

# Radical Orthodoxy's Flawed Critique of Markets and Morality

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Radical Orthodoxy (RO) consists of a group of theologians who are very critical of market economies and representative democracy. They claim that philosophical and theological innovations in the late Middle Ages ultimately led to the Enlightenment and to capitalism. They argue that a return to medieval and patristic roots of Christian thought is needed to have a Christian social order. They utilize a genealogical approach that traces out how changes made by Duns Scotus and William of Ockham to the theology associated with Aquinas caused a movement to secularism and to an unjust economic system. I offer a critique of their arguments by arguing that they ignore history in their account and fail to consider how an extensive division of labor in modern economies requires an approach different from the one they offer.

## Introduction

Radical Orthodoxy (RO) is an important and controversial movement in modern theology. The proponents of RO try to offer a Christian account of the whole creation that relies on the premise that understanding the nature of God is vital to understanding any part of the created order. That is, there is no space or scientific field that can be truly understood without reliance on Christian theology. Further, they claim modern theology needs to return to premodern, patristic, and medieval roots to be able to provide this all-encompassing narrative of how the world works. Radical Orthodoxy theologians criticize the social sciences—in particular, sociology, political science, and economics. They are also very critical of how market economies and representative democracies operate. They advocate a return to features of premodern political and economic orders.

In this article, I describe some of the key features of RO, especially as related to economics and politics. Radical Orthodoxy begins with philosophical and theological presumptions and claims that alterations of these ideas ultimately led to modernity and Enlightenment ideas—ideas that are contrary to Christian truth. It follows that, if the social sciences are dependent on Enlightenment ideas, they cannot possibly offer valid insights into human behavior in the economic or political arenas. I will argue that their arguments are flawed and defend markets as the preferred method to organize economic activity.

## The Radical Orthodoxy Project

While RO is not a defined school of thought, there are theologians, mostly British, who utilize the same approach, terms, ideas, and concerns, and who frequently refer to one another's works. They also tend to react to ideas that stem from recent and contemporary continental philosophers. John Milbank is the key figure; his book, *Theology & Social Theory*,<sup>1</sup> offers a severe critique of modernity and current social life, economics, politics, and sociology. He argues that modernity's use of the secular as a separate realm is unchristian and misguided. Other important works of his include *Beyond Secular Order*<sup>2</sup> and *The World Made Strange*,<sup>3</sup> which is a collection of essays. D. Stephen Long's *The Divine Economy*<sup>4</sup> critiques several approaches to economics and explores how Milbank's ideas might be a worthwhile approach to pursue. William Cavanaugh is critical of consumerism in the West,<sup>5</sup> and Daniel Bell looks at how capitalism has perverted the desires people have.<sup>6</sup> I will also refer to a former student of Milbank, Adrian Pabst, who has both written with Milbank and published on his own.

John Milbank, Graham Ward, and Catherine Pickstock edited a volume entitled *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*. They use the phrase "radical orthodoxy" as the term for their approach. But how is it radical and how is it orthodox? They say it is orthodox in being consistent with creedal Christianity and the patristic writers. This orthodoxy, on their account, was lost sight of in the late Middle Ages and in modernity. It is radical in several ways: first, in returning to patristic and medieval roots; second, in using this recovered vision to analyze and criticize modern society, including culture, politics, philosophy, and science; third, in not merely rehearsing the views of the patristics, but in rethinking the tradition; and last, in the sense of criticizing the ways secularity has ruined the things secularity celebrated.

They describe their theological framework as *participation*. They begin with Plato and look at how Christianity reworked this idea of participation. In fact, RO can be seen as seeking to "rehellenize" theology.<sup>7</sup> Milbank, Ward, and Pickstock

see creation as a gift with creation *ex nihilo* occurring at every moment. The creation exists only as it participates in God's substantiality. They argue that "every discipline must be framed by a theological perspective; otherwise these disciplines will define a zone apart from God, grounded literally in nothing."<sup>8</sup> Hence, they criticize not only the operation of the economic system in market economies but also economics as a discipline.

The RO theologians are anti-Enlightenment and anti-modernity. While they employ postmodern terms and ideas, they also criticize much of postmodernism, claiming it is in some sense ultra-modernism. The premodern view concerning God was that there was disclosure mediated through creation yielding a response of praise and gratitude. This view has been lost. The RO theologians employ a genealogical approach in their analysis, which can be described as operating within the history of ideas.<sup>9</sup> Milbank often refers to the changes in ideas—mostly philosophical and theological—that led to the development of capitalism. Another example is the ancestry of ideas and persons leading to the Enlightenment.

From the patristic era through Aquinas, theologians understood the created order as participating in the divine. All of the created order was involved in transcendence. Further, all human life was understood to be religious. There was no secular life as understood in modernity. Faith and reason were intertwined. There was only one source of knowledge and that source was God. People perceived there to be a common good that could be grasped. There was a *telos* to life, both individual and social life. One goal of the institutions of society was to help guide people toward that *telos*. Life involved relationships with others in community. Exchange was often reciprocal in nature rather than contractual. There was a definite hierarchy in society, but it involved relationships that included both benefits and responsibilities. The serf was obligated to work for the lord of the manor, but the lord of the manor had responsibilities for the well-being of the serf. Since the relationship was truly relational, as opposed to wage-contract relationships, it was more humane.

What went wrong, according to RO? A necessary step for creating the secular was to jettison the participatory ontology that had prevailed. This is where Duns Scotus enters the picture.<sup>10</sup> They claim that Scotus replaced the idea of participation theology that had prevailed with the idea of univocity of being. The result over time was an unhooking of the world from the transcendent, which created spaces that were not touched by the divine as well as creating the idea of autonomous reason. Of course, this was not the intent of Scotus but the ultimate result.

The genealogical approach used by Milbank and others traces out the stages between Scotus and modernity. One step was the move to nominalism associated with Ockham. By rejecting the reality of universals, nominalism focuses

more on the individual and begins a process leading to individualism. Martin Luther is described as a nominalist as well, on the “family tree” running from Scotus to modernity.<sup>11</sup> The Reformational emphasis on the individual resulted in seeing the human person as an isolated subject. Later, Descartes separated the individual further, and John Locke argued the individual has autonomy and rights. Adam Smith pictured society as made up of self-interested and autonomous individuals. There is no true bond keeping society together; instead, the language of contracts is used, including the social contract associated with Locke and Rousseau. Included within this overall development are the rise of capitalism and the rise of the nation-state.

In an analysis of political science and political economy, Milbank claims that these fields are where the secular first was constructed: “Here I show that from the outset the secular is complicit with an ‘ontology of violence,’ a reading of the world which assumes the priority of force and tells how this force is best managed and confined by counter-force.”<sup>12</sup> He argues that Christianity does not recognize the notion of original violence. The infinite is seen as harmonic peace rather than as chaos. “Peace no longer depends upon the reduction to the self-identical, but is the *sociality* of harmonious difference.”<sup>13</sup>

Radical Orthodoxy theologians see secular theories as theological in disguise and as heretical. Cavanaugh does this with respect to the nation-state and secular political theory. He writes, “[T]he modern state is built upon a soteriology of rescue from violence. To see this as a false or ‘heretical’ soteriology then opens the door to reimagination of space and time along true theological lines.”<sup>14</sup> He sees the modern state as an alternative soteriology to the soteriology of the church. According to Cavanaugh, the Christian story involves an original unity of the human race. The sin of Adam and Eve shattered the original unity. One result is the creation of individuals as such. Redemption involves the restoration of unity as people participate in the Body of Christ. In contrast, the “State’s Story” begins with the individual. He discusses Hobbes and Locke and the metaphor of an original state of nature as the source of modern political life. He claims the myth behind the formation of the nation-state includes the necessity of the state to counteract the wars of religion. But in actuality, the states were trying to supplant the church as the true unifying institution in Europe. The formation of states was supposed to reduce violence but has failed miserably at the task.

Milbank and Pabst call for a return to a premodern political order, although modified somewhat.<sup>15</sup> Modern polity is based on individualism, but human beings are meant to live in community rather than to live autonomously. Getting the right mix relating the one, the few, and the many is necessary but difficult. A mixed constitution is called for but the modern version is a liberal perversion.

To save democracy requires recapturing the idea of a shared *telos*. “Therefore the real alternative is between state as *societas*, mediating individuals or merely instrumental composing groups, or the state as corporation, itself composed of sub-corporations.”<sup>16</sup> A renewal of a mixed government as once prevailed in England is needed.

Milbank and Pabst put forward a program that includes monarchy, aristocracy, and the people. Parliament would represent the people, but there would be too much pressure from interest groups to pursue some private interests over the common good. The monarchy can hold elected officials to the higher standard of the common good. The sovereign can be freed of political pressures facing Parliament. Much change would be required—a reform of civil service, a re-imagining of the Privy Council, and changing the composition and selection of the House of Lords. The last point refers to finding people to fulfill the role of the aristocracy who represent different associations of people. Trade groups, guilds, labor unions, education, health care, among others, would be areas in which people who have ability and perhaps wealth, but who also recognize a responsibility to pursue the common good, would become society’s leaders. “The problem today,” according to Milbank and Pabst, “is, rather, the reduction of the role of inheritance to land, cash and privilege, uncoupled from any sense of inherited duty and identification of the ‘leading’ role with the public good. Yet, if virtue, of course, more primarily defines aristocracy than does lineage (in every sense), then it needs also to be seen that virtue as such is inseparable from succession.”<sup>17</sup>

Similar to their view of liberal democracy, the theologians connected to RO dislike modern economics and capitalism. They dislike economics because of the emphasis on the individual as well as on ideas such as the invisible hand, competition, and the failure to consider the common good and the proper end of economic activity. Long examines approaches to economics undertaken by some theologians and argues the theologians ceded too much ground to economic methodology. Instead of beginning with the doctrine of creation as many of these theologians do, Long argues for Christology or ecclesiology.<sup>18</sup> Daniel Bell offers a number of criticisms of capitalism, including: It destroys communal relationships and is individualistic instead; the freedom in free markets is only a negative freedom; and human desire is insatiable. He writes, “[C]apitalism deforms and corrupts human desire into an insatiable drive for more today that is celebrated as the aggressive, creative, entrepreneurial energy that distinguishes *homo economicus*.”<sup>19</sup> The competitive nature of capitalism distorts human relations, turning everyone and everything into a commodity subject to cost-benefit calculations. The cooperative relations that exist in capitalism are contractual in

nature: “That is to say, capitalist relations are first and foremost relations among strangers and entail a reduction of the duties we owe to one another.”<sup>20</sup>

Another problem with capitalism is that it generates unjust exchanges. In modern market economies, exchange involves equivalent values as measured by prices. But for Aquinas, the equivalence that is supposed to exist is one of justice. For this to occur there must be some social consensus about the value of different things that does not rely on the price in the exchange. In other words, the price should reflect the social consensus about the value of the good. Truly just exchanges can arise only in a moral society of friends where common goods are shared.

Milbank calls for an economic system based on gift. Since creation and life are gifts from God, gift should be the focus of our interactions with one another. Several other RO theologians pick up on the idea, although none flesh it out.<sup>21</sup> Another description of the preferred alternative is Christian socialism. This involves “a recovery but transformation of an antique medieval politically ontological vision.”<sup>22</sup> Milbank discusses the idea of a society directed toward *paideia*—where education for certain values is cultivated and there is dedication to social and economic equality. He claims that most of the nineteenth-century socialisms were conservative in that they were directed toward *paideia* and common values, but also modern in calling for equality. The Catholic socialism of Pierre Buches conceived the church as the location of a new social order. This is in stark contrast to Marxism and the twentieth-century revolutions in the name of Marx.

Christian socialism had characteristics of a romantic and counter-Enlightenment critique. Milbank uses John Ruskin and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon as instructive examples. Ruskin wanted wealth to be integrated with genuine virtue. He wanted considerations as to the aesthetic quality of objects produced by society. “A just exchange of goods and labour presupposes a match between the ethical capacities of persons, and the interpreted excellence of material objects. The virtuous deserve beautiful, truly useful artifacts; artifacts of fine quality deserve a good use.”<sup>23</sup> Proudhon can be seen as the main representative of French republican socialism, which, according to Milbank, Marx tried to absorb and overcome. Milbank suggests that when Rousseau’s civil religion took on a Christian character, French socialism came into being. Proudhon was concerned with questions of justice—what kinds of property are allowable? What kind of standards apply to exchange? And how can we have supply and demand equalize in the marketplace while also maintaining that market exchanges are just? But it was Ruskin, Milbank claims, who saw more clearly “that just exchange and true equality are only possible when there is a continuously remade agreement

about cultural norms and values; no single economics mechanism can replace this complex requirement.<sup>24</sup>

The RO theologians are very critical of modern mainstream economics, but do rely somewhat on the civil economy as an alternative. The civil economy refers to an approach developed by an Italian economist who was a near-contemporary of Adam Smith, Antonio Genovesi. “For Genovesi, society is not primarily about the division of labour and the harmonious balancing of rival self-interest in the marketplace (as for Smith). Rather, human beings have shared needs that can only be satisfied through mutual assistance.”<sup>25</sup> Milbank and Pabst see the Neopolitan civil economy as compatible with Catholic social thought and, thus, more appropriate than mainline economic analysis. A modern proponent of civil economy says that for a market economy to be legitimate, the principle of reciprocity must apply.<sup>26</sup> Connected with reciprocity is the notion of the common good—that is, goods that are shared in common and involve relationships. The civil economy and Catholic social thought emphasize that there is a common good to be pursued and mainstream economics refuses to consider the common good. Along this line, Milbank and Pabst write, “If human beings are naturally political, social and gift-exchanging animals, they need to cultivate habits of personal and communal living that sustain the polity, society and the economy.”<sup>27</sup>

Cultivating habits relates to another emphasis of RO—the purpose of the political, social, and economic is to lead people to live virtuously. This is Aristotelian, with the idea that the *polis* is needed for humans to achieve their *telos* and virtue, that is, by learning the proper way to live as truly human and to develop the habits that promote virtuous living. Such a life can only be lived in a social setting that encourages just behavior.

## A Critique of Radical Orthodoxy

The various theologians in the RO camp have developed a vision of how the political and economic systems should operate. In general, the vision is a modified version of ideas from the patristic and early medieval period. Presumably, that vision would still be in place but for philosophical and theological alterations of the orthodoxy associated with the time period from Augustine to Aquinas. Capitalism would not have developed if European culture had maintained a theology of participation and maintained the philosophical acceptance of universals.<sup>28</sup> Luther's philosophical and theological ideas would have been different and there would have been no Reformation. This is a lot of weight to put upon philosophical ideas, and it ignores history.

A genealogical approach is used to trace out the changes to the orthodox theology and philosophy that existed in the time of Aquinas. These changes in philosophical thought generated changes in how European societies operated that resulted in the Enlightenment and capitalism. Milbank notes there is an intrinsic difficulty in genealogical analysis. Humans use words and also take actions. Often one is done without consciously thinking about the other: “This means that both acting and thinking typically occur in the shadows.”<sup>29</sup> He adds, “[T]he presupposition of this book is that there has to exist a concealed symmetry between the most rarefied expressions of modern thought in ‘philosophy,’ on the one hand, and modernity’s collective ‘political’ deeds on the other.”<sup>30</sup> That is, the “rarefied expressions of modern thought” filter down to impact the actual operation of the political realm.

This alleged connection between political philosophy and political operation lies behind the genealogical approach used by Milbank and the other RO theologians. I see two problems with this presumption. First, rarely is there a single current political philosophy from which the political realm can draw. Second, while ideas do have consequences, this puts more weight on rarefied thought than is reasonable. But for Scotus and Ockham Europe would still be Christendom?

Many philosophers and theologians dispute the claim that Scotus’s approach associated with univocity of being necessarily leads to secularism. Thomas Williams claims the doctrine of univocity of being is “true and salutary.”<sup>31</sup> He says that univocity in Scotus is a semantic doctrine and not an ontological claim. Michael Horan argues that Milbank and Pickstock misread Scotus and ignore most of Scotus’s writings. He also claims that the interpretation of Scotus by Milbank and Pickstock is not accepted by numerous philosophers who have focused their research on Scotus.<sup>32</sup>

Milbank and others could reply that even if the reading of Scotus is mistaken, the rise of secularity and modernity are still related to the abandonment of participation and a move to voluntarism and nominalism. Sweetman disputes this:

I wonder if it is not incumbent on us as Christian scholars to admit that no theological structure could be, or even has been, safe from a process of annihilation or could be counted on to reenchant our disenchant world. We must make such an admission, to be sure, but only to insist that there is equally no theological structure, however humble, that cannot be used by God to work God’s longed-for reenchantment, perhaps even and admittedly *per mirabile* the natural theology of John Duns Scotus or one of his theological heirs: the Reformed tradition in philosophy and theology.<sup>33</sup>



A further difficulty is that the genealogical approach ignores history and historical events. Aquinas lived from 1225–1274, Scotus from 1266–1308, and Ockham from 1285–1347. Barbara Tuchman describes the fourteenth century as calamitous.<sup>34</sup> This is the century after Aquinas developed a philosophy and theology that RO looks to as the epitome of Christian thought. It was a century that featured the Plague, the Papal Schism, and the Hundred Years War. The Plague had a momentous impact on European society, including the views and concerns of common people. Tuchman writes that people could find no purpose in the suffering and death caused by the Plague. She concludes,

If a disaster of such magnitude, the most lethal ever known, was a mere wanton act of God or perhaps not God's work at all, then the absolutes of a fixed order were loosed from the moorings. Minds that opened to admit these questions could never again be shut. Once people envisaged the possibility of change in a fixed order, the end of an age of submission came in sight; the turn to individual conscience lay ahead. To that extent the Black Death may have been the unrecognized beginning of modern man.<sup>35</sup>

A walk through an art museum with works from the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries exhibits the focus on death and the macabre that followed the Plague.

Heiko Oberman makes the case that the Plague made it easier for people to accept nominalism because experience did not support the orderly philosophy of Aquinas. The shift was from God-as-Being to God-as-Person.<sup>36</sup> Oberman points out that this shift began with St. Francis of Assisi when he presented a covenantal relationship between God and his creation. Further, this fits better with the Hebrew of Exod. 3:14 rather than the Latin translation in the Vulgate. The Latin suggests God-as-Being while the Hebrew emphasized God as an actor—"I will be who I will be."

The Papal Schism also had a huge impact on life and ideas. There were rival popes for forty years. Who was the true head of the Church? Wyclif originally supported Pope Urban as a reformer, but financial abuses by both popes made him reconsider. Tuchman notes that this turning point ultimately led to Protestantism. She offers an anecdote to illustrate, "According to a popular saying toward the end of the century, no one since the beginning of the schism had entered Paradise."<sup>37</sup>

In 1300, Pope Boniface VIII established a Jubilee in which indulgences were available to the repentant who made a pilgrimage to Rome. Due to its popularity, Pope Clement VI established another Jubilee in 1350 in a Bull of 1343. Tuchman writes:

Momentously for the Church, Clement formulated in the same Bull the theory of indulgences, and fixed its fatal equation with money. The sacrifice of Christ's blood, he stated, together with the merit added by the Virgin and saints, had established an inexhaustible treasury for the use of pardons. By contributing sums to the Church, anyone could buy a share in the Treasury of Merit. What the Church gained in revenue by the arrangement was matched in the end by loss in respect.<sup>38</sup>

Of course, it was the system of indulgences that Martin Luther attacked in his Ninety-Five Theses. The question at issue was not a philosophical one affected by whether or not Luther was a nominalist. Luther's attack on indulgences was an attack on the penitential system in the Church in his time. Ideas do not operate in a vacuum; historical events affect ideas as ideas often impact historical actions.

The RO theologians claim that modern politics and economics are based on an ontology of violence. This was part of the critique in Long regarding a number of theologians who had written on economic issues such as Michael Novak and Max Stackhouse.<sup>39</sup> Long notes that many of these theologians emphasized the doctrine of creation and the importance of original sin. He prefers ecclesiology or Christology as the starting point and thinks there is an overemphasis on original sin. In the original creation before the fall, peace prevailed and there was "original righteousness." But once we get past the second chapter of Genesis, violence and sin predominate and require that God find a way for forgiveness, redemption, and reconciliation. Christians believe that ultimately a return to peace will take place, but there are numerous opinions as to how or when this may take place. Is the church supposed to continually succeed, grow, and ultimately bring in the peaceful kingdom of God? Or, will it take some dramatic, apocalyptic conclusion to history as we experience it? Or some other way? When there was a Christian Europe in the Middle Ages, there was neither peace nor a movement towards Edenic righteousness.

The genealogy of individualism offered by RO is inadequate. There were movements towards increasing individualism long before Ockham and nominalism. This can be seen in the Hebrew Scriptures when later prophets such as Jeremiah and Ezekiel challenged the prevailing view that children were punished for the sins of their fathers. They would not have agreed with the punishment of Achan that included stoning his entire family. Siedentop argues that St. Paul was a key figure in altering ideas about the importance of the individual.<sup>40</sup> Radical Orthodoxy downplays the notion of individual salvation and emphasizes a more collective or social notion.

Then there are practical concerns. The agenda outlined by Milbank and Pabst in particular requires that society be Christian and the economics Christian socialism. How can modern European or North American societies implement Christian socialism when there are large numbers of non-Christians in the societies? Western Europe is becoming more Muslim rather than more Christian. Western Europe and the United States are becoming more pluralistic and not moving towards a new type of Christendom.

## Economic Issues

There is no evidence that RO theologians care about either economic growth or that tens of millions of people have come out of poverty in the last few decades. Milbank and Pabst make a passing reference to the Great Enrichment—the rapid rise in economic wealth in Western Europe and the United States since 1800—but they do not even comment whether it was a good thing or not.<sup>41</sup> I have not located any reference to the millions of people escaping poverty in the last several decades or the fact that the developing world is growing more rapidly than before. It is as if they do not care about people escaping poverty. Bell writes, “The conclusion is that even if capitalism works and produces a superabundance of material goods, it is still wrong for the ways it deforms human desire.”<sup>42</sup> It may be that they do not connect the increased longevity of life and improved health conditions with the rise of market systems. Noell and Smith argue for the importance of economic growth on human flourishing and offer a theological defense of growth.<sup>43</sup> Fogel documents the improvements in health and longevity in Europe and America.<sup>44</sup> As Deaton notes, the incredible increase in human longevity and improved health were the result of increased wealth.<sup>45</sup> Further, these health and life expectancy gains, for the most part, spilled over into poorer countries.

Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* begins with the claim that the division of labor is productive. When an RO writer refers to the capitalist division of labor, it sounds as if specialization of labor is due to capitalism. Instead, the division of labor was recognized by ancients, practiced by households as far back in time as we have evidence of human life, and utilized when the tabernacle was built in the wilderness and when Solomon's temple was built in Jerusalem.<sup>46</sup> As Buchanan has noted, it is the division of labor that really makes economics a social science.<sup>47</sup> People need each other to survive. They have to cooperate with others in some way. But specialization of labor requires coordination and there are only so many ways to generate the coordination needed. Markets have proven to be the best method found to date.

The coordination problem is also an information problem. The RO theologians do not comprehend this difficult “epistemological problem” (using the term differently than they do). By this I mean the information needed due to the division of labor. When people specialize they have to transact with other specialists to acquire the basic goods and services needed for life. When people live in a village of 200, the degree of labor specialization is limited. All dealings are “personal” in the sense of being face-to-face and involve people who know each other personally. The knowledge needed may be available relatively easily.

But when people live in cities of millions of people, they have to rely on sources of information other than personal relationships. In modern market economies the specialization of labor is incredible when compared with economies several hundred years ago. “Wasteful” things like advertising become important, and relative prices can be used to economize greatly on information. Further, as noted by Hayek and Weber before him, people simultaneously live in at least two worlds. There is the personal world of family, friends, and church that is similar to the world of the Israelite peasant in David’s time.<sup>48</sup> In this world, reciprocity is important as is gift giving. And there is the impersonal world of interacting with people we do not know and often relying on people who live far from us. Radical Orthodoxy rejects this distinction and claims all interactions should be relational and personal. As Hough and Greier note, “A London of 850,000 people in 1776 could not be governed through monopoly guilds that set prices and wages and that resolved disputes over contracts. The number of people in such businesses simply became too large.”<sup>49</sup> As Bell acknowledged, “[C]apitalist relations are first and foremost relations among strangers.”<sup>50</sup> The number of people a person knows individually is a tiny fraction of the people the person interacts with directly or indirectly. The knowledge a person has concerning the people on whom he or she relies is incomparable with the knowledge a person has about friends and family. It is possible to think of what is best for my family but not possible to know what is best for people I do not know at all. An economy of gift may be feasible for a small tribal group but is not feasible for Great Britain or the United States.

## Conclusion

Radical Orthodoxy is correct in some of its claims concerning the disunity and lack of social cohesion that troubles modern societies. Its proponents ultimately fail to offer a compelling critique, however, because they fail to consider historical events that can shape people’s attitudes and concerns, and they concentrate only on philosophical ideas. They also fail to see that modern industrial societies

utilizing specialization to a high degree cannot operate like small rural societies. The information problem in a modern economic order is much too severe for a reliance on personal relationships and good intentions. Even if all people in a society were Christian and lived in a truly Christian manner, markets would be necessary as the only viable solution to the information problem associated with an extensive division of labor.

The social order desired by RO is unrealistic in pluralistic, non-Christian countries such as exist in Europe and North America. Milbank and Pabst clearly want such a social order for Great Britain. Other RO writers seem more open to the church operating as an alternate social order. The church can be an institution in which reciprocity, gift, and grace function. Bell calls for Christians to operate in the divine economy, which “appears in a variety of practices and forms challenging the capitalist order of things and freeing desire to flow in the joyous conviviality of love.”<sup>51</sup> The starting point involves practices of simplicity and solidarity. The church in the first few centuries was not in charge of society but grew and functioned in more communal ways than today. As noted above, Long thinks the starting point should be ecclesiology rather than the doctrine of creation. While he does not make the point, the church would be the natural starting point for thinking about human interactions based on the doctrine of ecclesiology. To focus on the church as an alternate social order is not as grand a goal, but may be more achievable and less coercive.

## Notes

1. John Milbank, *Theology & Social Order: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).
2. John Milbank, *Beyond Secular Order: The Representation of Being and the Representation of the People* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2013).
3. John Milbank, *The World Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997). Milbank is a prolific writer and has published numerous journal articles as well as other books.
4. D. Stephen Long, *Divine Economy: Theology and the Market* (London: Routledge, 2000).
5. William T. Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination: Discovering the Liturgy as a Political Act in an Age of Global Consumerism* (London: T&T Clark, Ltd, 2002).
6. Daniel Bell, *The Economy of Desire: Christianity and Capitalism in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012).
7. Adrian Pabst, *Metaphysics: The Creation of Hierarchy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012) makes this argument. He specifically refers to a call for rehellenization of theology by Pope Benedict XVI in a lecture given at the University of Regensburg, "Faith, Reason and University: Memories and Reflections," September 12, 2006.
8. John Milbank, Graham Ward, and Catherine Pickstock, "Introduction: Suspending the Material: The Turn of Radical Orthodoxy," in *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, ed. J. Milbank, G. Ward, and C. Pickstock (London: Routledge, 1999), 2.
9. Reference can be made to Friedrich Nietzsche, Michel Foucault, and Jean-François Lyotard. The last also made references to metanarrative, a term often employed by RO theologians.
10. See Robert Sweetman, "Univocity, Analogy, and the Mystery of Being according to John Duns Scotus," in *Radical Orthodoxy and the Reformed Tradition: Creation, Covenant and Participation*, ed. J. K. A. Smith and J. H. Olthuis (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 73: "John Duns Scotus makes cameo appearances in many works that travel under the name Radical Orthodoxy. My impression is that his name is nearly always invoked as a kind of curse."
11. Describing Luther as a nominalist is inappropriate since the intellectual environment of that time was more nuanced than described by RO. See Heiko Augustinius Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963).
12. Milbank, *Theology & Social Order*, 4.

13. Milbank, *Theology & Social Order*, 13.
14. Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination*, 2.
15. See John Milbank and Adrian Pabst, *The Politics of Virtue: Post-Liberalism and the Human Future* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), especially pt. 3. For a more abstract and philosophical approach, see Milbank, *Beyond Secular Order*, esp. 114ff.
16. Milbank and Pabst, *The Politics of Virtue*, 184.
17. Milbank and Pabst, *The Politics of Virtue*, 221.
18. Long, *Divine Economy*, 44-65.
19. Bell, *The Economy of Desire*, 103.
20. Bell, *The Economy of Desire*, 107.
21. See Long, *Divine Economy*; idem, *The Goodness of God* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2001); and the works of Cavanaugh and Bell for examples. Kathryn Tanner, *Economy of Grace* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005) criticizes the idea. She discusses instead an economy of grace, which she tries to flesh out as an extended welfare state.
22. Milbank, *Beyond Secular Order*, 10.
23. Milbank, *Theology & Social Order*, 192.
24. Milbank, *Theology & Social Order*, 202.
25. Milbank and Pabst, *The Politics of Virtue*, 140.
26. See Stefano Zamagni, "Catholic Social Thought, Civil Economy, and the Spirit of Capitalism," in *The True Wealth of Nations: Catholic Social Thought and Economic Life*, ed. Daniel K. Finn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 73.
27. Milbank and Pabst, *The Politics of Virtue*, 141.
28. One could say the philosophy of participation since it was part of Plato's philosophy.
29. Milbank, *Beyond Secular Order*, 1.
30. Milbank, *Beyond Secular Order*, 2.
31. Thomas Williams, "The Doctrine of Univocity of Being is True and Salutory," *Modern Theology* 21 (October 2005): 575-85.
32. Michael S. Horton, "Participation and Covenant," in *Radical Orthodoxy and the Reformed Tradition*, 107-32.
33. Sweetman, "Univocity, Analogy, and the Mystery of Being," 87.

34. Barbara W. Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1978).
35. Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror*, 123.
36. Heiko Oberman, *The Two Reformations: The Journey from the Last Days to the New World*, ed. Donald Weinstein (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 26.
37. Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror*, 339.
38. Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror*, 121.
39. Long, *Divine Economy*.
40. Larry Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: The Origins of Western Liberalism*. (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014).
41. Milbank and Pabst, *The Politics of Virtue*, 105. The term “Great Enrichment” is from the work of economist Deirdre N. McCloskey, in particular the trilogy: *The Bourgeois Virtues: Ethics for an Age of Commerce* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); *Bourgeois Dignity: Why Economics Can't Explain the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); and *Bourgeois Equality: How Ideas, Not Capital or Institutions, Enriched the World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).
42. Bell, *The Economy of Desire*, 29.
43. Edd S. Noell and Stephen L. S. Smith, “Economic Growth: Re-assessing the View from Christian Theology,” presented at the Association for the Study of Religion, Economics and Culture Annual Meetings, Boston, MA, March 20–21, 2015.
44. Robert William Fogel, *The Escape from Hunger and Premature Death, 1700–2100: Europe, America and the Third World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
45. Angus Deaton, *The Great Escape: Health, Wealth and the Origins of Inequality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).
46. Paul’s discussions of the gifts of the Spirit are relevant also.
47. James M. Buchanan, “What Should Economists Do?” *Southern Economic Journal* 30 (January 1964): 213–22.
48. This point is developed more fully in Peter J. Hill and John Lunn, “Markets and Morality: Things Ethicists Should Consider When Evaluating Market Exchange,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 35 (2007): 657–83. See also several of the essays in Paul Heyne, “*Are Economists Basically Immoral?*” and *Other Essays on Economics, Ethics, and Religion*, ed. Geoffrey Brennan and A. M. C. Waterman, (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2008).



49. Jerry F. Hough and Robin Grier, *The Long Process of Development: Building Markets and States in Pre-industrial England, Spain, and Their Colonies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 237.
50. Bell, *The Economy of Desire*, 107.
51. Bell, *The Economy of Desire*, 211.