspiration for negative theology, but beyond these few references, to a limited number of Greek fathers the Eastern tradition is highly

underrepresented, with such theological greats as Symeon the New Theologian, Gregory of Palamas, and John Climacus from the later tradition entirely absent.

83 Janz, 'Radical', see especially pp. 368–9.

84 The various problems surrounding the use of this term must be considered here, but space does not allow their discussion. However, for a way to provide a satisfactory definition that gets around the problem of speaking of 'religions', but still allowing the licit employment of the term, see Paul Hedges, 'Defining Religion: A Religious Orientation Typology', Part I, *Interreligious Insight*, 4, 3 (2006), pp. 9–15, Part II applies it to a variety of traditions and is in the subsequent edition of the journal (4, 4 (2006), pp. 34–42) – a modified (and improved?) version of the typology can be found in Paul Hedges, 'Can We Still Teach "Religions"? Towards an Understanding of Religion as Culture and Orientation in Contemporary Pedagogy and Metatheory', in G. Durka, L. Gearon, M. de Souza, & K. Engebretson (eds), *International Handbook for Inter-Religious Education* (New York, London & Rotterdam: Springer Academic Publishers, 2009 – forthcoming).

85 On Indian religions, see Richard King *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and 'The Mystic East'* (London: Routledge, 1999) while, on Chinese religion, see Russell Kirkland, *Taoism: The Enduring Tradition* (London: Routledge, 2004).

86 On Milbank's usage in this fashion see, for instance, 'The Gift of Ruling', where he speaks of 'genuine religion' (p. 236). The best analysis of the development of this term into its modern usage still remains Wilfred Cantwell Smith's classic, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (London: SPCK, 1978 [1962]). However, other more recent critics who have complained about its usage as an aspect of a modernist worldview, and often an expression of views based in nineteenth century liberal theology, include Russell McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia* (Oxford: OUP, 1997), Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion* (Baltimore & London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1993), and Timothy Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies* (Oxford: OUP, 2000). Some would argue against the viability of the term 'religion' at all, however, for an overview of the arguments and a proposition for a valid usage of the term in the modern study of religion see note 84. Of course, these arguments mainly relate to the usage of the term in the study of religion, and do not necessitate its inappropriateness in first-order theological discourse, but in as far as the critics see the term as based in a modernist worldview and liberal theological agendas of a universalized notion of the religious, it is at odds with Milbank's own proclaimed vision.

87 However, for many post-moderns this claim is undermined by their claims to power over how it should be interpreted. For instance, conservative post-liberals will often claim that theologians, such as Don Cuppitt or Mark C. Taylor, have 'missed the point' of post-modernity. That is to say, while they now seek God in the margins, or see God as having disappeared, the former group will say the joke is that they have failed to realize that post-modernism means that God reappears from under modernity's shadow, and can be spoken of again with confidence and traditional formulations. However, this ignores the multi-faceted and varied nature of post-modernity. By staking a claim to what post-modernism means and the 'correct' and 'authentic' interpretation they are claiming that the *essence* of post-modernism is what they want it to be.

88 See note 79.

89 It may be noted that in some works Milbank speaks of the good within modernity and says that Radical Orthodoxy rejects nothing in entirety; however, his blanket condemnations elsewhere and the lack of any substantial use of modern thinkers belie his more moderate claims. See Milbank, 'The Programme'.

90 It is worth noting, however, that Hyman makes a similar critique, accusing Milbank of failing to make nuanced distinctions, in some cases relying instead upon dualist understandings. See Hyman, *The Predicament*, pp. 69–73.

91 Placher, 'Review Article', p. 139.

92 Eagleton, *The Illusions*, p. 28.

93 This is, of course, a reference to Lindbeck's foundational notion of post-liberal theology, but which has resonances with other worldviews. On this see Paul Hedges, 'Particularities: Tradition-Specific Post-modern Perspectives', in Paul Hedges and Alan Race (eds), *Christian Approaches to Other Faiths* (London: SCM, 2008), pp. 112–35, esp. pp. 115–7 & 127.

94 Hyman, *The Predicament*, p. 68.

95 Hyman, *The Predicament*, pp. 73–77. Another argument that Milbank's ontology of peace fails is found in C.J. Insole, 'Against Radical Orthodoxy: On the Dangers of Overcoming Political Liberalism', *Modern Theology* 20: 2 (2004), pp. 213–41, see pp. 221–7, who argues that Milbank abuses the normal meanings of these words through a heavy reliance on Foucault, who he then rejects, meaning that Foucault is only right if he is wrong, making his argument, 'self-referentially incoherent' (p. 224).

96 The former is associated with Lindbeck's notions; the latter, in a Barthian manner, is found in Gavin D'Costa in 'Roundtable Review of *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*', *Reviews in Theology and Religious Studies*, 6 (2001), p. 246. Milbank would seem to use similar notions, for while he does not seem much concerned with other faiths, he has positioned himself in a place that denies their legitimacy in relation to Christianity (for an analysis of his position see D'Costa, *Christianity*, pp. 48–53, and for a critical account of such traditions see Hedges, 'Particularities').

97 Gerard Loughlin, *Telling God's Story: Bible, Church and Narrative Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 24.

98 A Muslim is someone who performs the five pillars, while the inner intention is beyond this, see David Waines, *An Introduction to Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 89–93.

99 Michael Cook, *The Koran: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 73 & 106–7.

- 100 Byrne, 'A Reasonable Passion', p. 9.
- 101 Gareth Jones, 'Review of *The Word Made Strange*', *Reviews in Religion and Theology*, 2 (1997), p. 6.
- 102 Janz, 'Radical', pp. 368–9.
- 103 Hyman, *The Predicament*, p. 79.
- 104 I apologize for having lost the source of this critique, but may note that the need for this is raised in J. Hanvey., 'Conclusion: Continuing the Conversation', in Hemming, *Radical*, p. 169.
- 105 Todd Breyfogle, 'Is There Room for Political Philosophy in Postmodern Critical Augustinianism?' in Hankey & Hedley, *Deconstructing*, pp. 44–5.
- 106 Taylor, Mark Kline (ed), *Tillich: Theologian of the Boundaries* (London: Collins, 1987), p. 52.
- 107 His views on salvation particularly reflecting this, as Jesus enacts salvation not in any traditional sense but rather in a literary sense (Milbank, *The Word*, p. 3).
- 108 Milbank, 'The Programme', p. 37.
- 109 See, for instance, the commentary on the movement by Sharlet, J., 'God's Own Knowledge', http://www.killingthebuddha.com/dogma/gods_own.htm.
- 110 See, for instance, J. A. Herrick, *The Making of the New Spirituality: The Eclipse of the Western Religious Tradition* (Downers Grove, Ill: Intervarsity Press, 2003), pp. 14–35, Paul Heelas, 'De-traditionalization of Religion and Self: The New Age and Postmodernity', in P. C. Jupp & Kieran Flanagan (eds), *Postmodernity, Sociology and Religion* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1999), pp. 64–82, Paul Heelas & Linda Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution: why religion is giving way to spirituality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 77ff., Joanne Pearson (ed), *Belief Beyond Boundaries: Wicca, Celtic Spirituality and the New Age* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), pp. 6–7, C. Partridge, *The Re-Enchantment of the West*, Vol. I (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2004), or David Lyon, *Jesus in Disneyland: Religion in Postmodern Times* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005), pp. 20 ff, who all, in various ways, discuss the way the religious/spiritual has/is returning as a central feature of the post-modern world.
- 111 Homosexuals, along with lepers, are spoken of as 'banished human categories,' who result from 'a refusal of true Christianity' (Milbank, et. al., 'Introduction', p. 3), but seems best seen, within the work, as simply something accepted because it is what is now the norm within those who accept critical theory. As Stuart has argued, the emergence of gay and lesbian theologies owes much to liberal theology (Elizabeth Stuart, *Gay and Lesbian Theologies: Repetition with Critical Difference* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002) see especially chapter 2).
- 112 According to Stuart, Radical Orthodoxy does not take its inspiration from gay and lesbian theology, but from queer theology, which she herself has pioneered (see *Gay*, chapters 7 & 8). In as far as this is a post-modern theology it would mean that Radical Orthodoxy does not rely upon liberalism. However, part of my contention here is that there is no 'pure' post-modern space utterly distinct from liberalism and modernism. Hence, this counter fails. Also, while recognizing the very different emphasis of queer theology from previous gay and lesbian theologies, and its quite radical and powerful critiques, it must be seen that it only exists in a space made possible by gay and lesbian theologies. To use a phrase from her book, if it hadn't first been postulated that 'gay is good' then there would be no arena for queer theology to operate within. Therefore, even for Radical Orthodoxy to use queer theology means a reliance upon a prior liberal hermeneutical positioning.
- 113 We may note, though, that from a certain perspective he could appear as a type 5, in that he speaks of the need for the use of pure Christian resources alone; however, he seems to consider philosophy not incompatible with the expression of Christian truth as long as it knows its place.
- 114 We may return again to Rieger's typology here who categorizes Neo-Orthodoxy as the 'Turn to the Wholly Other' (*God*). Whatever we make of this it clearly means we have to consider many factors before making any assessment of whether a theology is 'liberal' or 'conservative', etc.
- 115 Frei, *Types*, p. 34.
- 116 On Tillich in relation to the post-modern, see John Thatamanil, 'Tillich and the postmodern', in Russell Manning, *The Cambridge Companion to Paul Tillich* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), pp. 288–301.
- 117 Robert Cummings Neville, 'Review Article: *A Theology of Engagement*', *Reviews in Theology and Religious Studies*, 10 (2005), pp. 140–50, p. 141.
- 118 See Reno, 'The Radical', most particularly in relation to his linguistic Christ.
- 119 On some of the many uses and understandings, mainly from an insider perspective, see Mark D. Chapman (ed.), *The Future of Liberal Theology* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002).
- 120 The idea that 'liberal' theology is more about a disposition than characteristics as I have suggested here is warmly endorsed by Ian Markham, 'Response to Robert Cummings Neville', in *Reviews in Theology and Religious Studies*, 2005, 150–156, p. 155.
- 121 Interestingly in the work Milbank has recently co-edited with Simon Oliver introducing Radical Orthodoxy, Oliver's introductory paper uses the term 'late modernity' (Oliver, 'Introducing'), perhaps an indication that the problems I have discussed about post-modernism have been recognized, though this still does not address how Milbank would deal with this.
- 122 See, for instance, D. Grummett, 'Review: Deconstructing Radical Orthodoxy', *New Blackfriars* 87: 1009 (2006), pp. 322–3, p. 323.
- 123 I may suggest that such a viewpoint should, more properly, lead us to the approach of open engagement with other systems, to understand where other worldviews intersect with our own, and find in this not a sense that we have the correct answers because of the self-sufficiency of our revelation, and to dismiss these other systems as faulty for nuances of difference from our own – this certainly has been Milbank's strategy, for in noting some common strands or

history in various Indo-European religious traditions, he has always decided that the Christian interpretation is correct (employ the rather circular logic that it says what Christian theology proclaims it should) while others are wrong (see, John Milbank, 'The History of the One God', and 'The End of Dialogue', in Gavin D'Costa (ed.), *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1990), pp. 174–90, esp. pp. 179ff.

124 Some hints of what it should stand alongside have been seen in this paper, in particular the works of David Tracy and David Ray Griffin, who both present more balanced and nuanced approaches to post-modernism. Meanwhile, the works of theologians such as Philip Sheldrake (*Spirituality and Theology* (London: DLT, 1998)), Bede Griffiths (*A New Vision of Reality* (London: Fount, 1989)), Ian Markham (*A Theology*), Stanley Samartha (*One Christ, Many Religions* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991)), Perry Schmidt-Leukel (*Transformation by Integration* (London: SCM, 2009)), David Ray Griffin (*God*), David Tracy (*Blessed*), and Peter Phan (*Being Religious Interreligiously* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004)) would provide a context in which to restate Milbank's work in a way that would be better suited to providing a contemporary theological vision.

Copyright of Heythrop Journal is the property of Wiley-Blackwell and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.