

# Integrity and Realism: Assessing John Milbank's Theology

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## I

On the acknowledgements page of *Theology and Social Theory* John Milbank thanks, rather abruptly, 'Rowan Williams, who taught me theology'. No other teacher is recognised. The formal teaching was at Westcott House, Cambridge, in the mid-70s; but there is evidence enough that the current Archbishop of Canterbury has been an abiding influence on the whole of John Milbank's theological career. In the crowded Metro of Milbank's footnotes, it is rare to see a face more than once; but Williams appears five times in *The Word Made Strange*, speaking variously of Barth, Arius, Lossky and Gregory of Nyssa. And often, Milbank's ideas seem closely related to those of his teacher. The concept of *poesis* in Milbank's 'A Critique of the Theology of Right' (1989) – 'the ceaseless re-narrating and 'explaining' of human history'<sup>1</sup>, a self-exceeding act — is clearly the twin of Williams' 'generative revelation' — 'events or transactions in our language that break existing frames of reference and initiate new possibilities of life'<sup>2</sup> — in his essay 'Trinity and Revelation' (1986). But this example serves not just as a demonstration of Williams' influence on Milbank; it also shows how Milbank overtakes his teacher, tackling on a grand scale ideas that are in Williams rather tentative. For Milbank, the idea that somehow Christian experience generates its own momentum of truth contributes to the overthrow of Kantian transcendentalism; for Williams, the same sort of idea provides 'a way of thinking' about the Spirit's work in the church. Milbank's theological ambition seems much greater than Williams'. And this indicates something about their relationship that is significant when it comes to an assessment of Milbank's work.

Williams and Milbank both clearly share a passion for making theology new: Milbank wishes to 'open up space' for 'transformation'<sup>3</sup>; Williams wishes to resist the 'monolithic' in ways both 'critical' and 'celebratory'<sup>4</sup>. However, they seem to diverge on what might be called the question of 'responsibility'. Williams the cautious ecclesiastic is likely to be bound in ways that Milbank the speculative theologian is not.

The 1991 paper 'Theological Integrity' (first published in *New Blackfriars*) sees Williams exploring the use and abuse of theological discourse. Discourse, he says, lacks integrity when it seeks to conceal its purposes. That's wrong in principle; but also because it 'sets out to foreclose the possibility of genuine response' — often to safeguard the speaker's power. 'Having integrity, then, is being able to speak in a way which allows of answers. Honest discourse permits response and continuation; it invites collaboration by showing that it does not claim to be, in and of itself, final.' Naturally, Williams notes, this presents difficulties for theologians. Claims about the whole moral universe are unlikely to be provisional; nevertheless, those same claims insist that we are 'under judgement'. So how do we make judgements about God and his creation without betraying God's status as the ultimate judge? Only, Williams says, 'by showing in its workings what is involved in bringing the complexity of its human world to judgement before God; not by seeking to articulate or complete that judgement. A religious discourse with some chance of being honest will not move too far from the particular, with all its irresolution and resistance to systematizing...'

The conclusion of all this is that 'Language about God is kept honest in the degree to which it turns on itself in the name of God, and so surrenders itself to God' by means of community acts of prayer – in repentance, supplication and praise. Williams' vision of theological integrity is very much grounded in the everyday life of the church. And because theology takes place, as it were, 'on the ground', within the praying community, it 'lives with the constant possibility of its own relativizing, interruption, silencing; it will not regard its conclusions as having authority independently of their relation to the critical, penitent community it seeks to help to be itself.' What theologians must always eschew is the delusion 'that there is a mode of religious utterance wholly beyond the risks of conversation, a power beyond resistance, a perspective that leaves nothing out.' Certainly, theology has a synthesizing task: it 'needs to make connections, to search out and display unities or analogies'. But that can distract us from the real - 'real history, real materiality, real pain'. Theology can be no more and no less 'systematic' than 'the processes of faith to which it is answerable, and if it is confident of itself in ways divorced from this, it loses its integrity'.

Perhaps this view is not widely shared, but it seems to me that Williams' essay on theological integrity is something of a 'Tract for the Times'. Integrity is about maintaining the balance of authority and humility. And it could be said that every debate about what theology is for, since the Enlightenment, has been about integrity in this sense. But while few of those debates are truly over (I think of Harnack vs. Barth,

which still has the power to split college seminars down the middle) postmodernity has brought another challenge to theological integrity. The successful theologian today is like a fencing master who has pledged to play, as a demonstration, a whole class of pupils, old and young, simultaneously. The business is fiendishly complicated and requires great skill. At every turn, a new attack, from a new opponent, must be dealt with. Of course, success under these circumstances is extremely difficult to achieve; and if the master is not utterly confident of success, then — who knows? — they may tip the balance of authority and humility, and fend off an opponent with a stout kick or a shove. Continuing the figure (if you will forgive me) Williams' essay can be seen as a reminder to these master-swordsmen that occasionally they fail; and for the demonstration to succeed, it must always be possible for them to fail.

If theologians don't seem to meet Williams' criteria for theological integrity, it is not necessarily because they're cheating. Success in balancing authority and humility, in judging whilst remaining under judgement, in questions which allow of answers, is easy to mistake quite innocently. Failure is not necessarily the mark of a charlatan. Therefore I hope it will not be thought impudent to ask whether John Milbank's theology meets his old teacher's criteria for theological integrity; and if not, why not.

## II

Williams' essay offers four easily identifiable criteria for theological integrity. These criteria flow into one another in sequence, and must, I think, be taken all together.

Firstly, a theology of integrity speaks in a way which allows of answers: 'Honest discourse permits response and continuation; it invites collaboration by showing that it does not claim to be, in and of itself, final'<sup>5</sup>.

Secondly, it speaks, in a way which allows of answers, of the real and particular: 'A religious discourse with some chance of being honest will not move too far from the particular, with all its irresolution and resistance to systematizing: it will be trying to give shape to that response to the particular that is least evasive of its solid historical otherness...'<sup>6</sup>

Thirdly, it speaks, in a way which allows of answers, of the real and particular praying community: 'Religious practice is only preserved in any integrity by seriousness about prayer; and so, if theology is the untangling of the real grammar of religious practice, its subject is, humanly and specifically, people who pray.'<sup>7</sup>

Finally, it speaks, in a way which allows of answers, of the real and particular praying community, with the same dispossessing language as that praying community: 'Language about God is kept honest in the degree to which it turns on itself in the name of God, and so surrenders itself to God: it is in this way that it becomes possible to see how it is still God that is being spoken of...' <sup>8</sup>.

Does John Milbank's theology speak in this way?

### III

Rowan Williams himself has expressed reservations about Milbank's theological programme. In 1992, again in *New Blackfriars*, he had this to say about *Theology and Social Theory*: 'It seems that we are again confronted with something 'achieved', and left with little account of how it is learned, negotiated, betrayed, inched forward, discerned and risked.' <sup>9</sup> In the same piece, Williams suggests also that Milbank presents a 'rather ahistorical framework' for his ideas. <sup>10</sup> These criticisms seem to chime with what Williams says about theology that 'permits response and continuation': 'How does it talk of God as context and origin without slipping into the 'total perspective' mode? Only, I suggest, by showing in its workings what is involved in bringing the complexity of the human world to judgement before God...' <sup>10</sup>.

When writing about Milbank, Williams displays a characteristic fastidiousness; he has reservations about the theological method, but is not quite impugning the integrity of the enterprise. However, what he says has been taken up by many others, much more critically. There is a vast secondary literature growing up around Milbank and Radical Orthodoxy. Criticisms of Milbank and Radical Orthodoxy often elide, attacking his theology from positions that can be categorised more or less neatly using Williams' criteria. <sup>11</sup>

Richard Cross, Laurence Hemming, Gareth Jones and Nicholas Lash have all suggested (in very different ways) that Milbank writes in a way which does not allow of answers.

Cross is the most vituperative critic: Milbank's use of Duns Scotus shows 'how *not* to do theology' <sup>12</sup>. Briefly, Cross claims that Milbank bases his analysis of modernity's ills (and therefore his whole theological project) on a misunderstanding of Scotus' doctrine of univocity. The doctrine of univocity states that the concept of being is univocal: we can speak, therefore, under one concept, of the being of God and of creatures. However, Milbank seems to take this as being an ontological claim – that God and creatures have the same sort of being – and thus the birth of atheistic modernity. Whereas Cross maintains that for Scotus, the concept of being was only ever a vicious abstraction. The

doctrine of univocity is therefore a semantic theory, with no ontological consequences. Cross gives a good deal of evidence for his contention that Milbank has misread Scotus on this point; but he believes it to be more than a misunderstanding. Along with a certain 'elusive and allusive style', the treatment of Duns Scotus, 'helps us clarify the nature of the Radical Orthodoxy project itself: the exclusion of all argument from systematic theology.'<sup>13</sup>

'Of course, good philosophy and good theology generate new questions,' he writes. 'But it would be exasperating if a proposed theological engagement with the past were to provoke no questions at all, or if the questions it asked simply provoked negative responses; if, in other words, the only viable reaction to it on the part of the historian of ideas would be to try to show why it was simply based on radical misunderstanding.'<sup>14</sup>

That, for Cross, sums up Milbank's project: it is 'folly'.

#### IV

Cross's analysis is striking, but may perhaps be dismissed as a specialist's pedantry. But his complaint finds an echo in the more general analysis of Laurence Paul Hemming. For Hemming, Radical Orthodoxy produces work that lacks 'self-reflexivity': 'The argumentation that preceded the inscription is hidden, for the sake of presenting the results... Radical Orthodoxy does not lead us into how to 'rethink the tradition', rather it presents us with a vision of what the tradition looks like once it has been re-thought.'<sup>15</sup>

Gareth Jones has written of *The Word Made Strange*: 'There is no room in this system for any other perspective; the argument is absolute (with the exception of a moderate amount of Christological diversity).' <sup>16</sup> And Nicholas Lash has detected, in Milbank's work, an unfortunate theocratic tendency that 'has little to commend it as a contribution to the common quest for wisdom and the healing of the world.'<sup>17</sup> Of course, that 'common quest' is the important thing here. Cross, Hemming, Jones and Lash all feel that Milbank's theology lacks integrity in that, intentionally and unintentionally, it does not engage with the scholarly community.

Similarly, Douglas Hedley, R.R. Reno, and Ross Thompson, have all suggested that Milbank has moved away from the analysis of the real and particular. For Douglas Hedley, precisely because there is an evasion of 'solid historical otherness', 'the consequences of Milbank's system are simply fideism, with its attendant evil of fundamentalism'.<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, Reno and Thompson make the same sort of criticism: but where Hedley sees Milbank moving in the direction of Barth, Reno and

Thompson see him being pre-Barthian – almost modern. For Reno, in *Radical Orthodoxy*, ‘Authority shifts out of the particularity of word and sacrament into a supervening theory or concept.’<sup>19</sup> ‘From the particular story and history of Christ’, Thompson says, ‘certain general truths are abstracted, and these general truths then replace the particular event as the means of salvation and liberation.’<sup>20</sup>

Critics have also found fault in Milbank’s relationship with the real and particular praying community – the Church. One of Gavin Hyman’s points, in his excellent book *The Predicament of Postmodern Theology*, is that Milbank’s theological metanarrative is sometimes difficult to identify with Christianity: ‘the Christian narrative may allow itself to be construed in the way that Milbank wants to construe it, but it does not necessarily demand that it be construed in that way.’<sup>21</sup> Romand Coles also has problems with Milbank’s metanarrative alongside his Christianity.<sup>22</sup> And F.C. Bauerschmidt, in discussing Milbank’s rather vacuous Christology — ‘Jesus is essentially a linguistic and poetic reality’<sup>23</sup> — observes that ‘at times Milbank’s commitments to certain philosophical positions regarding language push him in directions which seem to run counter to the stories and practices of the church...’.<sup>24</sup>

Finally, there are criticisms which we might categorise by thinking of Williams’ notion of theological language matching the language of prayer by similarly surrendering itself to God. Most of Milbank’s critics have remarked, in a theology which speaks always of ‘ontological peace’, on a rather jarring note of violence. Milbank’s assertiveness which precludes answers also emerges in the treatment of rivals or critics. Steven Shakespeare has complained of a certain ‘rhetorical machismo’<sup>25</sup>; and Douglas Hedley has commented on ‘the martial tone of theology ‘evacuating’ and ‘overcoming’ philosophy and metaphysics...’.<sup>26</sup>

Gavin Hyman is again pre-eminent here; he sees it as a consequence of Milbank’s reliance on meta-narrative, that his theology will still be attempting (in a quite un-postmodern way) to ‘master’ other narratives — hence the violence that Milbank seeks to exclude, creeps in. But even without Hyman’s sophisticated analysis of narrative, one can agree that Milbank’s language, always assertive, always authoritative, seems far away from the surrenders of repentance or praise.

## V

This is only a brief survey of how critics have assessed John Milbank’s theology. But it does show that, for all the praise he has received, Milbank’s theology is widely recognised as flawed. Gareth Jones has called Milbank ‘the most important British theologian in the world over

the last ten years'.<sup>27</sup> But this 'importance' is measured, not by the quality of Milbank's own publications, but from the 'conferences, colloquia, journal special issues, and books, all devoted to the discussion of Milbank's work and the assessment of its lasting significance'. That is to say, Milbank's work has been rather profitable for theologians (not actually one of the criteria for theological integrity mentioned by Archbishop Williams). And the profitability looks likely to continue.

Anyone analysing the various pieces attacking Milbank's work will be struck by how rarely they manage to succeed in piercing Milbank's formidable armour. In Milbank's own responses to discussions of his work, in seminars or in journals, he will dismiss much of what is said about him, concede only minor factual details, and respond at great length quite obscurely to the few charges which he thinks are worth answering. As an example of this, it is interesting to see how he responds to Nicholas Lash's criticism that his theology contains 'theocratic tendencies.' Milbank refuses to accept any such criticism, claiming that such tendencies would have to be based on a dualism which cannot possibly be detected in his work. In his reply to Lash, he says: 'It is not plausible to detect hieratic and theocratic tendencies in my work. Not plausible, because such tendencies within the Western legacy emerge belatedly (although already *in nuce* in the Gregorian reforms) and precisely from the construction of those dualities which I refuse. For the more science and politics were confined to immanent and autonomous secular realms, the more faith appealed to an arational positivity of authority invested with a right to rule, and sometimes to overrule, science and secular politics, whose claimed autonomy, being construable as pure only in formalistic terms, is by the very same token open to substantive breaching. Theocracy requires the other realm of the secular in order to have something over which to exert its sway...'.<sup>28</sup>

The whole point of Milbank's thesis is that the secular has no valid real existence. Where it attempts to deny theology, it merely becomes an anti-theology, but theology nonetheless. And where it celebrates theology, there is no more secularity. This point is made again, rather more simply, in his essay 'The Programme of Radical Orthodoxy': 'Radical Orthodoxy favours no theocracy, because theocracy is predicated upon the very dualism it rejects: for the sacred hierophants to be enthroned, there must be a drained secular space for them to command. But for Radical Orthodoxy, there is no such space.'<sup>29</sup>

There is no 'drained secular space', because secularity is so completely incompatible with theology; theology could not move into its space to command, even if it so wished – this is, for Milbank, what liberal theologians attempted mistakenly throughout the twentieth-century.

But Milbank's replies are surely sophistry. Certainly if everywhere and always it obtained that reason is as much a participation in the divine mind as faith, there could be no theocratic dominion of the latter over the former. But however much Milbank believes he has done away with any dualism of reason and faith, or secular and sacred, this is not the way the rest of the world sees it, and it would be disingenuous of Milbank, serving one academic faculty amongst many others, to suggest that he is unaware of this. It is part of Milbank's method to practise, in some sense, a 'realised eschatology': that is to say, Milbank's kingdom is coming *and* is here now. It is in this sense that he has 'already' overcome the negative dualisms of modernity. But the kingdom that is already here is also still arriving. And it is in the 'still arriving' side of the equation that the theocratic tendency is detectable: that is why so many theologians have identified it. Anyway, surely *not* to be theocratic would be to exhibit the 'false humility' from which, according to the famous opening words of *The Word Made Strange*, theology has too long been suffering.<sup>30</sup>

Incidentally, the way in which the theocratic allegation is dismissed demonstrates so much theological *hauteur*, it is difficult not to feel some sympathy for Lash. 'Normally,' writes Milbank, 'Nicholas Lash's own work is supremely sensitive... In the present instance, however, he fails to reflect that I am protected from imputations of authoritarianism by my very non-dualism'<sup>31</sup>— so there!

What this response might indicate (apart from the fact that self-proclaimed militant socialists really hate being called theocrats) is that Milbank has developed an unfalsifiable system. Most theologies, of course, are unfalsifiable to the strict Popperian, but Milbank's seems untouchable even to those in sympathy with the theological approach. Even those who approve of and share Milbank's postmodern leanings cannot quite prove him wrong.

Gavin Hyman has come closest to hitting the target, but he does so firing the cardboard arrows of postmodern theology: only fellow postmodernists can applaud his aim. Hyman's criticisms all concern Milbank's use or abuse of narratives, because Hyman accepts fundamentally the Lyotard conception of the end of modernity being the end of the metanarrative. But the end of modernity for Milbank does not mean the end of the master-narrative; for even the arbitrariness of Lyotardian postmodernity is a master-narrative. The end of modernity only means the end of modernity's master narrative, and Christianity's master narrative is the one valid replacement.<sup>32</sup>

According to Hyman, Milbank does not recognise with sufficient nuance the postmodern predicament here. For even though the return to metanarrative is inescapable, 'this return itself is inherently unstable and



tends towards a self-destruction. It seems that metanarrative is both an unavoidable necessity and an unstable impossibility.’<sup>33</sup> However, his criticism would only be valid were it to be obvious that Milbank is unaware of the instability of his metanarrative. Now, for all the ‘rhetorical machismo’ that we have already examined, if it is at least plausible that Milbank’s metanarrative is ‘fictional’, then why should it not be plausible to assume that for Milbank, his metanarrative is unstable, and self-consciously so?<sup>34</sup>

The whole point of a postmodernism which does not exclude ‘the other’ would seem to be a refusal of stable knowledge, indeed of certainty, as it is commonly understood. If Milbank’s work is postmodern in this way, then surely a grand narrative could still be claimed. And the charge that Milbank’s theological integrity has been damaged by a totalising impulse will not therefore be upheld.

Hyman’s problem is that he objects to ‘any pellucid dichotomy between the presence and absence of a metanarrative’ because ‘both are equally problematic’. He admits that Milbank is right to point out that ‘there can never be a complete absence of metanarrative. But in rejecting the possibility of a complete absence of metanarrative, Milbank moved in dialectical fashion to the opposite extreme, in asserting the absolute and ultimate presence of metanarrative.’ However, for Hyman, ‘the presence of a metanarrative is just as problematic as the absence of a metanarrative. It seems that a metanarrative is as impossible as it is unavoidable.’ Only a ‘fictional metanarrative’ can be sustained, and Hyman tries to outline what that might be like in the rest of his book.<sup>36</sup>

So here are two cases. In the first, Nicholas Lash raises a question about the aim of his theology; Milbank responds by insisting that the question is invalid — ‘not plausible’. In the second, Gavin Hyman raises a question about the nature of Milbank’s theology. Although we don’t have a response straight from Milbank, we can see how it might so easily be dismissed in a similar way. A theology so defended can continue to grow in importance, whilst sustaining that industry of ‘conferences, colloquia, journal special issues, books’ and, of course, doctoral theses.

## VI

We have said that criticisms of Milbank’s theology can be categorised according to Williams’ criteria for theological integrity. But it’s also clear that, although the criteria would seem to promise convenient ways of proving the integrity or otherwise of a piece of theology, they can sometimes leave us at a dead end. For if the theology seems to fail on the first criterion, we can go no further. Really what Milbank’s critics have shown is just that. Both Lash’s complaint of ‘theocratic tendencies’ and

Hyman's dislike of present or absent metanarratives, are matters of Milbank's theology not permitting of response or continuation, insisting on total judgement. The fact that Milbank's theology is somehow totalising in this way is what impresses itself upon most of its critics, and most do not go much further. But why does Milbank's theology speak in a way which does not allow of answers?

If we follow the argument in Williams' essay, it would seem that a theology which does not allow of answers is one which is *insufficiently realist*. For the rest of Williams' criteria all concern a relationship of correspondence with the reality independent of our own experience and language: he talks of 'real history, real materiality, real pain'. Indeed early on in his essay, Williams gives an account of Christian reflection which shows correspondence to reality to be at its heart: 'Christian reflection takes as normative a story of response to God in the world and the world in God, the record of Israel and Jesus. In that record, what is shown is the way in which imperfect, distorting responses to God so consistently generate their own re-formation, *as they seek to conform to the reality of what it is and was that called them forth*, that they finally issue in a response wholly transparent to the reality of the calling; and this culminating response creates a frame of reference, a grammar of human possibilities, believed to be of unrestricted significance, an accessible resource for conversion or transformation in any human circumstance' (my italics).<sup>37</sup>

This is a sensitive, non-reductive, form of the realist's correspondence theory of truth. It is larger than most scientific versions of that theory but only because, for Williams, there is more to reality. If theology demonstrates such a realism then it allows of answers, because it can point to a reality outside itself to which it corresponds.

John Milbank rarely discusses realism in his work, and when he does, the discussion is inconclusive. In the introduction to *Theology and Social Theory*, Milbank plays with the possible labels available: claiming initially to 'reject MacIntyre's philosophic realism in favour of 'linguistic idealism' and a variant of pragmatism,' and then subsequently to take up 'a counter-modern position – historicist and pragmatist, yet theologically realist – as suggested in particular by Maurice Blondel.'<sup>38</sup>

Confusion here surely arises from Milbank's suggestion that, while rejecting philosophical realism, he's still a theological realist: yet no definition of theological realism results.

Perhaps encouraged by such confusion, Don Cupitt, the Grand Realism Inquisitor himself, has accused Milbank of 'active non-realism', in a 1998 essay, entitled 'My Postmodern Witch.'<sup>39</sup> The postmodern witch is one who prescribes traditional medicine for others, while

seeking modern medicine for themselves.

For Cupitt, Milbank's attempts to show that 'Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics' require a metaphysics of their own; it is simply not possible to talk about God as real without talking about metaphysics. Gavin Hyman has tried to discredit this by showing that true postmodern theology (i.e. not Cupitt's, which is simply a form of modernity) is quite beyond the metaphysical realist/non-realist dichotomy.<sup>40</sup>

But his reasoning here is not convincing<sup>41</sup>; and his later critique of Milbank on narratives (the reason why he abandons 'radical orthodoxy' in favour of 'fictive nihilism') seems rather similar to Cupitt's critique of Milbank on realism: for where Cupitt insists on 'metaphysics', Hyman insists on 'metanarratives'.

In Hyman's favour, however, is a passage from *Theology and Social Theory*, wherein Milbank does seem to be aiming for a position somehow 'beyond realism and non-realism': 'The character of my theological critique of nihilist ontology will be therefore, quite distinctive: not an attempt to reprimatinate realism, because I deny that postmodern anti-realism is a threat to theological objectivism. Nor certainly, an embracing of the devil to call him God, in the manner of Mark C. Taylor; but, rather, a bifurcation, which affirms the postmodern reduction of substance to transition, and yet questions the transcendental reading of transition as conflict.'<sup>42</sup>

Interestingly, Milbank here gives a friendly nod in the direction of anti-realism in general, even as he disparages Mark C. Taylor in particular. If this is his position on realism, it seems to describe an alternative in its negative phase (affirming the postmodern reduction of substance to transition) but not so much in its positive phase. One can see how affirming transition over substance would constitute a repudiation of modernist realism; but how would questioning that transition as conflict (and presumably asserting it as peace) constitute a new position (not anti-realism) altogether? Peaceful transition, being ideal, as Milbank says elsewhere<sup>43</sup>, surely indicates an idealist approach.

But how can this 'idealist' approach be realist enough to speak of the 'particular'? How can 'linguistic idealism', presumably the idea that reality is fundamentally linguistic, provide us with a God to whom we might pray, yet who exists outside the language we pray in? Williams' notion of the 'surrendering' of language to God could surely not be realised in a linguistic idealist Christianity?

It is surely here that Milbank's work may be said to lack 'theological integrity'. The 'violence' of his style does not allow of answers: but is that because there is no real connection in Milbank's work to a real praying community, and no real God to whom that community prays?

Unless Milbank gives a fuller treatment of theological realism in his subsequent work, his 'theological integrity' is always likely to be in doubt.

- 1 John Milbank, *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1997), p.32.
- 2 Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Oxford, Blackwell, 2000), p. 134.
- 3 *The Word Made Strange*, p.1.
- 4 *On Christian Theology*, xv-xvi.
- 5 *ibid.*, p.5
- 6 *ibid.*, p.6
- 7 *ibid.*, p.13
- 8 *ibid.*, p.8
- 9 Rowan Williams, 'Saving Time: Thoughts on Practice, Patience and Vision', *New Blackfriars* 73, (1992) 319-326, (p.321).
- 10 *ibid.*, p.320
- 11 Unless the context specifically indicates otherwise, I have taken criticisms of Radical Orthodoxy to apply also to John Milbank. I concede that this is dangerous. But it's justifiable, I think, given the prominence of Milbank and his pupils (Catherine Pickstock, Conor Cunningham, et al) in continuing the movement beyond the original volume of essays, and the way that Graham Ward and his pupils (including Gavin Hyman) have been more critical of the enterprise. Also, where Radical Orthodoxy speaks with one voice (as in Introduction to the original volume) it sounds more like Milbank than anyone else.
- 12 Richard Cross, 'Where Angels Fear To Tread': Duns Scotus and Radical Orthodoxy', *Antonianum* LXXVI (2001), p. 41.
- 13 p. 22
- 14 p. 41
- 15 Laurence Paul Hemming, *Radical Orthodoxy – A Catholic Enquiry* (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2000), p.13
- 16 Gareth Jones, 'Editor's Choice' *Reviews in Religion and Theology*, (1997), p.6.
- 17 Professor Lash's criticism is echoed by the stupendously contrasting person of Jeff Sharlet, in his on-line article for 'Killing the Buddha' at [www.killingthebuddha.com/dogma/gods\\_own.htm](http://www.killingthebuddha.com/dogma/gods_own.htm).
- 18 Douglas Hedley, 'Should Divinity Overcome Metaphysics? Reflections on John Milbank's Theology beyond Secular Reason and Confessions of a Cambridge Platonist', *Journal of Religion*, (2000), 271-299, (p.273): 'Whereas, for traditional metaphysical theology, the Greek Platonic-Aristotelian thesis of reason as the divine within man provides the basis for natural theology, the neo-Barthian Milbank sees God as wholly other or 'strange', and he sees the only possibility for a meeting of God and man as not metaphysical speculation but theological practice: 'charity', 'poesis' and 'praxis', and 'narrative'
- 19 R.R. Reno, 'The Radical Orthodoxy Project', *First Things*, 100 (2000), 37-44, (p.40).
- 20 Ross Thompson, 'Postmodernism and the Trinity: How to be postmodern and post-Barthian too', *New Blackfriars*, 83 (2002), 173-188 (p. 175).

- 21 Gavin Hyman, *The Predicament of Postmodern Theology: Radical Orthodoxy or Nihilist Textualism*, (Louisville, Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), p.88.
- 22 Romand Coles, 'Storied Others and the Possibilities of Caritas: Milbank and Neo-Nietzschean Ethics', *Modern Theology*, 8:4 (1992) 331-351.
- 23 *The Word Made Strange*, p. 3.
- 24 F.C. Bauerschmidt, 'The Word Made Speculative? John Milbank's Christological Poetics', *Modern Theology*, 15:4, (1999) p.429.
- 25 Steven Shakespeare, 'The New Romantics: A Critique of Radical Orthodoxy', *Theology*, Vol. 103, 2000, 163-177 (p. 165)
- 26 Hedley, p.298
- 27 Gareth Jones, review of *The Word Made Strange*, *Journal of Theological Studies*, April 2001, pp. 467-470.
- 28 John Milbank, 'Intensities', *Modern Theology*, 15:4, (1999), 445-497 (p446).
- 29 Hemming, p. 37.
- 30 *Theology and Social Theory*, p.1.
- 31 'Intensities', p 446
- 32 See especially 'Postmodern Critical Augustinianism: A Short Summa in Forty Two Responses to Unasked Questions', *Modern Theology*, 7:3, (1991), 225-237, for discussion of this.
- 33 Hyman, p. 69
- 34 In asserting that Milbank's grand narrative is fictional, perhaps Hyman is thinking of Milbank's 1992 declaration: 'Fortunately, the Church is first and foremost neither a programme, nor a 'real' society, but instead an enacted, serious fiction'.<sup>35</sup> But Milbank goes on to talk of the eucharist as 'ritual distance', saying 'this ritual distance of the Church from itself defines the Church, or rather deflects it from any definition of what it is. In its truth it is not, but has been and will be'. This surely implies an acceptance of instability in Milbank's conclusions. Further on in the same article he talks of his descriptions of the Church: '...the 'formal' descriptions (which I do not claim could ever be exhaustive – even within the confines of formalism) – in terms of peace, forgiveness, harmony, etc – describe structural relations, and do not isolate essences... nor prescribe 'what is to be done'' (p.343).
- 35 'Enclaves, or Where is the Church?', *New Blackfriars*, (1992), 341-352, (p. 342)
- 36 Hyman, p.117
- 37 *On Christian Theology*, p.7
- 38 *Theology and Social Theory*, p.6.
- 39 Don Cupitt, 'My Postmodern Witch', *Modern Believing*, 39:4, (1998), pp. 5-10
- 40 His reasons are i) that realism/non-realism is a framework (Hyman sees frameworks — wrongly — as being analogous to Wittgensteinian language-games) and Milbank is operating in a completely different framework; and ii) that realism/non-realism is a dichotomy which takes insufficient account of alterity: again, an argument solely for the postmodernist
- 41 Hyman, p.62-64
- 42 *Theology and Social Theory*, p. 296.
- 43 'Postmodern Critical Augustinianism', p.228: 'The Community is what God is like, and he is even more like the ideal, the goal of community implicit in its practices'.