Theological Studies
68 (2007)

THE POLITICS OF RADICAL ORTHODOXY: A CATHOLIC CRITIQUE

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This article critically analyzes the three distinct forms of political ecclesiology thus far developed by the Radical Orthodoxy movement. William Cavanaugh and Daniel Bell, on the one hand, and Graham Ward, on the other, proffer models that resolve in different ways the contradictions of John Milbank's affirmation that peace amid diversity is possible only within the church (i.e., in the absence of significant religious diversity). While Cavanaugh and Bell share Milbank's rejection of Vatican II's approach, Ward's "critical engagement" is (surprisingly) consistent with the conciliar position.

THE RADICAL ORTHODOXY MOVEMENT has received considerable attention in the world of English-speaking theology, surely in no small part because it offers a bold vision of the socio-political role of the church. After all, few in the United States today would defend a "spiritual" form of Christianity to which matters of public life are irrelevant, but we have not yet developed a comprehensive political theology for our context such as liberation theology has provided for Latin America. The foundational understanding of the socio-political role of the church articulated in Vatican II's documents *Gaudium et spes* and *Dignitatis humanae* did not inspire the depth of reflection in the U.S. Catholic Church that it did at the Medellín gathering of Latin American bishops, perhaps because too many North Americans were content at that time to embrace both the religious freedom these Vatican documents affirmed along with the largely apolitical faith that the documents condemned. Many Christians in the United States who have awakened to the importance of the public role of the church are now looking to the Radical Orthodoxy movement, with its uncompromis-

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ing vision of a church in opposition to secularized capitalist society, for the political theology we lack.

Much of Radical Orthodoxy's attraction is thus rooted in what I will here call its "political ecclesiology," by which I mean its theological account of the socio-political mission of the church (including, but not limited to, the relation of church to state). The fact that three distinct political ecclesiologies have been developed by members of this theological group has, however, been little noted. As I will argue here, John Milbank advocates a "remnant Christendom" approach, William Cavanaugh and Daniel Bell defend what I will call "anarchic opposition," and Graham Ward argues for a Christian involvement with secular modernity that is perhaps best described as "critical engagement." Notwithstanding their differences, all agree on the four tenets that underlie the Radical Orthodoxy movement: (1) the opposition of reason to revelation is a corruption of the Christian tradition; (2) secular modernity is a theological heresy; (3) without belief in God we are led to nihilism; and therefore (4) contemporary efforts to value sex, art, and society cannot be successful without belief in God.[1] Since these points admit of considerable differences in interpretation and application, they are rightly claimed by all three, quite distinct, political ecclesiologies.

In addition to the differences among these three theological positions, it is significant that the anarchic oppositionalism of Cavanaugh and Bell on the one hand, and Ward's critical engagement with society on the other, seek to overcome unresolved tensions in Milbank's desire for a remnant Christendom. As I will argue below, Ward alone succeeds in outlining a theological approach that permits the unity-in-difference that the others explicitly affirm but at least implicitly deny. At the same time, Ward's theological position is consistent with the political ecclesiology of Vatican II that is rejected by Milbank, Cavanaugh, and Bell. If Ward's position is indeed the more coherent one, then it may be that the political ecclesiology of Vatican II has more to offer current efforts to construct an adequate political ecclesiology than is suggested by the radical break with mainstream theology that is so frequently advocated by Radical Orthodox theologians.

MILBANK'S REMNANT CHRISTENDOM

The most comprehensive argument for a "Radical Orthodoxy" form of theology is developed by John Milbank in his *Theology and Social Theory*.[2]

[1] John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, Graham Ward, ed., *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (New York: Routledge, 1999) i. I have changed the order of these four points so as to follow more consistently the order of Radical Orthodoxy's arguments as discussed below.

[2] John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1990).

As is well known, Milbank intends in this work to overcome the intellectual marginalization of theology and the concomitant loss of the Christian alternative to violence that he believes have perverted both church and society. With considerable urgency, he defends an explicitly Christian-narrated practice of peace as the only alternative to our increasingly violent world. Since his work provides the basis for later Radical Orthodox arguments, it here will occupy my attention first and in somewhat more detail than the subsequent models he influenced.

Milbank's argument unfolds as a grand narrative in which Western thought went awry, resulting in secularization, the social theory that justifies it, and the privatization of Christianity. "Once, there was no 'secular,'" he insists—or, more accurately: once, the "secular" was the *saeculum*, the time between the fall of humanity and the Second Coming.[3] In Milbank's narration, late-medieval nominalism paved the way for our current spatial (rather than temporal) concept of the secular because, he contends, nominalism displaced the authentically Christian "analogical" approach that he defines as emphasizing participation, unity-in-difference, and a nonexclusive relation between divine and finite causes. The result of this loss of the appropriately analogical perspective, Milbank argues, is that reason became divorced from revelation, and the secular was understood as a space independent of God rather than as merely that time in human history wherein God's redemption is at work but not yet completed. In Milbank's account, modern social theory then developed to defend the freedom of the secular from God's interference or action, and Christianity was relegated to the realm of private spirituality and stripped of its socio-political dimensions.[4]

The rise of individualism, especially in political theory, is also implicated in what Milbank characterizes as modernity's either-or logic with its rejection of a mutually participatory ontology envisioning unity-in-difference. According to this view, modern political theory is essentially Hobbesian, understanding human beings as so essentially in conflict with each other that government exists to constrain the violence that is inevitable when individuals seek conflicting goals. In short, Milbank holds that modern social and political institutions presume an original violence implicit in human differences that must be kept in check by force.[5]

Milbank thus determines that there is an inherent contradiction between orthodox Christianity's refusal of a secular realm devoid of God's redemptive action on the one hand, and the social theories that defend an inher-

[3] Ibid. 9.

[4] This account of the loss of "analogical" thinking in modernity is developed throughout Milbank's *Theology and Social Theory*, but see especially 9–17, 27–29, 51–52.

[5] Ibid. 12–23.

ently violent and secular society on the other hand. This fundamental conflict is the basis of his insistence that Christian theology is mistaken to dialogue with modern social theory insofar as doing so requires that theology accept modernity's presumption that the social order, and even reason itself, are independent of God. In a theology informed by such secular social theories, Milbank contends, grace can only be understood as extrinsic, added to an essentially unchanged nature and society, rather than as intrinsically transforming our personal and communal lives.[6] Moreover, under these conditions theology does not provide the metadiscourse that positions all other discourses in terms of its account of the fall and redemption of humanity; instead, theology is itself positioned as a marginal and partial discourse. Milbank then concludes that liberation theologians who accept Vatican II's acknowledgment of a degree of proper secularity and who therefore engage social theory in a theologically constitutive manner can finally offer only an individual religious salvation and a secular social liberation, since Christian salvation thus understood has no specific sociohistorical form.[7] As Milbank provocatively (indeed, rather outrageously) proclaims, "what [political and liberation theologians] really say is what they claim not to say: namely that Christians should say their prayers, be decent citizens, and otherwise accept society as it is."[8]

Milbank further argues that any theology engaged with modern social or political theory is (futilely) attempting to build a Christian peace on an ontology of violence. Once we assume the atomistic individualism and the priority of violence that Milbank discerns to be fundamental to modern socioeconomic and political systems, Christian practices of forgiveness and reconciliation can appear to be nonsensical. The ontological priority of peace, peace as our possibility and our ultimate goal, cannot be sustained without a return to the Christian ontology of mutual participation that envisions a unity in and through our differences. Milbank concludes that our currently distorted and implicitly nominalist Christianity may provide a sense of motivation, perhaps even general principles of behavior, but this motivation or set of principles will be informed by the inherently violent self-understanding of the secular realm, rather than being specified on the basis of a properly Christian understanding of our goal of unity with one another in God.[9]

Instead of dialoguing with and being positioned by the errors of modern social theory, Milbank insists that Christian theology must therefore repudiate the violent and secular heresies of modernity as well as the nihilistic postmodernity that modernity engendered. Taking advantage of the space

[6] Ibid. 210, 220–23, 240–45.
[7] Ibid. 234–49.
[8] Ibid. 245.
[9] Ibid. esp. 228–32, 279, 422–34.

opened up by the historicism of postmodernity, theology should rearticulate the Christian metanarrative in a way that demonstrates the nonnecessity of presuming an ontology of violence, defending esthetically a Christian-narrated practice of peace that persuades people "for reasons of 'literary taste'" that Christianity has the better story.[10] In one of his characteristically oppositional moves (which Christopher Insole has described as evincing the very will-to-power that Milbank putatively rejects),[11] Milbank challenges Christian theology to recover its proper position as the master discourse that positions all other discourses. According to Milbank, Christianity should claim this position as the supreme metanarrative, not on the grounds that Christianity provides a more accurate account of reality, but simply because it is the most attractive of the stories we might live by. Milbank further maintains that thus allowing the Christian story to become our master story would make it possible for the narrated practices of the church, especially the celebration of the Eucharist and practices of repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation, to be claimed and lived as the distinct and explicitly political practices they are.[12]

Whatever difficulties we may have with the logic of domination implicit in this insistence on the inherently oppositional and nonreferential character of metanarratives, Milbank's position provides a clear outline for a Radical Orthodox approach to political ecclesiology. Justice is held to be impossible within a secular state because such a state lacks the necessary shared commitment to a common goal. Indeed, Milbank maintains, true justice is possible only within a community united in adherence to the Christian narrative of our redemptive reunion in a harmony amid differences made possible by God.[13] Insisting on the sociality of this redemption, Milbank argues that salvation is found only within the church, which continues the distinctively Christian practices of forgiveness and reconciliation that are predicated on a specific understanding of and commitment to God. "Salvation is available for us after Christ, because we can be incorporated into the community which he founded," Milbank contends.[14] He thus emphasizes that the only alternative to the escalation of violence in our con-

[10] Ibid. 330.

[11] For his trenchant critique, see Christopher J. Insole, "Against Radical Orthodoxy: The Dangers of Overcoming Political Liberalism," *Modern Theology* 20 (2004) 213–41, at 221. See also the similar assessment of Milbank's oppositionalism by Oliver Davies, "Revelation and the Politics of Culture: A Critical Assessment of the Theology of John Milbank," in *Radical Orthodoxy: A Catholic Inquiry*, ed. Laurence Paul Hemming (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2000) 112–25.

[12] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, esp. 1–6, 247–49, 327–32.

[13] It should be noted that in at least one place Milbank acknowledges that "perhaps Judaism" also envisions an ontology of peace rather than conflict (ibid. 262). For further development of these ideas see ibid. 244, 331, 402, 418.

[14] Ibid. 387.

temporary world is the Christian practice of responding to sin by taking on the effects of others' sin, a thoroughly political practice that requires explicit formation in the story and disciplines of Christianity.[15]

Notwithstanding Milbank's insistence that the church is the only locus of true justice, it is important to note that he would not have the church replace the state or assume the state's role during the time of the *saeculum.* Indeed, he somewhat surprisingly warns against "the great danger . . . that this precariously upheld tragic distinction of 'state' from church will simply disappear."[16] The state, he argues, remains necessary because coercive, dominating rule must continue (to some extent) until the Second Coming, and this coercion is not the appropriate role of the church. Although the church must provide a redemptive witness against and asylum from this-worldly domination, it seems that the nonnecessity of violence in this world is a presumption that for Milbank pertains only to relationships among members of the Christian community. Non-Christians remain dependent on a state that maintains peace and order through dominating rule.[17]

While Milbank's political ecclesiology is therefore not one of church *versus* state, neither is it one of church *and* state alongside each other. Instead, Milbank envisions an arrangement of "hazy" boundaries between church and state as the church seeks to redeem all of society.[18] To be sure, the primary political practice of Christians, in this view, is not to engage and transform the state, but to build up the church as the only true polis with a genuine justice and peace that cannot be found elsewhere. Nevertheless, Milbank calls for a blurring of the boundaries between church and state so that, in the overlap of authorities and communities, Christians would seek to bring the policies of the state into conformity with Christian practices as far as the continued need for coercive rule allows, while at the same time the church increasingly absorbs and hence redeems social functions and interactions (including economic exchanges) that are currently assigned to secular society and overseen by the state.[19] The remnant of Christendom should, therefore, strive to grow within a society it no longer seeks to conquer by force but rather to subsume peacefully into the church through the public witness of Christian reconciliation, our only alternative to and restraint against the catastrophic violence that Milbank apocalyptically predicts will otherwise destroy society.[20]

[15] Ibid. 249, 411.

[16] Ibid. 419. See also ibid. 223, 422.

[17] Ibid. esp. 418, 422. In allowing violence to prevent someone from harming him- or herself while refusing the violence that is merely self-assertion and will-to-power, Milbank of course begs the important question of the permissibility of violence to defend others from harm, which he does not discuss.

[18] Ibid. 408.

[19] Ibid. 422.

[20] Ibid. 433–34.

Some of this understanding of the political role of the church will strike a Roman Catholic informed by the documents of the Second Vatican Council as right and appropriate. Milbank's emphasis on our eschatological goal of peaceful unity in diversity is remarkably similar to *Lumen gentium*'s description of our hope for "the unity of the whole human race," particularly insofar as that unity is described in *Lumen gentium* as a harmonious unity amid difference.[21] Further, Milbank's argument that the church is called to be the redeemed community, while extending this unity-in-diversity as far as possible throughout the world, echoes *Lumen gentium*'s definition of the church as both "a sign and instrument" of the eschatological goal of union with God and unity in the world.[22] Milbank thus joins Catholic theology in understanding the church to be a sociopolitically redemptive force in history, and both Milbank and Vatican II repudiate the private, individualistic spirituality that has distorted the gospel too often in the practice of modern Catholics as well as of Protestants.

Though Milbank's eschatological goal is quite Catholic, his political ecclesiology is in considerable tension, if not outright conflict, with contemporary Catholicism. He clearly positions his work as a critique of the Catholic theological giants (including Karl Rahner, Yves Congar, Gustavo Gutiérrez, Johann-Baptist Metz, and to a lesser degree even Henri de Lubac and Hans Urs von Balthasar) who contributed to or were formed by Vatican II, and he tends toward a *societas perfecta* ecclesiology in which the church is identified with, rather than being a servant of, the Kingdom of God present (imperfectly) in history.[23] Most significantly for my purposes, Milbank cannot accept *Gaudium et spes*'s affirmation of "the autonomy of earthly affairs" predicated on God's endowment of human society with an order and laws that can and must be discerned by reason.[24] Hence, Milbank rejects not only the secular*ism* that claims society is independent of God's rule, but also the secular*ization* in which society might be properly conformed to its divinely established telos without explicit acceptance of Christian revelation.[25] As we have seen, Milbank wants us to consider that

[21] *Lumen gentium* no. 1. For an example of the emphasis on diversity in this unity, see the argument in ibid. no. 13.

[22] Ibid. no. 1.

[23] For Milbank's critique of Vatican II theologians, see especially his *Theology and Social Theory* 206–10. His *societas perfecta* ecclesiology is developed throughout this work, especially in his arguments that salvation is found only in the church as a particular community that alone has the possibility of just and peaceful practices. See especially ibid. 226 for a brief and clear insistence that the church embodies the relationships that are "the goal of salvation." For comparison, see *Gaudium et spes,* esp. nos. 40, 45.

[24] *Gaudium et spes* no. 36.

[25] On the distinction between secularization and secularism in *Dignitatis huma-*

religion "might enter into the most basic level of symbolic organization of society" so that any allowance for valid social or political principles that could be discerned apart from revelation would contradict his project of narrating a distinctly Christian social order and practice.[26] Those outside of the church and thus caught in a logic of domination must then depend on the existence of the church and its enactment of the revealed social order to prevent the inevitable chaos of a society that is fatally disordered apart from divine revelation.

Close attention to Milbank's argument further reveals that his differences from the political ecclesiology of Vatican II stem from his reversion to the same dichotomous logic (especially on reason and revelation) that he critiques and to which he intends to provide an alternative. In countering modernity's hyperrational rejection of any religious belief or practice not defensible through reason alone, Milbank (at least on key points) merely reverses modernity's approach, as he criticizes any reason that does not proceed from the premises of the revealed Christian metanarrative. This either–or approach is also evident in his insistence on an oppositionalism, such that a theological metanarrative must either "position" or be "positioned by" all other metanarratives.[27] While Milbank is right to remind us that we all think within a context and according to some presuppositions, surely his critique of modernity's oppositional relation between reason and revelation ought to elicit more serious consideration of the possibility that some differing forms of reasoning and discourse might exist in a complementary relation.[28] As was once well known (at least by Catholic theologians), Vatican II's defense of a proper secularity never involved an acceptance of a "space" to which Christian faith (or God) is irrelevant; rather, Vatican II sought to defend the nonoppositional logic in which the principles of social organization can be discerned through a human reasoning that is transcended but not contradicted by Christian revelation.[29]

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nae, see especially John Courtney Murray, S.J., "The Declaration on Religious Freedom," in his *Bridging the Sacred and the Secular: Selected Writings* (Washington: Georgetown University, 1994) 187–99.

[26] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory* 109.

[27] Ibid. 1.

[28] Rather than "setting the Christian story over and against alternative narratives," as Oliver Davies observes, Milbank would do better to advocate "the Christian narrative as the site in which other narratives find their true meaning." Davies further poses the rhetorical question of whether Milbank has failed "to interrogate the philosophical underpinnings of Radical Orthodoxy [especially deconstruction] in light of the non-coercive and empowering dispositions of the Gospel" (Davies, "Revelation" 116, 117).

[29] *Gaudium et spes* nos. 36, 76.

Milbank's theoretical differences with Vatican II on secularization result in potential differences in political practice as well, a point that becomes especially evident when we consider the implications of Milbank's position for the religious freedom affirmed by *Dignitatis humanae*. It is neither "hazy" boundaries nor acceptance of a secular space that ground religious disestablishment in this Vatican declaration. Instead, a coherent Christian defense of religious freedom is understood to depend on a careful delineation of the specific and limited purpose of legislation, which is to serve the good of the public order according to the principles established by God in creation and discernible by all through reason. Perhaps more clearly to the point, *Dignitatis humanae* is not concerned with defending a mere refusal to coerce religious membership or practices; rather, the declaration affirms a broader right to religious freedom that protects the full and equal rights to civic participation of all, regardless of religious belief.[30] It is this in-principle right to religious freedom (even when Christians form a clear and dominant majority) that Milbank's position seems unable to accept. As we have seen, Milbank would have as many of the functions of the state absorbed into the church's explicitly Christian and thus redeemed practices as society will allow. In Milbank's political ecclesiology, then, non-Christians in a majority-Christian society would be rendered socially and politically marginal, as the majority encourage the absorption of the socio-economy into the church. Further, since his refusal of church rule over the state is only a rejection of clerical Christian governance of the state, Milbank leaves open the possibility of lay Christians ruling according to explicitly Christian beliefs and religious practices. Indeed, such lay governance could be seen as part of the Christian vocation to "extend the sphere of socially aesthetic harmony" envisioned by Milbank's Christian metanarrative. His position on church–state relations is therefore very close to the model of Christendom as well as to some forms of "Dominion Theology" currently popular in the United States (in which lay-Christian rather than clerical rule is sought and religious freedom is now frequently and rather bizarrely described as the right to attempt to make the majority's religious practices the law of the land). When Milbank's zeal to ensure that no space is autonomous from God translates into an effort to absorb as much space as possible into the visible church, we must conclude that Milbank's remnant Christendom ecclesiology is inconsistent with a religious freedom that is more than bare tolerance and noncoercion of those who do not adhere to the Christian faith.

In what may yet be the most serious problem with his political ecclesiology, Milbank's central claim that the church is unique in its ability to maintain the ontological priority of peaceful unity amid differences is in-

[30] *Dignitatis humanae* nos. 3, 6. See also *Gaudium et spes* no. 43.

herently unstable, in that his position allows peace only among those who have no religious differences. Given his insistence that true peace and justice depend on a shared Christian metanarrative and are possible only within the church, it follows that there can be no true peace between Christians and non-Christians. Is Milbank not affirming here precisely the "modern" belief to which he has claimed Christianity provides an alternative: the belief that peaceful unity in justice is not possible where there are genuine differences, at least when those differences are religious? This is a major, perhaps fatal, flaw in his argument, and is more serious than the mere fact of the (frequently criticized) belligerent tone in which Milbank's critique of secular society is expressed. As long as he maintains that a practical hope for peaceful unity-in-diversity is possible in this world only on the basis of explicit acceptance of the Christian metanarrative and only within the Christian community, Milbank requires a religious uniformity (a unity without difference!) as the basis for peace. It is difficult to see how he can coherently maintain, on the one hand, that Christianity provides the alternative to supposing that differences "necessarily imply arbitrariness and violence" and, on the other hand, that a peaceful nonviolence is possible only within the church, among people who share a common narrative practice.[31] Since his political ecclesiology is oddly predicated on both claims, his theological position would fundamentally change were he to cede either point.

CAVANAUGH AND BELL: ANARCHIC OPPOSITIONALISM[32]

William Cavanaugh and Daniel Bell develop their political ecclesiologies on the theological foundation provided by Milbank, yet their ecclesiologies

[31] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory* 5. A major presumption that begs for more careful analysis than I can provide here is the idea found in Milbank and others that a liberal state necessarily refuses any telos for society. Franklin Gamwell has shown, to the contrary, that the lack of an established telos need not mean that such a common telos is prohibited but may instead merely require that it be achieved through persuasion. See Franklin I. Gamwell, *The Meaning of Religious Freedom: Modern Politics and the Democratic Resolution* (New York: SUNY, 1995) esp. 161–83, and the discussion of this issue in Mary Doak, *Reclaiming Narrative for Public Theology* (New York: SUNY, 2004) 48–69.

[32] Since Cavanaugh and others reject the term "sectarian" for their position because they fear it suggests political irrelevance, I have coined the term "anarchic oppositionalism" instead. This is, I hope, both a more precise term and a more acceptable one to those so categorized: Cavanaugh declares himself to be a Christian anarchist, and both Cavanaugh and Bell staunchly defend an oppositional stance toward any form of centralized governmental authority. See the discussion of the semantic shadings in the debate over the term "sectarian" in Doak, *Reclaiming Narrative* 140. For another argument against "sectarian" as applied to Radical Orthodoxy, see John Berkman and Frederick Bauerschmidt, "Absolutely Fabulous

share a decidedly more oppositional stance toward the state than Milbank's. As I will show, Milbank's understanding of the secular state as an inherently violent instrument of capitalism is basic to their positions, as is his view that the church must constitute an alternative public space where truly just and God-oriented political-economic interactions occur. Building on Milbank's arguments on these points, Cavanaugh and Bell further identify the state itself as a major institutionalized evil that must be opposed, thus refusing Milbank's concession that the state has a necessary role in this time of the *saeculum*. This thoroughgoing rejection of the state allows for a boldness and consistency in their vision of the church as an alternative to the status quo in its witness against the injustice of the world. This move to reject the state also enables Cavanaugh and Bell to avoid the inherent tensions in Milbank's efforts to maintain the possibility of justice without rejecting the necessity of an unjust state, and to affirm the priority of peace without being a pacifist. Although a thorough analysis of their theological contributions is beyond the scope of this article, I will be especially concerned here with the price they pay to achieve this consistent political ecclesiology, as well as with whether they succeed in allowing for the unity-in-diversity that Milbank both explicitly affirms and implicitly denies.

Taking up Milbank's argument that the liberal state is predicated on an ontology of conflict between individuals, Cavanaugh's criticism of the state focuses on its essentially violent nature. He argues that the state was formed historically through the violent process of seizing power from local communities to make war on other territories, with the goal of fostering the economic interests of the elites who were benefiting from the emerging capitalist system. Moreover, this violence is no mere fact of history that contemporary nation-states might transcend. In the absence of a common telos, Cavanaugh argues, the unity of the state is maintained only through periodic wars that provide the populace with the sense of identity that comes from having a common enemy.[33] He therefore rejects the view that the liberal state arose, or functions now, as a protection against violence. The state, Cavanaugh insists, is not a solution to violence but is rather the cause of violence, since "violence becomes the state's *religio,* its habitual discipline for binding us one to another."[34]

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and Civil: John Milbank's Postmodern Critical Augustinianism," *Philosophy and Theology* 9 (1996) 435–46.

[33] See especially William T. Cavanaugh, "The City: Beyond Secular Parodies," in *Radical Orthodoxy* 182–200, at 191–92, 194. See also William T. Cavanaugh, "Killing for the Telephone Company: Why the Nation-State is not the Keeper of the Common Good," *Modern Theology* 20 (2004) 243–74, at 249, 266.

[34] Cavanaugh, "City" 194.

The inherent opposition Cavanaugh discerns between the peace of the church and the violence of the state is further magnified, in his analysis, by the jealousy of the state, which he contends cannot abide organic relations between persons and is suspicious of "any association which interferes with the direct relationship between sovereign and individual."[35] Cavanaugh thus concludes that the state not only privatizes the church, but in fact is necessarily at war with the church and with any community that fosters the organic human relations that threaten the state's centralizing power. Indeed, in Cavanaugh's assessment, torture is not an aberration but is instead the embodiment of the liberal state's drive to secure its power by breaking community bonds and atomizing individuals.[36] The state, he argues, aims at a monstrously deformed body in which all members are linked directly to the head (the centralized authority of the state) and only relate to other members through that head. As such, it is a parody of the Body of Christ, in which the members are organically united with each other as well as with the head.[37]

Since the state is thus viewed as in essence a form of government that attacks and breaks down any communal associations within it, Cavanaugh concludes that Christians' efforts to realize communities of virtue and reconciliation must work against, rather than with or through, the state. He therefore advocates, in his own words, a "Christian anarchism" that rejects government by the state, though he specifies that he does "not mean no government, but rather no state."[38] He further clarifies that he defines as a "state," and therefore opposes, any centralized government with the sovereign power over a defined territory to regulate relations between communities, to intervene between an individual and her or his community, and to monopolize the legitimate use of force.[39] Instead of this centralized government with the final authority to resolve all conflicts within its boundaries, Cavanaugh envisions complex spaces and overlapping communities. The ideal government would thus be one in which multiple associations and communities work things out among themselves without any central or sovereign authority to enforce laws regulating their interrelationship. The church, Cavanaugh maintains, should further this ideal of "overlapping communities" through its ministry of uniting people organically, "knitting people back together, connecting them as members of one

[35] Ibid. 191.

[36] William T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1998) esp. 34–40. See also Cavanaugh's "The Body of Christ: the Eucharist and Politics," *Word and World* 22 (2002) 170–77, at 174.

[37] Cavanaugh, "City" 191–93.

[38] Ibid. 182–83.

[39] Cavanaugh, "Body of Christ" 173, and his "Killing for the Telephone Company" esp. 260–67.

another," especially in its liturgical enactment of the Body of Christ as an alternative to the perverse and atomizing violence of the state.[40]

It should be noted that, notwithstanding Cavanaugh's staunch opposition to government by any form of state, he contends that he nevertheless also rejects the ideal of sectarian withdrawal. He is not, he insists, advocating a space apart from the state and its capitalist economy to which the church could withdraw. His ideal church would be a distinct polity transforming society from within, rather than a sect that withdraws and leaves the world to its fate.[41] Nor does he require that Christians refuse all cooperation with the state: he cites favorably Alasdair MacIntyre's acceptance of ad hoc alliances with the state for the purpose of combating some other particular evil. Nevertheless, he would have Christians bear in mind and act in a manner consistent with the principle that the state itself is a major form of evil and cause of violence. Any ad hoc alliance with the state must in no way mitigate resistance to the grave and unnecessary evil that Cavanaugh believes the state inherently embodies in the world.[42]

As mentioned above, Bell shares Cavanaugh's understanding of the church and of the role of Christians as necessarily one of opposition to the state, which Bell too considers to be a particularly oppressive form of government. Where Cavanaugh focuses on the violence and social atomization of the state, Bell develops his political critique in accord with Milbank's view of the state as essentially bound to the capitalist economic system. Drawing also on the theories of Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, and Raymond Williams, Bell identifies the nation-state with the governing "technologies" that, he argues, capture our desires and turn them over to the "discipline" of the capitalist economic system.[43] Hence, insofar as liberation theologians attempt to effect socioeconomic transformation through major reforms of the state and its policies, Bell criticizes them for engaging in a "politics of statecraft"; that is, by seeking to reform the policies and practices of the state, they implicitly concede the validity of the

[40] Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist* 267.

[41] Ibid. 268–69.

[42] Ibid. 195. In his more recent "Killing for the Telephone Company," Cavanaugh combines his thoroughgoing critique of the inherent violence and oppression by the state with a more moderate call to demystify the state rather than to reject it altogether. While Cavanaugh's argument here suggests that Cavanaugh may be evolving toward a more nuanced and less thorough repudiation of the state, he has not yet, to my knowledge, explicitly accepted the existence of a central authority as even a temporary expedient or a provisional good. See his "Killing for the Telephone Company" esp. 266–69.

[43] Daniel M. Bell Jr., *Liberation Theology after the End of History: The Refusal to Cease Suffering* (New York: Routledge, 2001) 13–15, 19–35. See also Bell, "'Men of Stone and Children of Struggle': Latin American Liberationists at the End of History," *Modern Theology* 14 (1998) 113–41, at 122–32.

state as a form of government and thus reinforce the hegemony of the capitalist system that the nation-state necessarily serves.[44] Bell concludes that it was inevitable that liberation theology would fail to achieve the desired liberation from the oppressions of capitalism (though one might surmise that much brutality would surely have been avoided and a few martyrs spared, had the tyrannical governments and powerful corporations themselves not considered liberation theology to be a real threat, a point Bell does not consider). He further argues that the recent shift away from political revolution in favor of building up the institutions and habits of civil society in Latin American will also fail to liberate, since this strategy continues to seek liberation through the reform of the nation-state and thus is still caught in this politics of statecraft.[45] What is needed instead, he contends, is the liberation of our desires by a church administering a spiritual therapy that directs our desires back to God.[46]

In Bell's judgment, this failure of liberation theology is not due primarily to a defective political strategy, but is rooted in a defective ecclesiology (as Milbank and Cavanaugh also maintain). These three theologians agree that no secular political alternative will suffice, since what we need is the particular praxis of the Christian community as the true polis oriented to God.[47] Bell argues more specifically that, if we are to be liberated from the disciplining of our desire by the capitalist system, what we need is the "aneconomic" practice of forgiveness that is integral to the Christian therapy of desire. Rather than striving to enlist the powers of the state in the cause of justice, Bell concludes that the poor should reject what he describes as the insatiable "terror of justice."[48] The poor are enjoined to forgo the struggle for justice, and instead are invited to offer the forgiveness that interrupts the capitalist culture of exchange by refusing to seek what is due. For this reason, Bell calls on the church of the poor to "refuse to cease suffering" and to extend forgiveness to their oppressors in a "wager on God" that true reconciliation and restoration are possible.[49]

Bell thus joins Cavanaugh and Milbank in arguing that the church offers Christ's redemption to the world not through the indirect influence of Christianity's principles and virtues, but rather by forming a distinct political and economic community, united in worship of God and providing (as Bell especially insists) a therapy of desire based on forgiveness. As I have shown, Bell also agrees with Cavanaugh in explicitly defining the state

[44] Bell, *Liberation Theology* 13, 42–44. See also Bell, "What Gift Is Given? A Response to Volf," *Modern Theology* 19 (2003) 271–80, at 275.

[45] Bell, *Liberation Theology* 68–70. [46] Ibid. 98–99.

[47] See esp. ibid. 72, and Bell, "Men of Stone" 133–34, for his alternative ecclesiology in which the church is the true public.

[48] Bell, *Liberation Theology* 187, 123–31.

[49] Ibid. esp. 192–95.

itself (and not merely its secularity) as inherently in opposition to the church's mission and to our true liberation. To be sure, the church should not exercise dominating rule as does the state, but rather for Bell (as for Milbank) the church is a *polis* and *oikos* that transcends and transforms our common understanding of what a *polis* and *oikos* can be.[50]

As other commentators have noted, it is not easy for the reader to determine what it means for the church to be an alternative political-economic body.[51] The problem, I think, is not adequately stated as one of not knowing what church Radical Orthodoxy is writing for, a criticism levied at Milbank especially. Insofar as Radical Orthodoxy is calling the church to be different from what it is currently, it is reasonable that there may be no complete embodiment of the ecclesial practices they envision. Nevertheless, given the centrality of the call to form the church as a unique *polis* and *oikos*, particularly in the arguments of Cavanaugh and Bell, it is not inappropriate to regret that this point so fundamental to their ecclesiologies is not more clearly defined. One might surmise that they would have Christians form economically self-sufficient and politically self-governing communities along the lines of some Old Order Mennonite and Amish groups. Such a model, it could be argued, would constitute the church as an alternative political and economic body and could well be a witness intended to transform rather than to abandon society (whether this witness would be successfully transformative is another question). Yet neither author mentions these communities as embodiments or approximations of their ideal, and Bell cites instead Ecclesial Base Communities, Catholic Worker Houses, and church-sponsored soup kitchens, even though these are not self-sufficient politico-economic entities (however much they may involve faith-centered political and economic interventions into the larger political economy).[52] Indeed, it is especially puzzling that Bell includes Ecclesial Base Communities' petitioning the state government among his examples of the church acting as an alternative to the state, since this political petitioning would seem to be precisely the politics of statecraft that he opposes.[53]

Notwithstanding this lack of clarity on the key issue of the alternative Cavanaugh and Bell are calling the church to embody in place of a politics of reforming the state, they are pursuing important issues. Even those who find a bit extreme the description of capitalism as a form of collective suicide might yet agree that an increasingly unfettered capitalism is wreak-

[50] Bell, "What Gift Is Given?" 274–75; see also Bell, *Liberation Theology* 72–73.
[51] See especially the discussion in Miroslav Volf, "Liberation Theology after the End of History: An Exchange," *Modern Theology* 19 (2003) 261–70, at 263–64.
[52] Bell, *Liberation Theology* 73. See also Bell, "What Gift Is Given?" 275–76.
[53] Bell, *Liberation Theology* 73.

ing havoc on communities around the world and on the planet itself.[54] Cavanaugh and Bell are certainly right to warn that the logic of the market is dominating all aspects of society and culture (at least in the United States), and our churches are not only failing to counter the hegemony of the market but have themselves been colonized by capitalist values to an alarming extent. Especially those of us who enjoy the benefits that come from this very destructive economic system must learn a different way of being church if we are to continue our mission to be signs and instruments of a peace with justice in this world.

Nevertheless, Cavanaugh and Bell's unrelenting opposition to any form of authoritative centralized government is cause for concern, especially as this repudiation of the state is neither peripheral to their positions nor inconsequential for Christian praxis. Much more than proffering a mere critique of some current functions or dangerous tendencies of the state, Cavanaugh and Bell explicitly reject any form of government that involves a central governing authority with final coercive power over a territory. Even Hannah Arendt's radically participatory ideal of a conciliar system of government would be opposed as inherently oppressive and evil, according to the logic of Cavanaugh and Bell's critique, insofar as Arendt envisions a council of councils with final territorial authority.[55] My intention here is not to deny that Cavanaugh and Bell develop theological insights (especially on the Eucharist and on transforming our desire) with a validity independent of their claim that all states are to be opposed as an unnecessary and irreformable evil; nor do their criticisms of the state lack merit. Yet I cannot dismiss as mere rhetorical flourish their insistence that Christians must oppose any sovereign territorial authority, however structured, since this rejection of the state is central to their efforts to position their political ecclesiology as a distinct and consistent alternative to the approaches of liberation theology and of Catholic social teaching. Especially given that the suspicion of a central government evident in the arguments of Cavanaugh and Bell is deeply rooted in U.S. culture and history, we cannot responsibly prescind from considering the likely consequences, should these arguments be well received in the United States. Political agitation for freedom from governmental protection of minority rights and from laws regulating gun ownership is not uncommon in this country and would find considerable support in these Radical Orthodoxy arguments that the state is problematic precisely because it is a central governing authority that protects the rights of individuals and holds a monopoly on the authoritative use of violence.[56]

[54] Bell, *Liberation Theology* 12.
[55] Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin, 1990) 278.
[56] In addition to the discussion above, see especially Cavanaugh, "City" 182–83;

Though an adequate critique of this rejection of any and all states is beyond the scope of this article, it should at least be noted that it takes a great deal of confidence in a natural peacefulness retained in our fallen condition to assume that peace and justice will result from the removal of the violence imposed by the state. (Milbank, as I have shown, does not share this confidence, even while he insists on the ontological priority of peace.) If we reject any authority with the right to control violence within a territory, what, we must ask, is to prevent Cavanaugh's local communities from becoming marauding gangs that prey on weaker groups and individuals? In my judgment, neither human history nor the arguments developed by Cavanaugh and Bell provide sufficient reason to trust that, once freed from a common regulative authority, local communities will not only extend justice to their own weaker members but will also peacefully and fairly resolve their differences with other communities and accord justice to the outsider unprotected by a community. As we have been recently reminded by the revelations of clergy sexual abuse, even church authorities are tempted to abuse the vulnerable members within their communities, and thus the vulnerable need to have recourse to the very external authority that Cavanaugh especially rejects as "atomizing" because this authority presumes to protect individuals from abuse by their families and communities.[57]

It is important to note also that the optimism with which Cavanaugh and Bell assume that local communities will flourish and people will resolve differences peacefully and justly without a sovereign authority is not shared by Catholic magisterial teaching any more than is Milbank's pessimism about the capacity of those outside the church to discern principles of peaceful and just government. Committed to the indispensability of a central, ultimate authority within its own institutional structures, the Catholic Church has not been inclined to downplay the need for such authority in the temporal realm.[58] Moreover, the hard lessons learned from the experience of anti-liberal governments in the 20th century taught the Catholic Church—and should remind everyone—to beware of unnuanced rejections of the liberal state which suggest that any alternative is likely to be an

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Cavanaugh, "Body of Christ" 173; and Bell, "What Gift Is Given?" 275. I am troubled not only by the unintended similarity of anarchic oppositionalism to the arguments of far-right groups in the United States, but also by the violence and instability unleashed in countries where private militias challenge the hegemony of the state and thus are even more difficult to restrain and to hold responsible to standards of justice and a common good than are states.

[57] See especially Cavanaugh, "Body of Christ" 171–75.

[58] *Gaudium et spes,* esp. nos. 74–76.

improvement.[59] The Catholic Church has (I believe, wisely) come to recognize that people and communities are likely to flourish best, not in an anarchy that rejects any authoritative structures enabling them to work together in and through their differences, but rather in a representative government that provides institutions from which none are barred from participating on account of their religious beliefs.[60]

Given that Cavanaugh and Bell presume that peace amid differences may reign within and among all communities once we are freed from the authoritative governmental structures that mediate our differences, they cannot be accused of contradicting the very hope for peace amid differences that they espouse (as Milbank does in claiming that peace is possible only within the church). To the contrary, the assumption of a return to harmony absent the state's oppressive violence is entirely consistent with Milbank's argument for the ontological priority of peace. The difficulty with this anarchic oppositional stance is not internal incoherence, then, but rather the incredibility, as well as the danger, of the presumption that undermining the state's mediating authority will more likely result in a harmonious justice than in a Darwinian struggle for survival of the fittest group or community.

It should also be noted that Cavanaugh and Bell cannot provide a clear rationale for valuing religious diversity, since they follow Milbank in understanding the Christian community as possessing a fully adequate and even superior narrated practice that renders the community self-sufficient. Though they consistently assert the possibility of peaceful unity between the church and other communities, they nevertheless share Milbank's ideal

[59] For a fascinating discussion of the relation between pre-World War II Catholic ecclesiology and the response of Catholics to Hitler, see Robert A. Krieg, *Catholic Theologians in Nazi Germany* (New York: Continuum, 2004) esp. 152–75. Krieg's analysis provides helpful tools for further assessment of the political ecclesiologies of Radical Orthodoxy. Though a full discussion of this point is beyond the scope of this article, it is interesting to note that Milbank, Cavanaugh, and Bell all follow the unusual approach of uniting the *societas perfecta* model of the church with the model of church as a moral advocate (though with some of the pre-Vatican II confusion over whether the goal is to assume the world into the church or for the church to serve the world). Ward differs in that he follows a Body of Christ model along with a moral advocate model, and has defined the Body of Christ as clearly broader than the church. Though a full discussion of the use of these ecclesiastical models by Radical Orthodoxy is beyond the scope of my article, Krieg provides a very helpful assessment of the potential strengths and limitations of these general approaches in ibid. 158–75.

[60] *Gaudium et spes* no. 75. As Christopher Insole has further argued, "where the state withdraws from questions of religious truth and personal salvation, one finds that a greater degree of participation in the national life becomes possible for those religious groups who have been previously marginalized" (Insole, "Against Radical Orthodoxy" 237).

of a uniformity in which all people are faithful members of the church. More importantly for our purposes here, this emphasis on unfettered local communities governing themselves and determining their interrelations in an ad hoc manner is disturbing in that it delegitimates the legal structures that serve to protect minorities and their right to participate in governing decisions. Though Cavanaugh and Bell avoid the Milbankian desire for Christendom, their unrelenting critique of the protections offered by the procedures of liberal democracy will be problematic for those committed to a religious freedom that seeks to safeguard the right of all to participate in our common life.

GRAHAM WARD'S CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT

A third distinct political ecclesiology is evident in the recent work of Graham Ward, a coeditor (along with Milbank and Pickstock) of the Radical Orthodoxy book series. Ward does not address the state as such, but he does develop an account of the relation of Christianity to secular society, particularly as embodied in the cities that he believes function as the primary sites of our global, capitalist economy. Ward's focus on the city suggests that he ascribes to the common belief that the nation-state is on the verge of irrelevance, and indeed he contends that globalism has rendered the state ineffective.[61] (In my judgment, recent events such as the U.S. invasion of Iraq indicate to the contrary that the state continues to be important in political organization and decision-making. Thus, I agree with Milbank, Cavanaugh, and Bell at least in this: the state cannot be dismissed as irrelevant.) Nevertheless, Ward's argument that theology must respond "positively and also critically" to the secular city provides an alternative political ecclesiology for Radical Orthodoxy that is of sufficient generality in its concern with all "social bodies" to be applicable not only to the city but also, mutatis mutandis, to other levels of political organization in secular society, including the state.[62]

In his *Cities of God,* Ward analyzes both the modern city, which he describes as characterized by eternal aspiration to achieve ideals, and our current postmodern city, devoted not to ideals but to endless desire. The postmodern city of desire, Ward argues, exaggerates and thus makes evident the social atomization and overconsumption latent within the modern city's individualism. In Ward's view, it was precisely this modern individualism that both privatized Christian faith and prevented the modern city from achieving its promise of social harmony with freedom and personal development for all. Taking up Milbank's argument that postmodernity reveals the unsustainable excesses of modernity, Ward argues that the

[61] Graham Ward, *Cities of God* (New York: Routledge, 2000) esp. 28, 242.
[62] Ibid. 70.

postmodern city surpasses the modern city in being evidently individualistic and even nihilistic in its devotion to an unending cycle of creating and fulfilling individual desires through the production of simulacra.[63]

Further echoing Milbank's basic insights, Ward contends that what our cities desperately need, and what Christian theology can provide, is a truly radical critique of secular modernity and postmodernity. This radical critique must reassert an "analogical" perspective countering social atomization and calling forth instead "a desire not to consume the other, but to let the other be in the perfection they are called to grow into" because each person participates in all others and so cannot achieve fulfillment alone.[64] Lacking such a vision of mutual participation (predicated, as Milbank also insisted, on belief in a transcendent and triune God), our modern and postmodern cities have been caught in an oppositional logic that Ward (like Milbank) maintains will inevitably lead to individualism and to self-and-other consuming forms of desire in place of the true fulfillment we can achieve only through relations of mutual care and support.[65]

But how, given the entrenched individualism and patterns of narcissistic consumption in our postmodern global capitalism, are we to effect the required therapy of desire and recover the awareness of our interrelationality that can heal our social atomization? Ward interestingly argues that, since we do in fact exist in relations of mutual participation, we each affect and are affected by all others. We should, then, be confident that Christians living their eucharistic faith will ineluctably have a positive influence on the larger society.[66]

If we are so interrelated that each person affects all others, one might conclude that non-Christians, including people living a hedonistic consumerism, will also influence Christians. Nevertheless, Ward does not determine that Christians need to separate themselves from non-Christians in order to maintain their purity; in fact, he insists that separation is impossible according to a properly interrelational account of existence. Ward has a confidence in the possibility of a Christian contribution to the renewal of society that is grounded not only in our inherent interrelatedness, but also in his refusal to believe that Christians are the only ones capable of realizing and living some degree of the truth. Though he contends that Christianity has a significant contribution to make to society, he also acknowledges that Christianity has blindnesses and distortions that will not always be adequately uncovered through self-critique, but must at times be revealed to us by others.[67] Thus, even while defending the role of Christianity in the recovery of the relational perspective needed to heal our postmod-

[63] Ibid. esp. 27–77.
[64] Ibid. 77, 172–73.
[65] Ibid. esp. 70, 236.
[66] Ibid. 236.
[67] Ibid. 74.

ern cities, Ward also maintains an openness to non-Christians having some truth that can help Christians and non-Christians to grow together toward a more just and peaceable society.

In detailing the contribution of a Christian perspective to life in our contemporary cities, Ward argues that what he calls the "Christian city" or the "city of God" is "immanent to the forms of all cities," making possible their existence as well as their redemption.[68] For Ward, this does not mean that Christians must strive to construct an explicitly Christian city or focus on developing the church itself as an alternative to secular society. To the contrary, Christians should recognize that each existing city has its own manner of realizing (and presumably also of falling short of) the ideal of just human relationships. Appealing to Augustine's refusal of any temporal triumphalism, Ward further maintains that the city of God Christians are called to build in each moment and the actual cities they live in can be separated only by divine judgment.[69] Notwithstanding this inevitable degree of indeterminacy in judgments about our cities, Ward contends that Christian theologians nevertheless have a distinct contribution to make to this process of conforming our cities more fully in their particular ways to the ideal city of God. Theologians should take seriously the specificity of each society, provide a theological critique of its root cultural metaphor, and work with any point of cultural connection that will allow a theological critique to be heard.[70] In an application of this method, Ward discerns in the culture of the postmodern city an openness to our otherwise marginalized theological discourse in the nostalgia for transcendence expressed in the widespread public fascination with angels.[71]

As should be clear from the above discussion, Ward's approach to political ecclesiology shares some of the central ideas developed by Milbank, Cavanaugh, and Bell. Certainly the significance of belief in God for sociopolitical life is evident in Ward's argument that a truly interrelational perspective requires a transcendent God who establishes the unity in difference of all that exists. Ward also agrees with these other Radical Orthodox thinkers in judging that our individualistic modern and postmodern cities lack any sense of a common good and have embraced an oppositional ontology that leads to nihilistic consumerism. Ward explicitly agrees with Cavanaugh's claim that our cities of endless desire are parodies of the true erotic community the church is called to embody, and with Bell he argues for an ecclesial therapy to reorient our desire to the God who desires us.[72]

Yet there are obvious and important differences between Ward's position and the anarchic oppositional approach of Cavanaugh and Bell. Where

[68] Ibid. 226.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid. 237.
[71] Ibid. esp. 206–8.
[72] Ibid. 77, 125, 150–51.

the latter judge the state to be irredeemable as a form of government, Ward insists that the contemporary secular city, notwithstanding its deep perversity, remains a site of "eschatological" possibilities and so should be engaged rather than opposed.[73] If we judge that the secular state continues to have political relevance, then the logic of Ward's argument, especially in its insistence that *all* social bodies participate in and transform one another, leads to the conclusion that the state too should be similarly judged as perverse yet not beyond reform. Indeed, Ward advocates a transformational praxis of civic engagement that, when applied to the state, would surely be repudiated by Bell as "statecraft." Further, Ward rejects the claim that involvement in secular politics is secondary to the primary task of providing the oppositional witness of a distinct ecclesial polity, as it is for Cavanaugh and Bell. To the contrary, Ward maintains that an active engagement in transforming secular society is an essential part of the Christian vocation to respond through grace to the needs of the time and place in which we find ourselves. Hence, he strongly condemns as "neotribalism" the demand that Christians denounce the secular world, and withdraw from (or minimize their involvement in) efforts with non-Christians to build a more just society.[74]

Ward's stance also differs from Milbank's account of church-state relations. To be sure, Ward's affirmation that "the boundaries cannot be patrolled, the sites of Christian community cannot be mapped and labeled" sounds quite similar to Milbank's call for hazy boundaries between church and state.[75] However, Milbank merely tolerates the state as a necessary evil, and he would limit the state in favor of an expanding church that he suggests embodies the Kingdom of God insofar as that Kingdom is present (however imperfectly) on earth. Ward, on the other hand, considers the church to be only one of the many social bodies that show forth the Body of Christ each in its own way. Further, Ward argues that Christians should recognize that all bodies, individual as well as social, participate in all others, since the "permeability" of our physical, social, and ecclesial bodies is "the nature of Christian embodiment."[76] Therefore, rather than focusing on a witness against the perversions of a secular city that is only tolerated, Ward wants Christianity to "give to secularism a legitimacy that saves it from nihilistic self-consumption" by providing the interrelational perspective that secularism needs to function *as secular*.[77] We grow toward the

[73] Ibid. 205.
[74] Ibid. 69.
[75] Ibid. 247.
[76] Ibid. 180. Here Ward further argues that "the body of Christ desiring its consummation opens itself to what is outside the institutional church. . . . The institutions of the body of Christ are serving a purpose much greater than their own survival."
[77] Ibid. 236, 94.

Kingdom of God, in Ward's view, not by incorporating the world into the church, but by helping all social bodies (including the church) to achieve their own proper manner of conformity to the mutuality of the Body of Christ. Only thus, according to Ward, will the church assist the redemption of the desire of postmodern societies, as well as of the abused and overly consuming physical bodies of people caught in postmodernism's logic of endless desire.

Unlike the other Radical Orthodoxy thinkers discussed here, Ward clearly affirms the potential of secular societies as secular, not of course in the sense of being independent from God (since he maintains that all cities should strive to embody the city of God), but certainly in the sense of constituting a common life shared no less by non-Christians than by Christians. Ward's approach does not conflict with religious freedom, then, insofar as he does not posit an ideal in which society is united in a common commitment to God or is explicitly guided by Christian revelation. Further, Ward's insistence that all social bodies must inform and transform each other is fully consistent with the goal of complex space and overlapping authorities, a goal that Milbank, Cavanaugh, and Bell also proclaim but implicitly deny in positing the ideal of uniting religion and politics (indeed, all of society) within the church. Ward's quite different approach is especially evident when he celebrates the various communities he has the opportunity to participate in with non-Christians, warning that "my assertion of exclusivity debilitates us both," as it attempts to separate what is in fact inherently united.[78]

This consistently interrelational approach enables Ward to uphold the importance of a God-oriented political activity without contradicting the Radical Orthodox claims that peace is more basic than violence and that harmony amid differences (even religious differences) is possible. Al-

[78] Ibid. 258. Defenders of the remnant Christendom or anarchic oppositional approaches may well argue that the praxis inspired by these political ecclesiologies would in fact lead to the complexification of authorities as the sociopolitical authority of the church counters the hegemonic authority of the state. (Indeed, the differences in attitude toward the state between Milbank's approach and that of Cavanaugh and Bell may be rooted in the fact that Milbank understands the state to have a tendency to hegemonic authority that can be resisted by opposing authorities, whereas Cavanaugh and Bell provide analyses in which the state is irredeemably a hegemonic authority whose very existence is incompatible with multiple authorities.) I concede that asserting the political authority of the church over that of the state might at first lead to more actual negotiation of alternative authorities, though I believe it is likely that such a political ecclesiology would finally result in a more fractured society in which authorities (and their adherents) are not overlapping but are locked in opposition to one another. My basic point here, however, is simply that the goal of overlapping authorities and the goal of an all-encompassing church are practically incompatible in this world of religious diversity. I am also deeply suspicious of means that contradict the desired end.

though he insists that a distinctly Christian perspective is relevant to all that we do, enabling Christians to give an adequate account of human interrelatedness and to commit themselves to discerning how each social body might realize the city of God in its own way, Ward does not hold that justice and peace are found only within the church. To the contrary, he maintains that each of the various communities that unite us in our differences must embody justice and peace in the manner proper to that community. Where Milbank's "remnant Christendom" holds that a just peace is possible only within the church, and where the "anarchic oppositionalism" of Cavanaugh and Bell envisions peace as the absence of the state, Ward (like the Catholic tradition) provides grounds for hoping in God that peaceful justice can be sought in and through the governing institutions by which we cooperate with each other as members of secular bodies (including, I would argue, states).

CONCLUSION: BRIDGING RADICAL ORTHODOXY AND CATHOLIC ORTHODOXY

Each of the Radical Orthodox theologians considered here is concerned with the development of a political ecclesiology in which the church has something more to offer the world than mere motivation. Their interest in defending a distinct socio-political Christian stance thus embroils them in the passionate battles over the role of religion in public life that are currently engaging people around the globe. Given this historic moment, it is difficult to be sanguine about either the privatization of faith that Radical Orthodoxy rightly rejects or the undermining of religious disestablishment that some of the group's arguments foster (however unintentionally). If we are to be true to our theological hope for peaceful unity amid diversity, I believe that we must envision a politically active faith that is fully consistent with the secularization in which religion is not officially supported by the state, so that religious diversity does not require a de jure public marginalization of religious minorities.

Neither Milbank's "remnant Christendom" nor Cavanaugh and Bell's "anarchic oppositionalism" can be rendered consistent with the secularization of religious disestablishment. Milbank's hazy boundaries encourage Christian absorption of public functions in a way that would necessarily marginalize non-Christians in a majority Christian society. Further, as I have argued here, his efforts at a distinct Christian politics so value the witness of the church as an alternative polis that he falls into the unsustainable contradiction of maintaining that a just peace is impossible where there is religious diversity. Though Cavanaugh and Bell also emphasize the mission of the church to be visible as a uniquely just (and, they add, self-sufficient) community, they succeed at least in consistently imagining the possibility of peace even among non-Christians, provided only that all

are liberated from the violence necessarily imposed by the state (or by any institutionalized central authority). However, this anarchic oppositionalism evinces an extraordinary optimism about the ease of achieving a peaceful justice among human groups of various sizes and strengths, and so it would leave the less powerful within and among communities especially vulnerable and without legal rights or defense. Ward's "critical engagement" is the only Radical Orthodoxy position thus far able to envision a substantive Christian sociopolitical praxis that is not inherently incompatible with religious disestablishment, because he accepts and encourages a Christian transformative politics that works with non-Christians for the greater good of all.

Ward's work also clarifies the significant ambiguity at the heart of the Radical Orthodoxy project, evident in that Milbank (especially) interprets the tenets of the Radical Orthodox credo according to an either–or logic, whereas Ward outlines a both–and understanding of these propositions in a manner similar to that of the Second Vatican Council. This ambiguity may be why commentators on Radical Orthodoxy are often ambivalent about its theological project: much depends on whether this credo is understood as proclaiming that *only* insights founded on Christian revelation are of real sociopolitical value, or rather as affirming the sociopolitical significance of Christian revelation without necessarily rejecting all non-Christian insights. Does insisting on the nonopposition of reason and revelation, as well as on the importance of God as the basis of all true value, mean that revelation provides the foundation necessary for reason to function properly, so that any perspective is nihilistic that is not predicated on belief in God and on the acceptance of divine revelation, as Milbank maintains? Or might such claims about the nonopposition of reason and revelation instead allow reason and revelation to inform each other because finally they are not mutually contradictory, even if one wishes also to maintain that belief in God provides the grounding without which our values are otherwise unstable? Ward takes the both–and path—as do the Vatican II documents—while Milbank, Cavanaugh, and Bell develop the either–or approach. This openness to a variety of intellectual perspectives further entails that Ward is not bound to the claim that Christianity already has a complete socioeconomic theory, so that his approach is open to engaging analyses of specific forms of oppression, as do the liberation theologies that Milbank so harshly criticizes.[79]

Ward's basic coherence with Vatican II's approach to political ecclesiology suggests that the documents of this council warrant further attention,

[79] Though the Radical Orthodox thinkers discussed here identify themselves with some form of "left-wing" politics and at times even with a "Christian socialism," their work is certainly open to the criticism that it speaks *about* the poor rather than *with* the poor. Further, the proffered analyses of the oppression inherent in our global, capitalist economy occur on a highly abstract level, considerably removed

at least by those unwilling to relinquish the hope that a politically active Christian faith might be consistent with governing institutions that intend to protect the rights of all citizens and that allow us to work together in and through our religious differences. Though an adequate defense of the integrity of the conciliar position is beyond the scope of this article, those interested in the Radical Orthodoxy efforts to develop a critical and socially transformative political ecclesiology would do well to reconsider the manner in which *Gaudium et spes* and *Dignitatis humanae* affirm both religious disestablishment and the sociopolitical relevance of Christian faith, on the grounds that our rational capacity to discern the proper principles by which society should be governed are complemented and not contradicted by revelation. Though we may indeed need to develop further the critical engagement between Christianity and the various cultures of modernity and postmodernity, a reading of the Second Vatican Council as accepting either a privatized faith or an uncritical sociopolitical stance is not adequate to the documents the council produced.

John Courtney Murray, no friend of unitary authority, warned us over 50 years ago that the simplest solutions of collapsing or opposing the life of faith and the political projects of the nation-state do not do justice to the nuanced tradition of Catholic thought on the sociopolitical role of the church.[80] Such simple solutions, I would add, also fail to provide appropriate guidance for discerning the proper role of the church in this complex world. What we need today is not a Milbankian postpolitical theology insisting that only Christian revelation can properly organize a society, so that religious diversity and disestablishment are at best evils to be tolerated. Rather, we need a religious critique of society such as that envisioned by *Gaudium et spes,* a social criticism informed by faith as well as by a thorough and adequate grasp of the relation-in-difference between reason and revelation, and between church and state.[81]

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from the specific experiences of suffering and exploitation. While this abstraction may be due to the foundational level of the Radical Orthodox project as thus far developed, it remains to be seen whether Radical Orthodoxy's criticisms of Liberation Theology will finally require Radical Orthodoxy thinkers to remain within an academic form of theology that disallows a constructive theological engagement with the specific experiences of the poor. Davies contends that Milbank's rejection of dialogue requires Milbank "to construct an essentially *monological* and *heroic* view of culture" in which theology is the work of the supremely creative individual. If so, Milbank's approach cannot be reconciled with liberationist efforts to ensure that the poor are subjects of theology (Davies, "Revelation and the Politics of Culture" 123).

[80] John Courtney Murray, S.J., *We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition* (Kansas City, Mo.: Sheed & Ward, 1960) ix.

[81] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory* 228.