

In the ensuing discussion (chaired by Robert Schreiter), we made progress in exploring the papers more deeply, and raising an array of further questions. Nothing was resolved, but luckily these are young scholars with plenty of time to do the needed work.

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#### "RADICAL ORTHODOXY" AND CATHOLIC THEOLOGY

- Topic: "Radical Orthodoxy":  
Reading the Signs of Pre/Post and Modern Times
- Convener: Philip Rossi, Marquette University
- Presenters: John Montag, Creighton University  
David Burrell, University of Notre Dame  
Philip Rossi, Marquette University  
Anthony Godzieba, Villanova University

The theologians (J. Milbank, C. Pickstock, G. Ward, P. Blond) who call their critique of secular modernity and their program for theology in postmodern culture "Radical Orthodoxy" (RO) have drawn some sympathetic interest from Catholic theologians. Inclusion of theologies shaping Vatican II and emerging in its aftermath in RO's criticism of "secular reason," however, has hindered dialogue with Catholic theologians still working with issues limned by "modernity." The session sought to identify loci in RO for future dialogue with a wider circle of Catholic theologians.

Montag recounted the origins of RO in a 1997 Cambridge meeting that Milbank, Pickstock, and Ward convened. Their intent was to recover a confident sense that reason is ineluctably tradition-bound; their insight was that one must retrieve one's premodern roots to get through the impasse of modernity and its postmodern nihilistic fragments. The meeting discussed the influence of theologians/philosophers who go beyond apologetics from within a hostile secular academe (e.g., de Lubac, von Balthasar, Ong, de Certeau, Gilson, Chenu, D. MacKinnon, C. Taylor, Lash, F. Kerr, Hauerwas, MacIntyre, R. Williams, M. Buckley, and Burrell.) The discussion framed RO as an effort to read the signs of the times, and to consolidate these voices, not as a doctrinaire movement, but as participants in a rich *disputatio*, not stultifying late-modern academic discourse. While North American Catholic theologians still show little interest in RO and most criticism is from liberal quarters, Montag noted two sympathetic interlocutors with interesting, accurate critiques of Milbank's theology and RO's project: W. Hankey disputes Milbank's reading of Neoplatonism, worrying that,

for the postmodern, *theoria* must always submit to desire; Lash questions Milbank's reading of Thomas, particularly the claim that "all knowledge implies faith in God for Aquinas."

Burrell observed how the social location of theology in the university affects RO's reception by favoring correlational or "identity"-type inquiries; he also noted V. Preller's work on Aquinas as important background for RO. He then focused on four points from O.-T. Vénard's "Radical Orthodoxy, une première impression" (*Revue Thomiste* 2001): RO's understanding of theology as *sacra doctrina* and of faith as a mode of knowing; RO as countering secularism in its latest avatar of postmodernism by affirming that the language of faith renders discourse possible; RO as a theology of culture that does not borrow categories from social theory but realizes such theories are *cryptotheologies* to which RO proposes, in contrast, that human language, like human existence, must be rooted in a creator to function properly; RO's deconstruction of the neo-Thomist separation of philosophy from theology through a Neoplatonic optic that, rather than seeing faith/reason as additive to one another, construes them, as does John Paul II, as a mutually supportive dialectic.

Rossi focused on the "metaphysics of the sublime" as a marker of features of Kant's critical project and of modernity that, as central to Milbank's and Blond's narratives of modernity's descent to nihilism, are most problematic for the robust postmodern Christian theology RO proposes. While approving their attention to *The Critique of Judgment* as significant for Kant's critical theory, Rossi argued that the sublime is not the concept most fundamental to RO's account of his role in modernity. The "phenomenon/noumenon" distinction bears far more weight: RO reads this as a "two-world" distinction an understanding that, despite a long history in Kant interpretation, is not Kant's. It is less important for constructive dialogue to correct this reading of Kant as one whose attitude toward "the immense depth of things" is "to distinguish what is clear from what is hidden" (Milbank); more important is understanding the alternative RO proposes. A better starting point is parsing the metaphor of the "immense depth of things," particularly in relation to two concepts participation and the analogy of attribution that focus RO's reading of Aquinas.

Godzieba argued that RO offers important questions and some insightful answers for the relation of Christianity to contemporary culture, but errs by reading modernity one-sidedly as violence and nihilism, reducing philosophy to theology, and prescribing a premodern metaphysical framework (Neoplatonic participation) as the only authentic theological foundation. These suggest a fear of contingency and a desire for an immediate grasp of the divine to circumvent the messiness of history a construal of reality, while of some value, inimical to an authentic (i.e. analogical) Catholic reading of "signs of the times." He criticized RO's enlisting Aquinas in support of a totalizing theory of participation: Aquinas's more nuanced use of participation affirms the difference between faith and knowledge (necessarily tied to contingent particulars), the need for an independent philosophy, and the validity of a natural theology in addition to a

revelational theology. Godzieba urged Catholic theology, itself often dismissive of modernity, to more fidelity to the incarnational and eschatological structure of revelation thus to contingency than either it or RO has shown so far. Eschatological consciousness, shown in "the dangerous memory of Jesus Christ" (Metz), offers a way to overcome fear of the world and of time and to enjoy created contingency, secure in faith and in hope for the eschatological transformation that God in Jesus Christ promises all persons and all epochs.

Discussion from the floor: Does RO recognize opposition to nihilism from non-Christian traditions? For what faith community is RO a theology? Key conversation partners for RO: Blondel, *la nouvelle théologie*, J.-L. Marion; RO does not fear time, rather recognizes its provisionality against eternity. RO's strident rhetoric should be placed in British academic context. Aquinas recognizes faith as a kind of knowledge, yet clearly differentiates them; his texts seem not to support the thesis that faith undergirds all human knowing. Key issue: reality understood as God's free creation.

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