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Radical Orthodoxy: a Rough Guide for German Speakers in Response to Questions posed by Sven Grosse

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What follows is not an ordinary academic paper. It is instead a polemical summary designed to give a general idea of Radical Orthodoxy in terms of its origins, main ideas, milieu and general cultural ‘feel’. If much is here said about past thinkers and genealogies of the modern, this is not because RO thinkers suppose that that stands at the heart of theology, but rather because rival, liberal theological outlooks often in part depend, either openly or covertly, upon stories about the past and assumed readings of certain crucial thinkers. ‘Telling a different story’ is then crucial to any genuinely subversive theological proposal. Most of the stories I tell are based upon scholarly research from about RO, much of it generally accepted by experts, if not as yet always well disseminated. It is rather my ‘take’ on these stories and their historical and contemporary implications that is the most debatable and controversial.

1. Why at all a Christian alternative to secularization?

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

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

(b) Christianity is itself the source of a positive secularisation, if by this one means the descacralisation of political power and legality and the new linkage of the sacral to the free powers of the human spirit. What is questionable is the idea that the secular realm is completely autonomous and self-referential. Arguably, following Ivan Illich and Charles Taylor, this is the result of an excessive western Christian emphasis upon the ethical, practical and disciplinary, in isolation from the contemplative, festive and liturgical. In any case, an ethics claiming to be independent of religious vision is evidently subject to two seemingly opposed tendencies. On the one hand it sinks into a ‘moralism’ – to day taking the form of ‘political correctness’ –

which ignores the proximity of the ethical to questions of tragedy, fate or providence, historical legacy, existential vocation, and aesthetic vision. On the other hand it proves unable to account for the ethical imperative in its own terms and so replaces ‘the good’ with ‘right’, thereby inevitably grounding this imperative in the pre-ethical, whether our given sheerly open liberty on the one hand, or our sensory impulses to happiness or a projective sympathy on the other. In practical reality moralism pertains at the everyday level of epiphenomenal ‘gossip’ which now dominates our media; while reductionism pertains at the level of the elite scientific decisions and normative processes that really govern our lives.

2. Is it possible (and does it make sense) to roll back the wheel of history?

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

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

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

tainted with Catholic reactionary conspiracy theory. Only now are we starting to see, thanks to the work of Jan Assmann and others, that it has some measure of objective truth.

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

In terms of the more anti-Christian currents of enlightenment, with Charles Taylor one has to say that our current modern outlook is also the result of the romantic reaction against Enlightenment. And that very reaction was also twofold: there was a 'dark', immanentising romanticism, stemming from both Kant and Goethe and leading to Wagner and Nietzsche, but there was also a 'light' romanticism, stemming more from Jacobi and Hamann and a critical reaction to Fichte in the thought of Novalis, Hölderlin and F. Schlegel and others, stressing more a participation in transcendence and eventually tending towards an embrace of both Platonism and Christianity. RO is today very interested in Manfred Frank's demonstration that 'romantic' philosophy was a re-working of traditional realism in more vitalist and poetic terms and not a mode of aestheticised Fichteanism – though Frank underrates the theological dimension. May it be that theology should now realise that Schleiermacher (still too Kantian) was *not* the most interesting German romantic thinker from a theological perspective, even though he was the theologian?

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

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

3. Is Radical Orthodoxy an advocate for re-establishing Christianity against secularization or for re-establishing religion in general?

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

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

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

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

4. *Is secularization the only foe of Christianity?*

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

Thus also in the current period it may well appear that outright rejection of Christianity is the major crisis that we face today. But then, things like clerical child abuse scandals (however much the media may distort, misanalyse and misrepresent them) call us short. Even a dwindling Church can prove its own worst enemy. RO may of course have become over-obsessed with the secularisation question and it needs to continue to enlarge its horizons. However, it is important here to note that it has never mainly engaged in polemics against the secular, but rather has developed genealogies which tend to show that the secular is not as secular as one might think, or that it either perpetuates or understandably reacts against corrupted Christian emphases. For us these can include an excessive pietism that corrals the Christian faith into a narrow closet; a Voluntarist account of God; an intellectually idolised reduction of God to the ontic and a failure to elaborate theology as also a Christian philosophy that considers every aspect of reality – not excluding, I would say, even the physical and the mathematical. For want of a metaphysics in the name of a purer, more agnostic piety, one always is confined to a weak, implicit and perhaps distorted metaphysics by default.

5. *What is specifically Christian in RO? Cannot, e.g. the ontology of RO be regarded as something neo-platonic, and this means: something pagan?*

I think clearly not, because our ontology – or our ontologies! – depend upon Creation *ex nihilo*, on God as Trinity and Creation as being in the image of the Trinity, besides the importance of transformative event as shown supremely in the Incarnation. This is one reason why we have tended to reconfigure analogy as 'non-identical repetition' (See here most of all, Catherine Pickstock's new book *Repetition and Identity* which goes further than before in the direction of developing an 'RO metaphysics'.) Although indeed we emphasise Platonic *methexis* or participation, we also tend to argue that the doctrine of Creation is the *most* participatory doctrine, since things created out of nothing exist *only* as image and share, without remainder. Perhaps this truth was developed with the most brilliance by Albert the Great of Cologne, as Alain de Libera has now shown: for Albert, neo-platonic emanation of from downwards can be combined with Aristotelian

,elicitation' of form' upwards from matter precisely by appealing to Dionysius the Areopagite's view that the divine act of creation immediately brings about and yet is only possible through the 'grateful' reception of this gift which is from the outset a 'return' to God on the part of creatures. In this way Albert showed how the Christian understanding of creation is able to combine the Platonic stress on transcendent 'vertical' causality with the Aristotelian emphasis on immanent, horizontal causality. Aquinas both took over and further developed this approach in his own way.

In a similar vein, though we have recently stressed the importance of the 'theurgic' after Iamblichus and Proclus, we would argue that this perspective was appropriated by Dionysius, Maximus and Boethius just because the Incarnation is *hyperbolically* theurgic compared to any pagan scheme: here the divine descends to the point of identification and the saving ritual is offered first (but then by us as the Church) by God himself to God. Indeed without any pagan borrowing Augustine offers similar conclusions with respect to his *vox Psalmos totius Christi* in his *Enarrationes in Psalmos*. And this is linked to the real heart of atonement: the only acceptable gift that we can offer to God is God himself, and only the Incarnation renders this possible – both once for all and *yet* for that very reason, repeatedly. Moreover this rendering simultaneously reveals that God is in himself an offering of gift by the Son to the Father which is immediately (as in the Dionysian paradigm of creation) the grateful return of the Son to the Father, thereby mutually showing gift as a generous reciprocity which then 'proceeds' outwards from both as the *donum* of the Holy Spirit without limit. (I am drawing on Richard of St Victor and Aquinas, *De Potentia Dei* 9.9 here.)

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

Despite this analogy between attitudes to pagan philosophy and to other religions, it remains for RO nonetheless still fundamentally the case that there is an especial kinship (however one accounts for this historically) between the Platonic elevation of *theoria* with regard to the divine and to the re-conception of the divine as identical with the Good. I do think that one can see a convergence between this notion and those of the Old Testament in the writings of the New: for example in St Paul's account of the beatific vision. By comparison, attempts to 'de-Hellenize' Christian doctrine simply lead to its entire unravelling. And one can also note here that the work of recent Biblical critics like Margaret Barker has tended to break with the delusion that the Old Testament was only concerned with the historical and revelatory and not with the cosmic and the symbolically participatory. This is manifest not just in the wisdom literature, but in the whole complex of ideas to do with the temple. Too often supposed defenders of 'the Bible' are really

defending a particular ideological construction of it that has more to do with outcomes of intellectual and cultural history than with really attending to the Bible itself.

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

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

On the second, 'Dominican option' (one thinks here both of the Thomist and of the German Albertine legacy through to Nicholas of Cusa and even beyond) the movement away from a Platonising outlook in terms of a metaphysics of participation – which arguably most defines 'the modernity we have' – is rejected in part because it is seen to coincide with a general drift away from 'symbolic realism' which precludes a proper understanding of the Scriptures also. The condemnations of 1270-1279, in their understandable yet excessive fear of a new pagan religiosity focussed round a contemplative felicity not adverting to revelation, nonetheless 'threw the baby out with the bathwater', because in rejecting Averroes and much of Avicenna it

also rejected positions in Aquinas that were perfectly Patristic. After this period, without realist assumptions about relation, substance and accident, the nature of ‚proper‘ substantive and personal unity and so forth, nominalists like Ockham struggled to articulate the key Christian doctrines in genuinely orthodox terms.

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

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

The ‚analogical‘ solution given by Albert, Aquinas and others to the Plotinian quandary of maintaining a ‚general‘ unity of the categories across the boundaries from the divine to the intellectual to the psychic to the material in terms of a not entirely definable scale of participations was here sustained and yet radicalised in the direction of paradox in the face of Scotist and nominalist critiques. Thus in response to the claim for a logically necessary ‘univocity of being’ between creation and God (which threatens the ontological difference of the divine) it is newly and daringly asserted – harking back to Eriugena – that the world both is and yet is not God, just as the Trinitarian procession both is and is not distinguished from the outgoing of the creation. (Yet Aquinas already says this in his *Sentence Commentary*.) In response to Ockham’s argument that universals, real relations and analogy violate the principle of non-contradiction, both Eckhart and then Cusa argue plausibly that there *exist* such violations because logic breaks down not just in the infinite but also at the ‘impossible’ and problematic border between the finite and the infinite. In response to the Ockhamite division of all reality into atomic things and arbitrary signs, Cusa declares in effect (in a post-analytic move that is comparable to a post-analytic or post-phenomenological move in philosophy today) that *even* sensorily evidenced things are mediated by sign, but that actually symbolic construction (in the mathematical and other cultural realms) is not arbitrary, but a participation in the divine act of simultaneous

generation/vision which is the Father's eternal uttering of the *Verbum*. In this way Cusa begins to 'poeticise' and 'historicise' the metaphysics of participation by rendering participation 'conjecture' and yet conjecture also participation.

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

There are many mysteries and ironies here. Why is it that English medieval Catholic thought was often (though by no means always – Geoffrey of Ascham seems to have invented the 'analogical solution to metaphysical *aporia*) so 'already modern' while much Anglican thought has been just the opposite – seeking to retrieve the pre-modern Christian-Platonic synthesis in a new way. Hooker already goes back to Aquinas. Thomas Traherne develops a remarkable new theology of cosmic disclosure, and so forth. And why is it that English literature, without usually articulating a philosophy seems so often – from the *Gawain* poet through Spenser to Lewis and Tolkien – to adopt the 'stance of the fairies' at an extreme remove from the modes of utilitarianism that can tend to assume control within the British Isles? There is no equivalent of a continental binding of the philosophic and the literary, as with a Diderot or a Goethe – though there are several 'amateur' literary philosophers – Burke, Carlyle, Ruskin, Barfield, Massingham – who articulate the alternative 'fairy', perspective which Novalis in Germany dubbed 'magical idealism'. The exceptions to this amateurism would be the Cambridge Platonists, Berkeley, and to some degree T.H. Green and Collingwood. – who notably wrote 'a philosophy of enchantment'.

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

6. What is the essential difference between RO and postmodernity, between RO's critique of modernity and postmodern critique of modernity?

To some degree I think that RO's initial engagement with postmodernism was tactical: ie it was operating in a cultural environment where French post-structuralist thinking was highly influential on the student population in the humanities. (Although analytic philosophy dominates in British philosophy departments, any glance in a British bookshop will tell you that this does not mean that it enjoys the same equivalent amount of cultural influence!) Today that situation has slightly changed: the boundaries between Continental and Anglo-Saxon thought are blurring and an anti-metaphysical attitude shared in different ways by both Analysis and Phenomenology (with its offshoots) is giving way to a new 'speculation' which can take both naturalistic and spiritualistic forms. (Deleuze, Badiou, Laruelle, Henry, etc.) We have more recently responded to this new scenario and would even claim to be one of its harbingers since, from the outset, we tended to claim that the anti-metaphysical was only itself based on the wrong sort of metaphysical dogmatism. Put far too briefly, the claim is that a metaphysics that has become in early modernity an 'ontology' divorced from primary analogical causal explanation is already and explicitly half way to being an epistemology. Thus all Kant does – far from achieving any 'criticism' of metaphysics as conceived by Plato, Aristotle and Aquinas – is *complete* this process. Thus his 'critique' of metaphysics is only possible as the wrong sort of metaphysical dogmatism.

One can realise this in four ways: 1. after Hamann who saw 'meta-critical' that if language will not allow one to divide category from evidence that one cannot set any 'bounds' between the knowable and the unknowable; 2. After Jacobi who saw that Kant had *not* answered Hume because he has to assume a given foundation that Hume does not, and also that Kant's agnosticism cannot be defended from a practical nihilism if we know nothing of how things really are; 3. the excessive weight given to Newtonian physics rather than to the biological which tends to exhibit the *objective reality* of the teleological, as Kant with astounding bravery starts to see in his old age in the *Opus Postumum*; 4. the over-protection from naturalism provided by the miss-named, Copernican turn, which is too anthropocentric. To break with the myth that Kant constituted a unique 'undeniable break' in human thought, one should attend instead to a thinker like the French romantic Maine de Biran who showed the continuity between the natural and the psychic in terms of the primacy of the body and of habit. In his wake French 'spiritual realism' from Ravaisson through Bergson and Blondel to Merleau-Ponty continued to sustain a realist metaphysics that was not 'critical' in the Kantian sense and yet modern as adverting to both evolution and historical change.

But RO's relationship to postmodernism was more than tactical insofar as we tended to agree with the Nietzschean revival that humanism was incoherent without a theological foundation. I think what angered our theological elders in the UK was that they had invested a great deal in supporting an attempt to protect a humanist redoubt – whether in terms of Wittgenstein or of Gadamer etc. They regarded this as a possible 'launching pad' that could take their secular compères from humanity to God and at the same time it

permitted them a comfortable seat at the academic high table: their neighbour might be an agnostic, but at least they could agree about ‘basic human values’.

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

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

Of course there have been other merely humanist and metaphysically-neutral attempts to respond to postmodernism in this sort of way, but RO would further claim that they fail by being unable to give any account of how we can know that we can obscurely approximate to truth and reality. To do this one needs something like Plato’s theory in the *Meno*, or Augustine’s account of illumination in the *Confessiones*. One can of course note here just how close Augustine was in his day to Academic Scepticism. The latter has always been an ally of faith – an observation which by no means implies fideism, but rather a different and more accurate conception of the nature of reason.

I would now say that our response to postmodernism can readily be compared to Friedrich Schlegel’s realisation at once of the sceptical potential in Fichtean irony and his surmounting of that irony in terms of flashes of ‘wit’ that he saw as participating in eternal truth. As I have already indicated, rather like the early German and English romantics (Coleridge thought very similar things) RO tends to be in favour of a substantive metaphysics (in a ‘pre-critical’ sense) but to think of this as only articulable in ‘fragments’,

however extended. Such an attitude may well in fact be in tune with that of Plato as reflected in his mode of composition, but certainly for Christians, if participation is increased in the course of time, then a particular event or insight can keep revising even the general metaphysical framework within which one thinks. I suspect that this is implicit in Nicholas of Cusa also – but these considerations are much extended by the attention to non-identical repetition in Kierkegaard and in Charles Péguy.

7. What is different in RO's use of reason to the enlightenment's (or a post-kantian philosophy's) use of reason?

This is too big a question readily to answer here. But as already explained, questioning the idea that Kant is necessarily pivotal for all modern thought is central to the RO enterprise. Again, this put us into some conflict with our immediate elders in the UK who had often tended to favour a hybrid of Aquinas and Barth, with Kant as the essential mediating link. (Donald Mackinnon was the central figure here – though I should hasten to say that we remain indebted to him in several respects; not least the refusal ever to separate theology and philosophy from each other and his intermittent realisation that metaphysics was a kind of link between logic and poetry.) Again I feel that we were somewhat prophetic in this respect, for now, after Deleuze, Badiou, Meillassoux and others it has become commonplace to suggest that Kant's anthropocentrism was in some ways a perverse misreading of Copernican decentring, just as his finitism ran clean against the crucial spirit of mathematical calculus. Descartes' combination of mathematicisation, the priority of the infinite and yet (problematically) also of the humanly subjective is starting to look much the more centrally paradigmatic modern project right up to the present day. And as Jacobi realised, Spinoza's dogmatic immanentism is an equally possible variant on post-Cartesian rationalism to the critical and finitist philosophy of Kant. To see them both as variants on 'nihilism' was a crucial stroke of genius from which RO has learned much.

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

There are two other historical remarks which need to be made with respect to Kant and RO. The first – again

as already indicated – is that it has learned much from the work of scholars like Ludger Honnefelder, J.-L. Courtine and André de Muralt who have argued that Scotus and Ockham are the real historically pivotal thinkers and that Kant stands in their wake. Far from ‘overturning’ metaphysics, he inherits a post-Scotist metaphysics, regarded as prior to and separable from theology, that is already tending towards an inversion into epistemology and a conversion of the ‘transcendentals’ into formally-separable ‘transcendentalist’ perspectives.

The second is that – once more to pick up on an earlier thread – I tend now to have reverted to the view that David Hume is by far the more genuinely revolutionary philosopher – even though I read Hume in a way that is thoroughly heterodox by most Anglo-Saxon standards. On my reading, Hume is no empiricist foundationalist, but rather someone who – rather like Hamann with respect to language, thinks that we always ‘arrive too late’ to sift out the ‘given’ sources of knowledge in reason and sensation (he *attacks* this view in Locke) but thinks this with respect to the role of habitual *feeling*. Given this account of Hume, one can argue that two alternative (non-empiricist) tracks run from Hume into later thought, again bypassing Kant almost totally. The first is Jacobi’s reading which plausibly argues that Hume can only evade scepticism by ‘faith’, or trust in feelings. The second is Maine de Biran’s, which argues that we think by virtue of corporeal habit which is at once spiritual and material. With far more kinship to Hume than he realises (and with much resemblance to Goethe) he also thinks that since our thought arises from within nature, our self-knowledge with regard to the process of our feeling gives us a better insight to the workings of nature in general (for example into causality – this is just Hume’s real, more than sceptical position, as even mainline exegesis now realises) than a merely external, ‘scientific’ gaze upon its workings. But one can also argue that the ancient and medieval realist understandings of causality assumed that we can know natural causality from within nature and therefore have some microcosmic inklings of its workings. The ‘fourfold’ Aristotelian model of causality depends on this. And the attitude of RO is that supposing that the logic of Christian theology can survive the abandonment of this sort of causal model is both naive and cavalier. But the modern variants bring out more the ‘vitalist’ implications of this approach. I think it is now important to develop a ‘transcendent vitalism’ (partly on the basis of the importance of ‘life’ in the NT and in rejection of that supposed association of the vital with the immanent) which can show (without Michel Henry’s dualism) that only such a perspective will do justice at once to our natural condition and to our spiritual transcendence.

How then, does all this affect the attitude of RO towards reason as compared with the Kantian legacy? Above all we would reject the notion of identifiably different sources of empirical information on the one hand and rational processing based on *a priori* categories on the other – even if, for Kant, they can only be understood in correlated combination. Rather, for RO, thought is an event of appropriation of surrounding reality in terms of embodied feelings and expressed language. If thought conveys truth then this is because – as for Aristotle and Aquinas – the essences or forms (*eidē*) of reality are themselves transmuted into thoughts. But more than those thinkers we would stress the role of bodily comportment and linguistic

construction in the thinking and imagining of form. Reason for us is in this way realisation rather than representation. To realise is both to attend to the pressure of what one is confronted with, or of what happens to one, and at the same time to attend to the promptings of divine inspiration, its teleological lure. All true reasoning is therefore at once both art and prayer.

8. Which approach can RO find to the Bible as criterion of what is Christian?

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

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

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

But clearly all depends upon one's ontology of scripture. The contention of RO, along with many others, is that the Reformation inherited and exacerbated a mistaken, non-liturgical notion of scripture as a single bound book which 'represented' scenes and which one saw before one in an in turn 'represented' space. In other words, it forgot that Scripture had once been inseparable from liturgical performance, from liturgical carrying in procession, from pictorial embellishment and from division into several separate books adorned, like any Rabbinic volume, with extensive Patristic commentary in the margins. It forgot that it was a *Byblos* or a library in the midst of which one could stand and wander about – though never exit. (For all this Catherine Pickstock's *After Writing* is relevant. Along with my own *Theology and Social Theory* this is effectively one of the two 'founding texts' of RO.)

9. In which way does RO get an argumentation by biblical arguments into an agreement with its interest in reason and metaphysics?

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

But in more prosaic terms, we believe that God speaks through all of nature and all of human tradition – as the Bible itself tells us. But all this is consummated and transcended by the incarnation of Reason itself in Christ. The Bible, for Christians (despite the profound damage that has been done to this notion, on which Christian self-understanding depends, by the majority voice in Biblical criticism and on very little empirical or rational basis) speaks throughout its entire scope supremely of this event which it uniquely displays under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit which works equally through the Church. The Divine Word, which is also the word of scripture, along with the sacraments gives rise to the Church, yet only through its reception by the Church – the Marian Bride of Christ -- can it be inseminated and so brought to birth. Yes the Word is prior, but not prior to its being the word of worship, for unless one is always already inspired to worship by the word and to worship with others, one has not really heard the word at all. I suspect that it was the realisation that Karl Barth's profoundly ecclesiastical thinking really pointed in this direction that led the originally Lutheran theologian Eric Peterson to become a Catholic in the 1930s.

With this liturgical proviso – which is only to say that we must read the Scriptures under the guidance of the Holy Spirit who speaks also to our brethren to whom we must attend – then most certainly the authority of

scripture must always overrule any other authorities.

This liturgical perspective upon Biblical authority is closely connected to RO's paradoxical insistence on cultural mediation as primary – against both a Barthian tendency (which still in *an entirely liberal fashion* hands over the unredeemed world to Kant) to deny the need for mediation, and a liberal tendency to regard it as crucial but secondary and instrumental. Instead we think that revelation *first arrives* in the difference that it makes. The difference that the NT makes to the OT, without which the NT cannot at all be read, in default of Marcionism or gnosticism. The difference that it makes to Greek philosophy, without which there would have been no reflective Christian theology. The difference that it makes to Roman law and ritual, without which there would have been no Christian social order nor regular worship. This is the main reason for our focus on 'theology and.....' We think that without this focus not just theology, but the Church is doomed either to liberal compromise – 'translation' of the gospel into secular terms and so effective loss of the gospel – or else to becoming a purist, self-congratulating enclave, which will, ironically, have left the supposedly 'purely natural' world in the hands of liberalism after all. The gospel continues to arrive in the *unpredictable* difference that it makes to theory and to practice. This is why for me the very notion of theological method would deny the authority of the gospel.

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

10. Can RO come into a positive appreciation of the Reformation / reformational Protestantism? Under which conditions ?

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

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

As to RO itself, its thinking would not be what it is without the influence of later Protestants like Jacobi, Hamann and Kierkegaard. There is no question however, but that its understanding of the magisterial Reformation remains underdeveloped – because to some extent RO was born as a beleaguered stand of intellectual Anglo-Catholics in the face of an increasing dominance of Evangelicalism (in the Anglo-Saxon, not German sense) within the Church of England. However, to speak here primarily for myself, though probably for many others within RO, I remain concerned that the Roman Catholic Church exercises, especially in modern times, an over-centralised, over-politicised structure and an over-legislative attitude to Christian teaching. I favour ideally a ‘constitutional’ model of ‘Pope in Council’, together with a renewed understanding of the place of lay leaders within the Church – which implies a certain – perhaps both Byzantine and Anglican – blurring of the political/religious lines which goes beyond (in today’s changed, more threatened circumstances) the rather simplistic espousal of ‘purely cultural, not political’ Christian influence in the mid 20th century by so many. To my mind *ecclesia* remains a dispersed reality, despite the fact that arguably all the current mainline churches – that in some sense accept the sacraments and the threefold ministry – possess manifestly distortive, and not merely minor and inevitable imperfections, for historical reasons. This observation clearly allows the inclusion of the avowedly Protestant churches within the ecclesial fold.

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

In my own small town of Southwell in the English East Midlands, the reformed Church of England in the 16th century abolished the annual fifteen-mile folk dance from Nottingham to Southwell Minster (then a sub-cathedral, now a full one), which bore in symbolic style all the annual monetary contributions of the surrounding parishes to the mother Church. In this way, at a stroke, the organic links between Christianity, folk custom and the local economy were sundered, never to be recovered. The dance was revived—now as a

‘Morris dance’ – in 1980, but in England the struggle between Puritan and Cavalier (which by no means coincides with one between political right and left, nor simply between the ‘mundane’ and ‘the fairy’) continues: this very year the local police force announced that they would now, in the wake of further ‘Thatcherite’ insistence that they fund their own operations, no longer be prepared to give the road-dance the necessary police protection. Thus the ‘reformers’ once again seem to be triumphing ...

I mention this offbeat example, because it seems to me to be just as ‘theological’ as matters of abstruse doctrine. Also because it perhaps encapsulates a certain Reformation desire to establish a ‘pure enclave’ of piety, free of cultural, political and economic mediation. RO is avowedly resistant to this, and sceptical of the recent – syntactically and semantically dubious – consensus which seeks to distinguish ‘Christianity’ from ‘Christendom’. (Incidentally an elementary glance at Danish linguistic usage reveals that ‘Christendom’ was *not* what Kierkegaard opposed, but rather, official Christianity, something quite different.) Surely a true ecclesiology grounded in the NT regards Christians as belonging to a real community, a real household, a real academy, a real *cultus* and a real polity, not as a random assembly of people who happen to think the same things? There is something reeking of Sartrean ‘bad faith’ about the tendency of so many Christians today to rationalise their decline into the claim that now they can become a purer, more ‘moral’ minority and that this may well be God’s providential will. If there is any providence involved here, it may be rather that we have to discover through suffering the true nature of Christianity as the secret, alternative, and yet more cosmically real ‘kingdom’. We may well have to become the resistance, but only a non-concern for the salvation of souls could seduce us into imagining that we should no longer be interested in the exercise of power in the genuine sense. For if everything is interconnected, as it truly is, then a loss of cultural influence can only be mean less saturation by the word of the gospel and fewer people hearing that word.

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

Despite these comments, RO does not see the Reformation as the prime moment of disaster. Instead, we would agree with Michel de Certeau that the reformers were trying to respond to a destruction of traditional Christian thought, and to some degree, practice that had been underway ever since roughly the year 1300 and in the wake of the 1270-1279 condemnations. This involved a gradual separation of nature from grace with the beginnings of a ‘two ends’ doctrine allowing that a human natural end could be pursued without any reference to our final, supernatural destiny; a decline of the sense that, as de Lubac put it ‘the eucharist makes the Church’, and a splitting between an excessively dialectical theology on the one hand and an

excessively affective and sometimes pathological spirituality on the other.

Given this situation, RO would tend to say that the Protestant reformers, like the Renaissance humanists, exhibit a mixture of reactions: some tending genuinely to overcome the late medieval problems, others tending just to perpetuate them. In this context, a figure like the Italian-born reformer Peter Martyr Vermigli, for a time Regius Professor at Oxford, is interesting to consider. Very humanistic, his thought remained imbued by Thomism and resistance to both Scotism and nominalism. His critique of transubstantiation, for example, was essentially a critique of nominalist variants of this doctrine, and one can say that by this time no one any longer really understood Aquinas's doctrine, which depends upon his subtle metaphysics of *esse*. (An important ecumenical consideration – though it is interesting to notice that Luther's 'consubstantiation' seems in continuity with Dietrich of Freibourg's criticism of Aquinas's position, on the grounds of the analogical and manifestatory continuity of all accidents with their substances – a view of accident that Aquinas generally shares. Surely some metaphysical mediation between these positions is now possible?)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

mode of existence.

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

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

These reflections on the Middle Ages will once again show that RO is suspicious of the unintended dialectical consequences of over-perfectionism or pietistic retreat. We espouse instead 'original mediation' and 'making a cultural difference' as the very first *instance* of revelation and grace, because we do not believe that Christians can abandon their mission, nor their responsibility for every single aspect of human life in this world, which should always occur in preparation for the world to come.

Appended concluding remarks

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

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

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

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

And if we still take mind and soul to be irreducible realities, then we cannot be content to leave people with a picture according to which we have only been, as creatures, ‘horizontally’ derived. This perspective is unsatisfactory since, not only does no ‘explanation’ for life and mind exist, also we experience thinking mysteriously as a medium we ‘find ourselves in’, as something that happens to us, just as thoughts ‘occur’ to us. To try to steer thought is a bit like angling in a pond with which the angler is nonetheless so immersed as to be in part of it – thoughts have to be ensnared with remembered skill and we have to practice at ensnaring new ones. Of course Islamic philosophical monopsychism is manifestly wrong – but we have not begun to think seriously about mind and souls till we understand why one might put forward such a thesis. How is it that an individual ‘shares’ to some degree voluntarily, in thinking? And how is it that we often know that we are all thinking the same thing and even sometimes in the same ways?

Following the lead of Albert and Aquinas, we need to find subtle ways of explaining how, while in one dimension soul and intellect are ‘emergent’, in another and more fundamental dimension that yet works vertically ‘through’ the horizontal, it is rather the case that intellect (as for most of the Fathers, including Augustine, and for Aquinas) is the first created thing, then giving rise to soul and finally to the material world. This speculatively and intuitively accounts for how it is that we experience thought as a participation in something that exceeds us and ‘arrives to us’.

Intelligence is the first created thing, because if the creation is gift, then it must first be received consciously

in order to exist at all. The first intellectual creatures (angels and ourselves) know themselves as gift and so exist as 'giving themselves to themselves' in a reflexive act that constitutes finite intelligence. In so doing they seek to return by gratitude to their source, but their failure completely to do so gives rise not just to inward understanding, but also to the excess of psychic life, whose partially failed attempts in turn to rise to self-awareness through self-sensing in turn give rise, first, to the 'mechanically material' for which being as substance is yet more a matter of relating and acting outside itself. Explaining the ontological explanation of things in this vertical, descending way makes more sense than immanent reductionism, because it is possible to see merely material forces as an approximation to living ones and psychic powers as approximations to amaterial ones, but not to try to account for the nature of these levels in the reverse direction, because this simply loses the specific difference of first thinking and then of living.

What I have so far presented is a neoplatonic scheme (mostly taken over by Christian thinkers in a way that goes under-recognised), but in Christian guise 'the lapse' of further descent though partial failure is no longer simply such, but rather also and positively the attempt through outgoing to imitate the overflowing of the good that characterises the divine source. This is the way in which Dionysius qualifies Proclus, in such a way as to render the vertical movement of 'return' identical with the horizontal movement of further self-giving in both equal degrees on the same ontological plane an diminishing ones in terms of donation downwards to the psychic and material. Though it should be added here that for Proclus, Dionysius and still more Eriugena, because the highest always acts more fundamentally than the intermediary, the material level also represents the point where the highest alone still acts and so the 'simplicity' of matter in some sense reflects the divine One in a manner that 'doubled' intellect cannot. Hence the strong Christian need for the sacramental ...

This same Christian modification allows us to see, as for Aquinas, how the whole of created reality reflects the Trinity in terms of ever more crucial yet ever more intimate outgoing relations: from mechanical cause to plant-seeding to animal action to human intellection that requires the inner and outer utterance of a 'word' linked to the spiritual desire to realise an end. In this way creatures more and more return on themselves and so to God. But God in himself is perfect self-return, not by an Hegelian alienation and mirroring, but through a generation of Offspring/Word that only reflects insofar as it *is* the constitution of an origin, and a circling back upon himself through the love of spirit in an act of perfect and so simple circulation. Simple because the mutual love of Father and Son inevitably spills over since it is truly love; because this is also love back of this overflowing spirit to Father and Son and because mediation (via the Son) though it here allows circular return is still simple as 'substantial mediation', mediation coincident with divine substance, which must be the case if the relations that constitute this mediation are themselves substantive.

In this way for RO participation is not just more fully realised by Creation *ex nihilo* but also by participation in the Trinity as more adequately defining finite substance as self-return. At the same time the Fall is loss of this participation and an 'impossible' stopping of the Trinitarian flow. Redemption is the restoration of this

flow, the repair by the original maker as the only possible repair, as Aquinas says in the prologue to his *Sentence Commentary*. Therefore participation is at once shown again and re-established (and so established *originally*) from before all times, by the event of the Incarnation and its prolongation as the giving of the Spirit through the Church.

In this sort of way RO tries to link the metaphysical with the historical aspect of theology. In order to do so, it also considers that it may be necessary to ‘radicalise’ (but not to liberalise) orthodoxy, along the lines of Origen, Eriugena, Eckhart and Cusanus. Catherine Pickstock notes in *Repetition and Identity* that Origen is really the strongest source of Christian credal orthodoxy, Christian allegorical exegesis and the key Christian spirituality of the spiritual senses. Yet for him this ‘orthodoxy’ belongs in a slightly different metaphysical context than for later thought. As she asks, does not Origen more radically respect the difference between time and eternity by seeing humans (not just souls) as ‘pre-‘ as well as ‘post’-existent; by allowing a pre-existent humanity as well as divinity of Christ for similar reasons and perhaps in better exegesis of Paul; by seeing the creation as eternal (though absolutely contingent) alongside God if the divine action is one and simple; and by regarding damnation as only penultimate, given that God is at once good and omnipotent? To adopt these positions is also to radicalise the crucial RO insistence since my *Theology and Social Theory* on the peacefulness of being as such and the interruptive, distortive character of violence as being identical with evil. But of course it is a mistake to read off from this an imperative of pacifism, any more than one of anarchy – in a thoroughly, though not totally depraved world, the ‘war against war’ may sometimes involve actual war if the innocent are to be protected and the wicked not corrupted by the very coercion to which they are subject. This coheres with Origen, Eriugena and others very ‘collective’ view of salvation, the corruption of some is always unavoidably the corruption of others and we are never saved alone, which is why we have the Church. And the redemption of all is the rescue of divine glory itself, which has been ‘impossibly’ captured and must be retrieved if God is to be God. The Shepherd cares most of all about the one lost sheep, because with this loss, he too is lost and wandering. But since he also is not lost and cannot be lost, the sheep is from always and once more again at the eschaton, to be found.

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