

Christian Participation in Public life. A theological view of “Radical Orthodoxy Theology”

Participación cristiana en la vida pública. una visión teológica de la “Radical Orthodoxy Theology”

JOSEPH CYRIL BASSEY

Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca

bjoeeyril@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0009-0003-3199-5290>

Recibido: 21 de marzo de 2025

Aceptado: 9 de julio de 2025

ABSTRACT

Radical Orthodoxy Theology develops its views within the theological framework of participation, which unravels an ontological dependence of created things on God. We will argue that this understanding makes relationship amidst diversity possible and exposes individualism taught by secularism as a wrong alternative. This way of understanding participation has a serious implication both in the ordering of the civic society and in informing Christian presence and involvement in public life.

Keywords: Christianity, Community, Creation, Ontology, Participation, Public life, Secularism, Theology.

RESUMEN

La “Radical Orthodoxy Theology” desarrolla sus puntos de vista dentro del marco teológico de la participación que desentraña una dependencia ontológica de las cosas creadas con respecto a Dios. Argumentaremos que esta comprensión hace posible la relación en medio de la diversidad y expone el individualismo enseñado por el secularismo como una alternativa equivocada. Este modo de entender la participación tiene una seria implicación tanto en el ordenamiento de la sociedad civil como en la información de la presencia y el compromiso cristiano en la vida pública.

Palabras clave: Comunidad, Creación, Cristianismo, Laicismo, Ontología, Participación, Teología, Vida pública.

INTRODUCTION

In examining the word participation, the first impression is to consider it literally as a complex word formed from the noun “part”¹. This view follows a direct translation/transliteration of the Latin noun “*participation*”, a derivative of the verb “*Participare*”, which means “to take part” (*partem capere*)². Thomas Aquinas holds that “*Participare est quasi partem capere*” (to participate is, as it were, to take part (of something))³. The problem with this view is that it raises the possibility of an imaginative divide of the *participatum* into discrete parts⁴, and consequently present participation in a predominantly quantitative manner. In the sense that what is exchanged between the giver and the receiver is a part of the whole rather than a whole reality.

However, this literary approach cannot just be dismissed easily, because a closer look at the verb “to participate” can help us appreciate its importance. In its transitive form, it means “to take part in”, while the intransitive form means “to take part of”. To take part, whether *in* or *of*, indicates in a sense *to share*. The first, to take part in, underlines an act of sharing in the activities, life, and experience of another. For example, “to take part in” an event means that the participants of the event shared in its activities. The other, “to take part of”, indicates that what is taken part *of* is shared with others. From the foregoing, it becomes clear that to take part, whether *in* or *of*, presupposes a relationship of *sharing*.

Apart from this, participation is also a metaphysical category based on its Greek etymology *methexis*⁵. The noun *Methexis*, derived from the Greek verb *metechein*, is constructed from the root word *echo*, which in the ordinary sense means “to have”. However, a deeper meaning is assumed when *echo* appears in

1 Andrew Davison sees this simple approach as a better starting point for understanding the concept of participation (cf. Andrew Davison, *Participation in God, A study in Christian Doctrine and Metaphysics*, (Cambridge, 2019), 135). However, Leo Sweeney differs in considering this approach to be very misleading (see Leo Sweeney, “Participation in Plato’s Dialogues: Phaedo, Parmenides, Sophist and Timeus”, *The Society for Greek Philosophy Newsletter* 123 (1983): 1-2. <https://orb.binghamton.edu/sagp/123>).

2 Sweeney, “Participation in Plato’s Dialogues”, 2.

3 Thomas Aquinas, *An Exposition of the Hebdomads of Boethius* (Catholic University of America, 2001), 2. 24.

4 David Schindler, “What’s the Difference? On the Metaphysics of Participation in a Christian Context”, *The Saint Anselm Journal* 3/1 (2005): 2. See also, David Schindler, “Perfect Difference: Gender and the Analogy of Being”, *Communio: International Catholic Review* 43/2 (2016): 194-231; Christopher Malloy, “Participation and Theology: A Response to Schindler’s ‘What’s The Difference?’”, *The Saint Anselm Journal* 3/1 (2005) 38-61; Merold Westphal, “Participation and Kenosis: A List for Schindler”, *The Saint Anselm Journal* 3/1 (2005) 28-37.

5 The metaphysical notion of participatory ontology identifies this Greek rather than the Latin *Participatio* as its origin. See Schindler, “What is the Difference?”, 1.

front of a genitive object, indicating a “having of” in the sense of sharing a whole rather than simply taking a part of something other than it⁶. In addition, the prefix *meta*, used with the genitive case, means: in the middle of, between, in common with, along with, etc. The verb *metechein* in this context implies sharing, dependence, and a relationship between two realities. Therefore, *methexis* “indicates a state of having in common, of depending on, of being related to”⁷. From the above, it follows that the metaphysical meaning of participation develops around the word to *share*, rather than *parts*, in terms of one thing qualitatively sharing the reality of another in a way that excludes partitioning in both the giver and the receiver. This notion presupposes a sense of wholeness; the fact that what is shared is a whole and not a mere part. Here the giver and the receiver participate in the same whole.

In a deeper sense, participation addresses the problem of relationality⁸, in terms of responding to what constitutes similarities and differences in realities, as well as giving reasons for why these realities share the same qualities amid their differences. Generally, the concept of participation accounts for the unity and plurality found in being. In this, the perceivable multiplicity does not undermine its perfection⁹, but sustains and reveals the complexity that forms its goodness. The problem of relationality, which is central to participation, appeals to different approaches to both faith and rational background. Participation owes its origin to the ancient and late antique philosophy of Plato, where it assumed a central stage until it made its way into Christian theology through the patristics. It has since then undergone conceptual developments in Augustine and Thomas Aquinas until it was lost in the rise of nominalism.

This article presents Radical Orthodoxy Theology’s¹⁰ appropriation and application of the concepts of participation in its theology. It examines the contributions of John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward: editors of ROT’s *Magnum Opus*: “Radical Orthodoxy”, and William Cavanaugh. Here, we will argue that ROT’s teachings on participation as relationality are vital to understanding a Christian’s participation in public life.

6 Véase Fritz-Gregor Herman, “Metéchein, Metalámbenein and the Problem of Participation in Plato’s *Ontology*”, *Philosophical Inquiry* 25 3/4 (2003): 22-25. <https://doi.org/10.5840/phillinquiry2003253/437>.

7 Sweeney, “Participation in Plato’s Dialogues”, 1-2.

8 Yonghua Ge, *The Many and the One* (Lexington, 2021), 11.

9 This view is held by Reformed thinkers and anti-Platonists who believe that Platonism threatens the goodness of creation and, as such, denies its integrity.

10 Radical Orthodox Theology will from here be referred to as ROT.

1. RADICAL ORTHODOXY: THE CAMBRIDGE REVOLUTION

ROT is a late XX century theological movement which originated from Cambridge, with the publication of its *Magnum opus*: “Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology”¹¹. It sets out to re-establish theology as a *metadiscourse* which is bold in both assuming its dignified position as well as in serving as a guiding light to the doing and understanding of other disciplines¹². To achieve its goal, ROT undertakes a critical assessment of secularism, exposing its deficiencies, especially its lack of values and nihilism¹³.

Hence, ROT evaluates secularism in the areas of its major interest where it “has invested heavily – aesthetics, politics, sex, the body, personhood, visibility, space – and re-evaluates them from a Christian standpoint; that is, in terms of the Trinity, Christology, the Church and the Eucharist”¹⁴. In doing so, it addresses the current model of understanding reality promoted by secularism, which is

11 John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward, (eds), *Radical Orthodoxy: a new theology*, (Routledge, 1999). However, the theological concern and perspective which ROT shares had made an earlier and notable appearance in John Milbank's work, *Theology and Social Theory* published nine years earlier (John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Blackwell, 1990). This has inspired many scholars such as Denis Sureau to attribute the origin of the movement to J. Milbank (See Denis Sureau, *Una Nueva Teología Política* (Nuevo Inicio, 2010), 142). J. Milbank writes in the introduction of his *Theology and Social Theory*, “this book is addressed both to social theorist and to theologian. To Social theorist I shall attempt to disclose the possibility of a skeptical demolition of modern, secular social theory from a perspective with which it is at variance: in this case, that of Christianity. ... what follows is intended to overcome the pathos of modern theology, and to restore in postmodern terms, the possibility of theology as a metadiscourse” (Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 1). Following this, it is not wrong in any way to hold that Milbank's most important and groundbreaking publication laid a solid foundation upon which the movement thrived. Still on its origin, apart from the fact of Cambridge being its place of publication, Radical orthodoxy bears a heavy mark of the Cambridge tradition, first, in the affiliation of its contributors before, during and after the publication to the Faculty of Divinity of the University of Cambridge, and second, in what its editors refer to, in the acknowledgements, as “resonance with the Cambridge past” (Milbank, Pickstock and Ward, (eds), *Radical Orthodoxy*, xi) merits it the title, “the Cambridge collection” (Ibid). The authors acknowledged that of its twelve contributors, “eight... are British; four of them are American. Three teach theology in the Cambridge University Divinity Faculty; five are graduate theological students in the same faculty; of the others, two were educated in theology at Cambridge and two are Americans who owe much to Cambridge influences. It is, therefore, very much a *Cambridge collection*, and other contemporary Cambridge figures who have influenced the volume and would sympathize with much.... We feel that our positive invocations of Plato, Augustine, Anslem and Aquinas have resonances with the Cambridge past” (Ibid., xi.).

12 According to the Editors of the collection *Radical Orthodoxy* “Underpinning the present essays, therefore, is the idea that every discipline must be framed by a theological perspective; otherwise, these disciplines will define a zone apart from God, grounded literally in nothing” (John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward, “Introduction, Suspending the Material: the turn of Radical Orthodoxy” in *Radical Orthodoxy: a new theology*, eds. John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward, (Routledge, 1999), 3). Milbank comments that, “the pathos of modern theology is its false humility. For theology, this must be a fatal disease, because once theology surrenders its claim to be a metadiscourse, it cannot any longer articulate the word of the creator God but is bound to turn into the oracular voice of some infinite idol, such as historical scholarship, humanist psychology, or transcendental philosophy” (Milbank, *Theology & Social Theory*, 1).

13 Milbank, Pickstock and Ward, “Introduction, Suspending the Material”, 1.

14 Ibid.

antithetical to religion, and regards man's religious views as aspects of his private life that should not interfere with matters of public interest. Therefore, ROT conquers nihilism and atomic individualism that triumphs in the modern world and as such, re-establishes the social nature of the human person as something not only corresponding to reason but also to revealed truth. For instance, W. Cavanaugh argues for the supremacy of the data obtained from revelation over that of human reason¹⁵.

ROT is a Christian project which deliberately proceeds to reclaim the world not by a nostalgic return to premodernity but by basically “situating its concerns and activities within a theological framework”¹⁶. Consequently, it seeks to establish a re-envisioned concept of theology which allows a proper perception of reality within a participatory framework that recognises both the immanent and transcendental constitutions of created reality at once. The task of Radical Orthodoxy is enumerated in the following way¹⁷:

- i. Secular modernity is the creation of a perverse theology;
- ii. The opposition of reason to revelation is a modern corruption;
- iii. Any thought that brackets God is ultimately nihilistic;
- iv. The material and temporal realms of bodies, sex, art, and sociability, which modernity claims to value, can only be truly sustained through the recognition of their participation in the transcendent.

ROT's bent towards orthodoxy is expressed in the fact that it draws its source from the *teachings* and *traditions* of the undivided deposit of faith, which subsist in the Catholic Church¹⁸. It is radical both in its approach and style of critique of modernity and secularism¹⁹. It aggressively drags theology out of taking a timid position in the back bench of intellectual discussion, to re-discovering its humble

15 William Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist, Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ* (Blackwell, 1998).

16 Milbank, Pickstock and Ward, “Introduction, Suspending the Material”, 1.

17 Ibid.

18 Orthodoxy is a historical innovation necessitated by the changes initiated by modernism. For further reading, see Moshe Samet, “The Beginnings of Orthodoxy”, *Modern Judaism* 8/3 (1988): 249-269, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1396068>. See also, David Singer, “The New Orthodox Theology”, *Modern Judaism* 9/1 (1989): 35-54, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1396432>.

19 Commenting on the radicality of ROT, S. Shakespeare notes that, “It is itself a postmodern phenomenon, radical in its denial that there is any neutral reading of truth or reality in terms of which conflicting belief systems can be judged. It asserts that reality can only truly be recovered, affirmed and redeemed when read in terms of the specifically Christian narrative, in which all that is, exists only by its participation in the being of God” (Steven Shakespeare, “The New Romantics A Critique of Radical Orthodoxy”, *Theology* 103/813 (2000): 163-177, p.164, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040571X0010300302>).

but rich beginnings in the *theology of the Fathers*²⁰. In so doing, ROT re-envisioned and re-positions theology to claim its lost dignity and relevance amongst other disciplines. Beyond this, a deeper look at ROT reveals the splendour of its intellectual depth and beauty that exudes beyond itself. It promises more than a mere Cambridge reality because the veracity it demonstrates goes beyond *Anglicanism* and its local *Cambridge* origin, to Spain, Ukraine, Rome and France.

1.1. Fundamental elements of Radical Orthodoxy Theology

a) A critique of Secularism

As the metanarrative of modernity, secularism pretends to safeguard the authenticity of material realities by detaching them from every transcendental affiliation²¹. Secularism originated from the nominalism of Duns Scotus and William of Ockham, which, though unintended, took a radical turn into the methodological doubt of René Descartes. This school of thought advanced later, in Friedrich Nietzsche’s declaration of God’s death, which falsely claimed the irrelevance of metaphysics and transcendental acknowledgements in the perception of reality²². Today, more people keep embracing secularism because of its false promise of neutrality and claim to be the basis for the possibility of self-determination and self-expression.

The hope given by secularism appears utopic and as a result crashed at its conception, because detached from its transcendental source, material things fall into crises of lack of origin and purpose. Hence, the project of ROT is to defeat and expose the weaknesses of secularism by confronting it in its area of interest. ROT begins this by accusing secularism of self-contradiction, in denying the very things it celebrated: embodied life, self-expression, sexuality, aesthetic

20 For further reading of the richness of Patristic Theology, see Servais Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics* (Catholic University of America, 1995), 195-215.

21 Matthew Scherer, “Landmarks In The Critical Study Of Secularism” *Cultural Anthropology* 26/4 (2011): 621-632, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1360.2011.01115.x>. See also, Andrzej Bronk, “Secular, Secularization, and Secularism: A Review Article” *Anthropos* 107/2 (2012): 578-583, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23510062>; Gil Anidjar, “Secularism” *Critical Inquiry* 33/1 (2006): 52-77, <https://doi.org/10.1086/509746>.

22 Secularism goes beyond a mere separation of the religion from politics to a nihilism. For instance, Michael Gillespie traces the origins of nihilism beyond Nietzsche to the nominalism of Duns Scotus and William of Ockham (See Michael Gillespie, *Nihilism Before Nietzsche* (University of Chicago, 1995), 1-63).

experience, and human political community²³. In the end, ROT overcomes secularism by re-envisioning a theology²⁴.

b) Metaphysics of participation

The crisis of value and meaning caused by secularism demands an alternative way of imagining reality within the context of the metaphysics of participation²⁵. To this end, ROT adopts participation as a tool to correct the errors of secularism and inaugurate a post-modern reign²⁶. Participation argues for the presence of eternal stability in things which goes beyond pure immanence²⁷. It teaches that material things receive their being and meaning from God. Participation does not in any way suggest that sensible things are fake or mere pictural representations of the spiritual. It rather teaches that creation is a site of divine presence and manifestation from whom they draw meaning and value²⁸ in such a way which reassures their individuality, dignity and integrity. At the basis of participation is the concept of relationality and communion which is relevant to understanding man's presence and involvement in public life.

c) The recovery of theology as a metadiscourse

Since the dawn of modernity, theology has suffered a drastic neglect and a conspicuous loss of both disciplinary influence and public relevance. This is partly due to its inability to provide proper experiential proof to man's existential problem in the way that scientific inquiries do and the univocal understanding of *Being* since the late Middle Ages. Theology has consequently suffered a lack of reputation and credibility in public discourse, which has resulted in its poor self-

23 Michael Hanby, "Desire: Augustine beyond Western subjectivity", in *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, eds. John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward (Routledge, 1999), 112.

24 See Milbank, Pickstock and Ward, "Introduction, Suspending the Material", 3; Milbank, *Theology & Social Theory*, 1.

25 "The central theological framework of radical orthodoxy is 'Participation' as developed by Plato and reworked by Christianity, because any alternative configuration perforce reserves a territory independent of God. The latter can lead only to nihilism (though in different guises). Participation, however, refuses any reserve of created territory, while allowing finite things their own integrity. Underpinning the present essays, therefore, is the idea that every discipline must be framed by a theological perspective; otherwise these disciplines will define a zone apart from God, grounded literally in nothing" (Ibid.).

26 Ibid.

27 Milbank, Pickstock and Ward, "Introduction, Suspending the Material", 3.

28 Ibid.

perception as a tool which only thrives through validating the errors proclaimed by social and political sciences²⁹.

ROT re-imagines theology to assume its pride of place, both in articulating the origin and dependence of creation on God as well as in seeking to supervise the practice of other disciplines³⁰. This implies, therefore, that social sciences can only and easily understand itself only in relation to the grand story of man’s *being* in God as her *terminus ad quo* and *terminus ad quem* which theology tells. Consequently, theology emerges as the only grand story which can explain everything in one piece. This justifies the fact that ROT “tries to reclaim the world by situating its concerns and activities within a theological framework”³¹ in which creation ontologically depends on God the creator.

1.2. The Politics of Radical Orthodoxy Theology

The concept of participation, within which ROT unveils its ingenuity, re-positions theology on the one hand, to overcome the vice of dualism: nature and grace, faith and reason, upon which modernity and secularism are built. On the other hand, it engages social sciences to illumine and provide a proper guide for them. A contrary opinion creates a social science which gives birth to false politics through its imagination of a false autonomy in creation that is separated from God and from every metaphysical influence. W. Cavanaugh comments, “there is no polis divided into a sacred and a secular sphere, nor a religion and politics that deal with two different sets of goods of human life, the natural and the supernatural”³². Properly thought, politics is built on a holistic perception of reality.

ROT has been bold and very deliberate in its vision to outline the socio-political role of religious belief in the world today, which can be described as a “theopolitical vision”³³. A political theology inspired by ROT in this sense takes seriously the truth of participation and imagines it to be the basis for the possibility of man’s socio-political life³⁴. ROT following the concept of participation, argues

29 Cf. Milbank, *Theology & Social Theory*, 1.

30 Ibid.

31 Milbank, Pickstock and Ward, “Introduction, Suspending the Material”, 1.

32 William Cavanaugh, “La mitología de la Modernidad: un diagnóstico teológico”, in *La Modernidad cuestionada*, ed. Carmen Ubieto (Deusto, 2010), 13-30.

33 See Daniel Bell, “Postliberalism and Radical Orthodoxy”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Political Theology*, eds. Craig Hovey & Elizabeth Phillips (Cambridge, 2015), 110.

34 Sureau, *Una Nueva Teología Política*, 154.

that man was created for communion with God. The reconciliation of the material and the spiritual and the reconstruction of reality initiated by ROT essentially benefits man in his self-perception, which promotes a more comprehensive participation in *public life*. Again, this is far from a call to replace modernity with some kind of pre-modernity, but it rather offers an alternative to modernity which is marked by a preponderance of atomic individualism (totally locked up in itself); that is a participatory individuality (open to relating with the other).

2. JOHN MILBANK: REMNANT CHRISTIANITY

The British theologian John Milbank launched into the intellectual stage with the forceful critique of his seminal work, *Theology and Social Theory, Beyond Secular Reason*, published in 1990³⁵. However, to comprehend John Milbank's thought, one must be equipped with a basic understanding of the background against which his school of thought emerged. The two extremes of Christian belief, namely, the liberal theology of mainline Protestantism and conservative fundamentalism, suffered a crisis in the last quarter of the twentieth century³⁶. The former had, in its attempts to conform with the society of the present era, probably watered down the teachings of Christianity to a point where they were deemed insignificant. The latter, because of fixation on gross, literal meanings, appeared to be a misunderstanding of reality which in an actual sense withdrew from real life³⁷. This is the vacuum into which Milbank led his co-authors. He presented a third way, which was at once conservative and progressive.

2.1. Economy of gift and grace

Milbank did not in anyway hide his great admiration for the French Jesuit scholar, Henri De Lubac and his *Nouvelle theologie*; especially his thesis in the *Surnatural*³⁸. Following the teachings of Aquinas, De Lubac held that the human person has an innate capacity to naturally desire a supernatural end such as the

35 Simon Oliver, "Radical Orthodoxy" in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy of Religion*, eds. Stewart Geotz & Charles Taliaferro (John Wiley, 2021), 1-4.

36 Cf. Jeffrey Hadden, "Religious Broadcasting and the Mobilization of the New Christian Right", *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 26/1 (1987) 1-24. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1385838>.

37 Ibid.

38 Cf. John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate Concerning the Supernatural* (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2005).

Beatific vision³⁹. This stood against those who proposed the existence of a pure nature, through which man desires and achieves a purely natural end. These are proximate ends, which culminate into one ultimate end in God⁴⁰. For Milbank, Theology “needs to recover the authentic and more radical account of the natural desire for the supernatural as offered by the De Lubac... This account is articulated in terms of spirit always oriented to grace, gift without contrast, the cosmos as lured by grace through humanity, unilateral exchange, and the link of grace with art”⁴¹. In this sense, creatures are not just self enclosed but are by their very nature compelled to seek communion both with God and their neighbours in their natural environment and daily socio-political activities.

Henri De Lubac used the economy of gift and grace to explain creaturely dependence of all physical realities on God for being. This is what ROT refers to as participation of creation in God which is a gratuitous gift, since each creature shares undeservingly, in what is not properly his, but belongs to another – a higher being – by necessity. Participation in this sense reflects a reciprocity which exists between the giver and the receiver: a free act of self-giving which does not at all imply, an entitlement or obligation on either side⁴².

Following this, Milbank conceived participation as the principle which explains the relatedness of distinct individual beings in and through God in a reciprocal act of self-giving and receiving⁴³. Reciprocity in this sense reflects a *sharing* between the giver and receiver: while the giver shares what belongs to it originally, the receiver, shares in the self-giving of the giver, which converts the

39 Henri De Lubac, *The Mystery of the supernatural* (Crossroad, 1998), xix.

40 Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, 25. For further reading, see Edward Oakes, “The Paradox of Nature and Grace: On John Milbank’s *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate Concerning the Supernatural*”, *Nova et Vetera* 4/3 (2006): 667–696. See also, Hans Boersma & James Packer, “Sacramental Ontology: Nature and the Supernatural in the Ecclesiology of Henri de Lubac” *New Blackfriars* 88/1015 (2007): 242–273. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43251132>; Christiane Alpers, “The Essence of a Christian in Henri de Lubac: Sacramental Ontology or Non-Ontology”, *New Blackfriars* 95/1058 (2014): 430–442. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43251838>.

41 *Ibid.*, 18.

42 For S. Oliver, “This establishes an important characteristic of the gift for Radical Orthodoxy, and Milbank in particular: reciprocity. Whilst Derrida theorises a pure one-way gift in which no return is possible lest the giver be tainted by self-interest, Milbank insists that for a gift truly to be gift it must be acknowledged as such. This acknowledgement takes the form of gratitude. The recipient offers a return gift: thanksgiving. So whereas, for Derrida, for a gift to be truly a gift it must be only one-way – from giver to recipient – and thereby totally selfless or purely altruistic, for Milbank the gift requires reciprocal exchange because the gift must be acknowledged as such. The recipient acknowledges the gift and reciprocates with gratitude to the giver. So gift, for Milbank, establishes relationship through *reciprocity*” (Simon Oliver, “Henri de Lubac and Radical Orthodoxy”, in *TT Clark companion to Henri de Lubac*, ed. Jordan Hillebert (Bloomsbury, 2017) 404).

43 See John Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (Routledge, 2003).

receiver into a giver of gratitude at the end⁴⁴. This establishes a natural communion and relationship between them which forms the basis for man's participation in public life. Through this predisposition to share, man possesses a natural drive towards communion and bodily relationship with those his same nature in the society.

2.2. Secularism: The Christian Heresy

At the heart of Milbank's critique lies the provocative claim: "once, there was no 'secular'. And the secular was not latent, waiting to fill more space with the steam of the 'purely human', when the pressure of the sacred was relaxed.... The secular as a domain had to be instituted or *imagined*, both in theory and practice"⁴⁵. This premise is both audacious and, given the consequences that it has provoked, all-encompassing, and can be said to be at the very core of ROT. In Milbank's view, what contemporary culture has today defined as the proper role of matter and spirit, and the separation of the two as natural is a certain kind of theology that emerged out of certain historical transformations, that is a possible corruption of Christian thinking: "secular discourse does not just borrow inherently inappropriate modes of expression from religion as the only discourse to hand... but is actually *constituted* in its secularity by "heresy" in relation to orthodox Christianity, or else a rejection of Christianity that is more "neo-pagan" than simply anti-religious"⁴⁶.

Consequently, Milbank notes that the secular is not real but a figment of modern imagination, which follows the wrong logic of nominalism⁴⁷. Duns Scotus and William of Ockham had wrongly taught that being can be predicated both on God and created things univocally rather than analogically. What ensues is a genealogy of the secular which is more than mere antiquarianism since it equips Milbank *prima facie* in his warfare against the so-called secular discourse. Thus, if secularism is a type of faith, even a misguided one, then its pretensions of being objective, exemplified for instance in the *New Atheists'* claim, fall apart. This, according to Milbank, equalizes the playing field and grants theology advantageous access back into the public square, not as some archaic intellectual

44 See David Grumett, "Radical Orthodoxy", *The Expository Times* 122/6 (2011): 263. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0014524610394523>.

45 Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 9.

46 *Ibid.*, 3.

47 See Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 10.

tradition, but as an important player in the great contemporary conversations and dialogue⁴⁸.

2.3. The Remnant Awakens

It is within this theological context that one can identify the specifics of the concept of ‘Remnant Christianity’ developed by Milbank. Promising to maintain Christianity’s fundamentalist element that stands for the purity of faith despite all the apostasies, Milbank offers the vision of Christianity that is both tradition-bound and today-entangled. This is not a call to withdraw and become theory, but for a deliberate establishment of a Christian approach to socio-political culture⁴⁹. Milbank’s contributions have evoked a great revolutionary effect within theology and beyond and have become the center of conversations regarding the religious voice in a public forum⁵⁰.

Milbank has given a direction on how Christianity must fit into the current secular world and positively impact it. For instance, following Augustine’s dialectics of two cities in the *City of God*, Milbank encourages the remnant Christians to give up the ontological antagonism of the secular world, which thrives on violence, and be ambassadors of peace⁵¹. Milbank’s “Remnant Christians” is led by a Christian spirit that must be courageous enough to project Christian teachings and practice of peace as an alternative to the societal menace of violence and individualism observable today. This is not so much about establishing a Christian state, but about leading a revolutionised conception of the world which conceives human relationship in its most original and natural state as relational.

48 The 5th chapter (“Policing the Sublime”) and 7th chapter (“Founding the Supernatural”) of his *Theology and Social Theory*, are dedicated to challenging the idea that theology must be restricted to discussing social ills. Milbank believes that theology must explore areas of knowledge which have been today ignored totally: namely the importance of the supernatural in social discourses.

49 Konstantinos Papastathis, and Anastasia Litina, “Orthodoxy as exclusivist identity in the Greek Radical Right: Discourse analysis and electoral behavior”, in *Illiberal politics and religion in Europe and beyond: Concepts, actors, and identity narratives*, Vol. 19, eds. Anja Hennig & Mirjam Weiberg-Salzmann (Campus Verlag GmbH, 2021), 291-316.

50 Marcin Skladanowski, and Lukasz Borzecki, “Radical Russianness: The Religious and Historiosophic Context of Aleksandr Dugin’s Anti-Occidentalism”, *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 14/2 (2020): 65-93. <https://doi.org/10.14321/jstudradi.14.2.0065>.

51 Cf. Milbank, *Theology & Social Theory*, 391-392.

3. CATHERINE PICKSTOCK: A LITURGICAL CITY

Cathrine Pickstock's seminal text *After Writing: The Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* has powerfully impacted the development ROT⁵². While undertaking her Thesis with John Milbank⁵³, which coincided with the period of the extraordinary liturgical reforms called by Pope Benedict XVI, she fell in love with the rites of traditional Catholic Liturgy, which inspired her, informed her entire career, and formed the major argument of her monograph, *After Writing*. The cornerstone of Pickstock's concept is her imagination of the world as "A Liturgical City"; which makes possible the interaction between theology, philosophy, and society⁵⁴.

3.1. The Philosopher's Liturgy

To comprehend Pickstock's vision of a Liturgical City, it is first necessary to examine briefly her critique of modern philosophy: critique of textualization and critique of spatialization⁵⁵. In her view, the trajectory of Western thought since Descartes has been marked by a fatal flaw of privileging writing over speech; the mind over the body; and the lettered body over the mauled and sexualized black body⁵⁶. For Pickstock, textualization means sacrificing real life for a text, which has led to the crisis of referentiality, the loss of the cycle of life, and consequently, alienation from the divine. In addition to this, there is also a notable neutralization of time and space, which rips life and reality of its true meaning and purpose.

To address this crisis, Pickstock proposes a revolutionized interpretation of the liturgy⁵⁷. In this reading, the being of the human person is understood to be essentially liturgical, because in it, the ontological value of the material things

52 Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgic Consummation of Philosophy*, (Wiley-Blackwell, 1998). See also Brandon Paradise and Sergey Trostyanskiy, "Liberalism and Orthodoxy: A Search for Mutual Apprehension" *Notre Dame L. Rev.*, 98/4 (2022): 1657-1696. <https://scholarship.law.nd.edu/ndlr/vol98/iss4/8>.

53 Catherine Pickstock has co-published a couple of works with John Milbank, which shows the coherence of their thoughts. Amongst these works are, Milbank, Pickstock and Ward, *Radical Orthodoxy*; John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas* (Routledge, 2001).

54 Ibid, 1657.

55 Pickstock, *After Writing*, 47-98. See also, Jack Trotter, "Reviewed Work: *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* by Cathrine Pickstock", *Christianity and Literature* 47/4 (1998): 489-493. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44314143>; David Williams, "Review of *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy*, by C. Pickstock" *Religion & Literature* 31/2 (1999): 111-116. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40059775>.

56 Ibid., 56.

57 Ibid., 167ff.

experienced overcomes their mere appearance⁵⁸. Pickstock proposes a program of reading texts that would bring out the oral, the bodily, and the liturgical meaning in a pure form. Making recourse to other thinkers like Jacques Derrida and theologian Jean-Yves Lacoste, Pickstock claims that meaning is construed and, thus, real and true knowledge is derived within the purview of rituals and, thereby, communal practice. She is not isolated in this view, because Pagels also conceives the liturgy not only as a religious rite but as a model of the human reason and society⁵⁹.

3.2. The City Redeemed

It is from this philosophical background that the *Liturgical City*, which Pickstock imagines, appears. Following this, the true characteristics of ‘political’ exactitude are not those of the *polis* envisaged in the secular humanist political science, but those based on the interpretations of the liturgical calendar and sacramental time⁶⁰. This is not a proposal for a return to the organizational structure of the divine rule (theocracy), but rather an invitation to rethink social organizations based on liturgical disciplines, viz a viz a purposeful consideration of the multiple analogies, metaphors and paradoxes that are part of the rich Catholic Eucharistic heritage⁶¹. In this connection, D. Grummet points out that: “in the liturgical space, physical journeying towards the altar is balanced by a divine movement of the host into our own physical bodies”⁶².

The comprehensive reality of the liturgical city shows that it is possible to describe each form of human activity in the same way and every sphere – economic, political, educative – man fulfils doxology, that is, worship, through which a person lives out freely what he experiences in an ontologically constituted good⁶³. In this perspective, time is saved, as it is no longer the progressive, secular process, but the in-time-ness of the liturgy that enters the eternal now. Space also

58 Cf. Sureau, *Una Nueva Theologia Politica*, 163.

59 Cf. Elaine Pagels, *Why Religion: a personal story* (HarperCollins, 2018).

60 Pickstock, *After Writing*, 192.

61 Grummet, “Radical Orthodoxy”, 267.

62 Ibid.

63 Ibid. Pickstock establishes an important connection between knowing and the know. See Catherine Pickstock, “Imitating God: The Truth of things According to Thomas Aquinas”, *New Blackfriars* 81/953-954 (2000): 312. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43250468>.

changes; for example, the structures of the church are sacralised, and the space is expanded to include the urban environment as well⁶⁴.

The most important element in Pickstock's vision is her conception of the Eucharist. Again, far from being a mere religious rite, the Eucharist is expressed in symbolic action and gestures and assumes in her vision the role model of everything that man does and thinks. In the Liturgical City, the self is not the social subject of liberalism, but a subject of sovereignty constituted through a common assembly of rituals. These rituals lead us beyond the search for truth in appearance, to a deeper reality which worships both reserves and reveals. Consequently, society can never be a contract between single subjects but a living organism which worships. The materiality of the created world is not viewed as existing solely for man's disposal but as a beautiful symbol expressing something beyond itself.

3.3. Sacramental sociability

Pickstock's idea of the Liturgical City is one of the most daring and commendable attempts to recast social and political existence based on the principles of Christian sacramentality. This concept aims at combating the individualism and the alienation typical of secular societies in order to establish a society based on participation in sacramental sociability. Consequently, the strength of Pickstock's approach is that it is founded on participation. While industrial-oriented societies are more characteristic of passive expenditure, the Liturgical City requires a person to actively participate in the life of collaboration. This participatory spirit has a consequential proposition regarding how Christians can engage in framing the common good. This vision permits a kind of Christianity in which the common good does not only encase mutual trust but where everything is possibly apostolic.

One practical example of this approach can be observed in the activities of "Inner CHANGE": a Christian order among the poor people that unites contemplation and active tending of communities in town environments all over the world. "Inner Change" is a Christian missionary organization founded in the early 1980s in Los Angeles by John Hayes. Their vision on the official website reads, "we are families, singles, and married couples, with and without kids, and whose children have left the nest. We are young and old, college-educated and

64 Matthew Rose, *A world after liberalism: five thinkers who inspired the radical right* (Yale, 2021).

highschool dropouts, living and serving in teams in places of poverty across the globe. We are an ecumenical community from differing socio-economic, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds seeking to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God together”⁶⁵.

Pickstock’s notion of the Liturgical City within the framework of the ROT movement reveals the potential of structuring the Christian’s values for participation in the common good. This approach pushes Christians rather than being passive, to interact with current social and political cocktails albeit in a specific way; it challenges them to always participate fully, cross over flawed binaries and consider God’s view of the social existence. Even though translating some of these observations into concrete practice may be difficult, this picture paints a rather intriguing and most likely transformative scenario of how Christianity is going to encounter commonality in the post-secular world. This view is similar to R. Dreher’s “Benedictine option”, which advocates for the confrontation of secularism through the formation of Christian virtues⁶⁶.

4. GRAHAM WARD: CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT

Graham Ward’s contribution to ROT’s project demonstrates that different threads of theology, cultural theory and political philosophy form an important vision of Christian existence in the modern world⁶⁷. His concept of “Critical Engagement” presents a complex and detailed way of dealing with the situation of Christianity in today’s diverse world. Ward neither advocates for a complete rejection of the secular culture nor for its total acceptance, but for a Christian interaction with culture⁶⁸.

Such a cartographical approach is well illustrated in some of his works: *Barth, Derrida, and the Language of Theology* and *Theology and Contemporary Critical Theory*⁶⁹. He is particularly up to confronting secular theory with the Christian perspective and thus letting discourse theory sound a lot like dogma. According to M. Doak, “Ward’s argument that theology must respond “positively and also

65 “Inner Change”, <https://www.innerchange.org/about/>, consulted 15 October 2024.

66 Rod Dreher, *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation* (Penguin, 2018).

67 This is what he refers to as “post-pluralism”. See Graham Ward, *The Cities of God* (Routledge, 2000), 2.

68 Ibid.

69 Graham Ward, *Barth, Derrida, and the Language of Theology*, Cambridge 1995; Graham Ward, *Theology and Contemporary Critical Theory* (Springer, 1996).

critically” to the secular city provides an alternative political ecclesiology for Radical Orthodoxy that is of sufficient generality in its concern with all “social bodies” to be applicable not only to the city but also, *mutatis mutandis*, to other levels of political organization in secular society, including the state”⁷⁰. His voyage is not simply academic tourism, but rather an endeavor to understand the current trends of modern thought from the Christian perspective, relying upon its strength.

4.1. The Virtuality of Faith

Perhaps, the most effective feature, using Ward’s approach, is his desire to redefine the concept of the Christian community within the context of postmodernism⁷¹. Unlike some other authors who define postmodernity as a phenomenon which is necessarily hostile to religious faith, Ward finds in the postmodern condition new possibilities for Christian evangelization. In postmodern manifestations of the parish, he postulates about a church, on the one hand, maintaining religious orthodox ties, yet on the other hand being culturally sensitive⁷².

Furthermore, Ward’s theological work ventures into realms that have only sparse reflexive treatment: technology and the virtual. In his work *Cultural Transformation and Religious Practice*, he dwells upon the effects of digital culture on Christian beliefs and activity⁷³. Instead of just rejecting the virtual as either being fake or hook line and sinker, Ward’s challenge is to perform a proper theological critique of the digital culture⁷⁴. It is this engagement that leads Ward to some rather stimulating discoveries about religion and its experiences in the high-tech age. Referring to the virtuality of cyberspace, he said that it could be used as a basis for the interpretive framework of the already/not yet aspects of Christian eschatology.

70 Mary Doak, “The Politics of Radical Orthodoxy: A Catholic Critique”, *Theological Studies* 68 (2007): 386. <https://doi.org/10.1177/004056390706800207>.

71 Cf. Ward, *Cities of God*, 71.

72 Ibid, 93.

73 Graham Ward, *Cultural Transformation and Religious Practice* (Cambridge, 2005).

74 Papastathis, and Litina, “Orthodoxy as exclusivist identity in the Greek Radical Right”, 291-316.

4.2. The Critique of Critique

Ward’s appraisal is established in ROT’s broader estimate of recuperating pre-modern Christian notions within the confines of postmodern philosophy. In works such as *Cities of God* and *Cultural Transformation and Religious Practice*, Ward argues for a shape of cultural engagement that goes beyond mere deconstruction or negative critique. This approach is conspicuously obvious in the way and manner in which Ward addresses issues of liberalism and consumerism, inter-religious dialogue, post-modernism, etc. Instead of simply dismissing these ideologies, the author aims to explain why such philosophies are popular and how one can meet the wants and needs that they promise to fulfil. This more subtle approach is beneficial for Christian witness and the creation of the common good that is often expressed as the shared vision of society⁷⁵.

In this direction, Ward’s approach to consumerism also draws special attention. Rather than focusing on the negative aspects of the consumer culture, or denouncing it outright, he looks at the wants and needs which give rise to consumption. In his work *The Politics of Discipleship: Consuming Post-materialism*, Ward contends that consumerism responds to real human needs of the search for meaning, for togetherness, and for the otherworldly⁷⁶. By being aware of such dynamics, Christians help to present healthier practices and stories as a means of fulfilling the needs rooted in sinful motives.

4.3. The Promise of Dialogue

Graham Ward develops a simple model by which the past, that is, a premodern lifestyle, could be engaged with the present, by avoiding two antitheses: careless take and complete discharge. This “critical engagement” strives to create a third way between Christian theosophy and modern social hypothesis, as well as an interim between the church and the broader world. Ward’s approach, as constructed in his works especially, *Cities of God* and *Cultural Transformation and Religious Practice*, looks at the consequence of the conviction that accommodates postmodern thought while continuing a distinctly Christian viewpoint. This method accepts what we may refer to as an old-type present culture, in the fact of its challenges to traditional Christian narratives, which at

⁷⁵ Hennandii Khrystokin, and Vasyl Lozovyt'skyi, “Reform of Orthodoxy: Current Challenges and Tasks”, *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* 43/8 (2023) 2. <https://doi.org/10.55221/2693-2148.2467>.

⁷⁶ Cf. Graham Ward, *The Politics of Discipleship: Becoming Postmaterial Citizens* (Baker Academic, 2009).

the same time provides impacts for new Christian witness and participation in the social/political space.

One of the key facts of Ward's methodology is his plan of "engaged withdrawal". This paradoxical provision holds that Christians ought to carefully get involved in contemporary culture while at the same time maintaining a prudent distance which is proper to their faith and moral identity. This position creates a third way which accepts both secularist calls for the privatization of faith and the necessity of the Christian culture. In the final analysis, Ward offers encouraging criteria for Christian participation in a generally best postmodern context. By enveloping critical engagement, seeking out new directions for proof, and supporting a promising outlook on cultural change. His approach sanctions Christians to be introduced authentically to modern social and political arguments while holding on jealously to their theological and religious custom. This model of arrangement gives authorization for a dynamic and pertinent Christian presence in shaping general satisfaction, even in the face of the challenges and opportunities presented by postmodernity.

5. WILLIAM CAVANAUGH: THE EUCHARISTIC COUNTERPOLITICS

William Cavanaugh is one of the twelve contributors to the collection *Radical Orthodoxy*⁷⁷. In addition to this, an entry of his data on Wikipedia online encyclopedia indicates "Radical Orthodoxy" as his school of thought and academic tradition⁷⁸. This notwithstanding, his reported interview with Roberto Andrés, - where he outrightly disassociates with ROT and denies membership – gives a contrary opinion⁷⁹.

77 William Cavanaugh, "The City: Beyond Secular Parodies" in *Radical Orthodoxy: a new theology*, eds. John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham. Ward, (Routledge, 1999), 182-200.

78 "William T. Cavanaugh", https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_T._Cavanaugh, consulted 12 September 2024.

79 R. Andrés, reports "William Cavanaugh himself commented to me, in the correspondence I had with him on the occasion of his visit to Bilbao, that he did not consider himself a member of the RO, and that the RO itself was not a theological current with a theological agenda that is being developed systematically and organized by its members" (Roberto Andrés, "¿Qué Ortodoxia?, ¿Qué Radicalidad?: una teología arriesgada para un tiempo incierto", en in *La Modernidad cuestionada*, ed. Carmen Ubieta (Deusto, 2010), 61).

5.1. The Myth of Religious Violence

William Cavanaugh’s *Eucharistic Counterpolitics* is worthy of credit for the proposed intervention it undertakes on behalf of how ROT could conceive Christian participation in the common good. Furthermore, his critique of the Myth of Religious Violence provides an additional compelling subscription to the concern raised by ROT. This outlook alters the conventional views on religion and its relation to public life, offering Christendom’s unique approach to political engagement. Cavanaugh, in his book *The Myth of Religious Violence*⁸⁰, notes that the story often told is that brutality belongs to religion and the story is told by the non-religious state which acts as the peacekeeper is not only wrong but also politically charged with intent⁸¹. This critique is important for ROT’s advocacy for a political Christianity since it interrogates the present-day privatization of faith in socio-political affairs. In this way, he offers a new terrain through which conditions of the Christian faith can be negotiated anew in the public sphere. This approach encourages Christians to actively participate in political and social issues not as individuals seeking help and personal support, but as members of community, reconstructed with the help of a certain vision rooted in religion.

Examining Cavanaugh’s ideas within the ROT framework shows that he engages deeply in an appealing and constructive reply toward Christian involvement in the common good. This approach insists on the oppressive narrations of religion and violence and suggests other types of Christian political engagement. It also provides Christians with visions that help them reconceptualize their position in the creation of social and political realities. Though this perspective may encounter certain difficulties in its practical application, it contributes significantly to the sending back of theology into the political terrain of post-secularism.

⁸⁰ William Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Root of Modern Conflict* (Oxford, 2009).

⁸¹ Cavanaugh is known as a very fierce critic of the state scattered in almost all his works. (See Cavanaugh, “The City: Beyond Secular Parodies”, 186-193. See also William Cavanaugh, “Killing for the Telephone Company: Why the Nation-State is not the Keeper of the Common Good”, *Modern Theology* 20 (2004): 243-274. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0025.2004.00252.x>. See also William Cavanaugh, *Torture and the Eucharist: Theology, Politics and the Body of Christ* (Wiley-Blackwell, 1998).). He sees the state among other things as intrinsically violent, evil, and at war with organizations which foster social unity. In his opinion which M. Doak summarizes as “Anarchic Oppositionalism”, the state must be resisted by the Christian spirit (Cf. Doak, “The Politics of Radical Orthodoxy”, 369).

5.2. The Body of Christ as Political Reality

Cavanaugh's *Eucharistic Counterpolitics*. takes advantage of the church's Patristic concept of the *Corpus Christi* to posit that the Eucharist is not only a religious rite but a political reality of eschatological magnitude. During the eucharistic meal and especially through the consumption of bread and wine, Christians introduce an entirely different form of citizenship, one that is not contained by nation-states and is even resistant to the individualizing tendencies of modernity's capitalist paradigm⁸². Here, the body of Christ produces both a social and spiritual effect in every Christian who partakes in it. At the reception of the eucharist, a person becomes ontologically configured to Christ while at the same time preserving his individuality. Socially, he becomes a member of a community of Christ faithful who share the same purpose and end.

Hence, participation in the eucharist is the possibility for participation in social life and a consequent formation of a civic society. In this, the human individual self is defeated, and the virus of atomization and individualization, which is akin to modernity, is eliminated⁸³. Thus, this Eucharistic "counter-politics" occurs in two ways. In the first place, it provides an antidote to today's mainstream political discourses, providing an alternative view of human beings, culture, and the role of society. Second, it is performed at the altar (counter), dramatizing in the ways of liturgical praxis the ontology of human freedom as committed to a common purpose of being with God and with one another⁸⁴.

Going further, Cavanaugh argues that the eucharistic-inspired citizenship is necessary not only to defeat individualism but also materialism⁸⁵. The reality of the body of Christ makes us appreciate and correctly use material things for the benefit of enriching human life. Material things in this reading are understood as part of God's creation, hence they have a deeper meaning and purpose. God placed the whole of creation at the disposal of the human person to care for it and to use it for his own good benefit. To this end, each human relationship with material realities is to enrich a person's personal life, allow an interpersonal relationship, and promote the common good.

82 Cf. William Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire* (William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 55.

83 Cf. William Cavanaugh, "The Body of Christ: The Eucharist and Politics", *Word & World* 22/2 (2002): 176).

84 Matthew Rose, *A world After Liberalism: Five Thinkers who Inspired the Radical Right* (Yale, 2021).

85 Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed*, 58.

5.3. Torture and Eucharist

Cavanaugh’s *Torture and Eucharist* provides a strong argument for how ROT can work to identify liberal Christian interactions in the common good. Deepening the “Eucharistic Counter politics” hypothesis based on the experience of the Chilean Church under Pinochet, Cavanaugh develops new directions in Christian politics. Among all the identified logical connections in Cavanaugh’s works, the idea that torture serves as a ritual, a ‘Liturgy’ is quite outstanding⁸⁶. He argues that torture, as used by the Pinochet government, is an anti-social and anti-community tool used for a deliberate elimination of social groups with its concomitant effect on individual lives through a disintegration of social bodies⁸⁷. Such a view also highlights how, through acts of political violence, it becomes easier to disassemble the socio-material in such a way that frustrates any attempt at collective resistance. Cavanaugh uses two concepts to describe the effects of torture, viz: isolation of individuals and atomization of body polity⁸⁸.

On the other hand, to confront the enclosed violence proper to secularism, Cavanaugh proposes Eucharistic-counter-politics as a Christian strategy which offers an adequate response. For that reason, the Eucharistic liturgy is not just about the portrayal of integration but truly produces integration by fashioning the people into the body of Christ. To this end, a proper understanding of the nature of the eucharist must be sought, as “not a mere symbol, a source of meaning which the individual reads and then applies to social issues “out there” in the “real world”⁸⁹. The eucharist is what unites us into one body with Christ – this is itself a political reality⁹⁰. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Eucharist is conceived by him as a socially formative application—middle to ROT’s vision of how the usually good might be jointly constituted by the station.

It is impossible to conjecture how Cavanaugh’s argument that those who feed on Jesus Christ “re-create another kind of politics” at the same time believes that the Christian political action should only be submerged into the political structures. A proper consideration of Cavanaugh shows that his position is rather a set of demands for producing other social spaces and practices that reflect

86 Cf. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, 21-70.

87 Cavanaugh uses the word torture in two senses, first in a strict sense to “denote any type of oppression or inconvenience: sitting in traffic for two hours was “torture,” my boss is “torturing” me, and so on” (Cavanaugh, “The Body of Christ”, 172) and secondly, as a strategy which aims towards fragmentation and atomization of social life. Torture in this general sense, aims at building walls of individualization, instead of relationships (Ibid., 174).

88 Ibid., 171 & 173.

89 Ibid., 177.

90 Ibid.

another configuration of the human community. As a part of the inclusive ROT movement, Cavanaugh's *Eucharistic Counterpolitics* is polemically fruitful in imagining a Christian contribution to the ordinary good. In a certain way, this approach to the socially formative character of the Eucharist and numerous other Christian practices poses a cathartic question to the believer and the Christian about the very nature of politics: politics is not here understood as the manipulation within the given social frameworks, but as the instantiation of the new existential architectonics. Furthermore, it constitutes an innovative paradigm within the Christian theological discourse of political engagement in the post-secular society.

6. RADICAL ORTHODOXY THEOLOGY: BRIDGE AND INTERLOCUTOR OF POSTMODERN SOCIETY

R. Andrés raises two important issues against ROT: the first is its lack of systematization as a school of thought, and the second is the unclear identity of its proponents. He presents a brief interview with William Cavanaugh in which he denied any ties with ROT⁹¹. Andrés' observation that ROT does not have a distinct programme of theology and no group of theologians identify themselves with ROT, seems plausible. Nevertheless, there are indications and landmarks that qualify the doing of theology that ROT proposes.⁹²

C. Pickstock's exposition in the article "Reply to David Ford and Guy Collins", indicates the bent towards *Orthodoxy* and *tradition* as characteristic of ROT. This reveals the specific and admirable identity of ROT⁹³. Furthermore, J. Milbank, in his article "The Programme of Radical Orthodoxy", calls ROT "a movement of intellectual, ecumenical and cultural mediation"⁹⁴. This means that ROT could be considered an umbrella theological movement which accommodates all thinkers who share the desire to conquer the culture of secularism using Christian metaphysics, especially of participation⁹⁵.

91 Cf. Andrés "¿Qué ortodoxia?, ¿Qué Radicalidad?", 61.

92 Ibid.

93 Catherine Pickstock, "Reply to David Ford and Guy Collins", *Scottish Journal of Theology* 54 (2001): 405. doi:10.1017/S003693060005167X.

94 John Milbank, "The Programme of Radical Orthodoxy", in *Radical Orthodoxy? – A Catholic Enquiry*, ed. Laurence Hemming (Ashgate, 2000), 33.

95 See Ola Sigurdson, "Radical Orthodoxy", in *Key Theological Thinkers*, ed. Staale Kristiansen (Routledge, 2016), 581-592. See also Bell, "Postliberalism and Radical Orthodoxy", 111.

However, in reading ROT’s project, care must be taken not to fall into exclusivism and ecclesialism, which S. Shakespeare points out⁹⁶. Their desire to save reality from nihilism and materialism makes her suspicious and critical of non-Christian realities⁹⁷. Shakespeare views ROT’s project as a subtle effort to deify the Church⁹⁸. He claims that the ideal Church which ROT imagines emerges only through a figment of their theological construction, which only satisfies their theological imagination. He accuses ROT of a fictitious presentation of the Church that is based on a pretentious ignorance of the Church’s violent past and disappointment in history⁹⁹. Shakespeare’s critique of ROT seems exaggerated; the appropriation of the church and her liturgy is intended only to provide a model for civic Society. This does not in any way suggest that ROT overlooks the deficiencies of the Church in the way that Shakespeare observes.

On a positive note, ROT’s project can be understood as a work in search of a connection between modern Christian apologetics and post-modern philosophical issues. The proponents of postmodernism do not apply the term as a specific time in history that chronologically succeeds modernity, but rather as an umbrella term that accounts for those positions that question the meanings and ideals of modernity and challenge its metanarrative, such as anthropocentrism, foundationalist epistemology, etc. ROT dismisses an actualization of a conservative withdrawal and liberal assimilation in theology¹⁰⁰. On the contrary, it advocates for a “radical” interpretation of reality, one which turns back to orthodox sources and traditions to draw its authority as a means to promote a coherent view of reality¹⁰¹. On that account, the stronghold of ROT is its re-imagination of theology in its proper dignity and pride of place as the queen of all sciences among other disciplines¹⁰².

ROT’s approach to *postmodernity*, is summarized by J. Milbank and A. Pabst as follows,

“To understand more deeply what this new approach involves, it is necessary to attend closely to the intended sense of the notion “post-liberalism”. ‘Post-’ is

96 Cf. Shakespeare, “The New Romantics”, 167.

97 Milbank, Pickstock and Ward, “Introduction, Suspending the Material”, 1. See also Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 23; Phillip Blond, “Perception. From Modern Painting to the vision in Christ”, in *Radical Orthodoxy*, eds. John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward, (Routledge, 1999), 232.

98 Ibid. 172

99 Shakespeare, “The New Romantics”, 167; Cavanaugh, “Killing for the Telephone Company”, 243-274.

100 Cf. Milbank, Pickstock and Ward, “Introduction, Suspending the Material”, 4

101 Ibid., 3.

102 Cf. Milbank, *Social Theory and Theology*, 1.

different from ‘pre-’and implies not that liberalism is all bad, but that it has inherent problems and deficiencies. Long centuries and recent decades of liberalization have afforded some protection against the worst transgressions upon the liberty of some by the liberty of other.... Appeals to emancipation and social justice ignore the relationships that can provide substance to such abstract norms. This is why there is a need to invent or discover new, more participatory modes of self-restraint and responsibility, of economic justice and share well-being”¹⁰³.

From the foregoing, ROT’s appropriation of the concept of postmodernity does not in any way suggest a total obliteration of modernity and its liberal creed but rather holds that, while sustaining modernity’s positive contributions, it is also important to address its deficiencies at once. In the words of J. Milbank, “Radical Orthodoxy, although it opposes the modern, also seeks to save it. It espouses, not the pre-modern, but an alternative version of modernity”¹⁰⁴. But the question is, how does ROT intend to save modernity? In examining the inadequacies of modernity, one sees that it seeks the good of man but does so in an erroneous way: by alienating man from his ontological dependence on God which constitutes the truth of his being. To save modernity, therefore, it is important to re-imagine it using theological principles which redirects it to the creature-creator ontological dependence.

ROT’s critique of modernity is not primarily about a nostalgic return to the premodern world, but rather an effort to interpret present realities within a theological spectrum in which every reality is understood to be ontologically dependent on God adopting the framework of gift and reciprocity¹⁰⁵. It aims at restoring a Christian metaphysics of participation in postmodern culture. ROT reinterprets postmodern culture within the framework of the theological idea of analogy in a way which debunks the secularization thesis dominant in much of modern social theory. Hence, ROT opposes a self-adequate identity and the main values of the postindustrial society. Instead, it offers a relational ontology that stems from the Trinity.

103 John Milbank and Andrian Pabst, *The Politics of Virtue: Post-liberalism and the human future* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 2.

104 Milbank, “The Programme of Radical Orthodoxy”, 45.

105 Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, 25.

CONCLUSION

The *theo-political* vision that ROT proposes is built on its appropriation, interpretation, and application of the concept of participation. Participation (*methexis*) was first used by Plato in his dialogues to explain the qualitative similarities and differences observable in nature and to establish a relationship between the *One* and the many. It was later adopted by the Patristics to describe the ontological dependence of created realities on God through *creatio ex nihilo*. The concept of participation was, however, lost in the wake of modernity following the rise of nominalism, which was responsible for both the emergence and widespread of nihilism and consequently for secularism. At present, participation in ROT’s usage constitutes a theological framework within which the issues of modernity could be properly examined.

ROT’s concept of participation holds that created things depend ontologically on God for being and meaning. In this way, the secular understanding of material things as a reality separate from God is properly addressed. ROT’s concept of participation has a serious implication for Christian’s perception and involvement in the socio-political activities of his society. Christian participation in the public life within this interpretation begins with ontology conceived analogically, whereby all creation depends on God the creator for their being and meaning. Participation in this sense therefore, implies a relationality in terms of sharing, in which Christians understand their *shared* origin in God. To this end, ROT redirects the perception of difference and diversity from implying individualism, social atomism, and antagonism, to underlying a *sharing*, in terms of a natural connection between one person and the other who shares in the same ontological source: God the creator.

ROT’s concept of participation unfolds within a genre of a fierce critique of secularism and modernity, which may at first sight appear excessive and exclusive. On the one hand, it considers non-Christian positions as suspicious and, at some point, untrue. For instance, J. Milbank and William Cavanaugh unite in a critical evaluation of modernity and the secular state. J. Milbank sees Christianity as the only real position that can serve as an antidote to the excesses of the modern state. Cavanaugh, on the other hand, uses his Eucharistic counter-politics as a tool for the fierce rejection of the dualistic trajectory of the modern state. The worry about this is that ROT both closes its doors against dialogue or is incapable of perceiving anything good in non-Christian realities. On the contrary,

G. Ward's *Critical Engagement* gives us another impression which can enrich our consideration. Ward opens the possibility of positively confronting the excesses of modern society to create a notable Christian influence in society. This balanced approach qualifies ROT as a bridge and interlocutor of post-modern society.

Christian Participation in public life is first and foremost an action that connotes presence and active involvement in the activities of one's society. However, a close consideration must be given to that which informs Christian's action, such as his self-perception and understanding of reality, which I describe as the thought dimension of participation. This is because, to take part in public life, a Christian must first feel himself as part of society and understand his shared origin with others as a natural connection and true basis for the possibility of civic society. I argue that ROT's concept of participation provides this important *thought dimension*, and as such gives Christian involvement in public life both a direction and a purpose. A Christian does not just take part in the socio-political activities of this society, but does so because he feels himself part of the society. The thought dimension, which ROT offers, strengthens and gives purpose to the action dimension. Hence, Christians, rather than shy away from their faith formation and identity, must take advantage of it in order to engage in a critical-creative engagement in the public space. It is in this way that Christian participation in the being of God makes possible a proper Christian participation in public life.

REFERENCIAS BIBLIOGRÁFICAS

- Alpers, Christiane. "The Essence of a Christian in Henri de Lubac: Sacramental Ontology or Non-Ontology". *New Blackfriars* 95/1058 (2014): 430-442.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/43251838>.
- Andrés, Roberto. "¿Qué Ortodoxia?, ¿Qué Radicalidad?: una teología arriesgada para un tiempo incierto". In *La Modernidad cuestionada*, edited by Carmen Ubieta, 51-80. Deusto, 2010.
- Anidjar, Gil. "Secularism". *Critical Inquiry* 33/1 (2006): 52-77.
<https://doi.org/10.1086/509746>.
- Bell, Daniel. "Postliberalism and Radical Orthodoxy". In *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Political Theology*, edited by Craig Hovey and Elizabeth Phillips, 110-132. Cambridge, 2015.
- Blond, Phillip. "Perception. From Modern Painting to the vision in Christ". In *Radical Orthodoxy: a new theology*, edited by John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward, 232-254. Routledge, 1999.

- Brandon Paradise and Sergey Trostyanskiy. “Liberalism and Orthodoxy: A Search for Mutual Apprehension”. *Notre Dame L. Rev.*, 98/4 (2022): 1657-1696.
<https://scholarship.law.nd.edu/ndlr/vol98/iss4/8>.
- Bronk, Andrzej. “Secular, Secularization, and Secularism: A Review Article”. *Anthropos* 107/2 (2012): 578-583. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23510062>.
- Boersma Hans and James Packer. “Sacramental Ontology: Nature and the Supernatural in the Ecclesiology of Henri de Lubac”. *New Blackfriars* 88/1015 (2007): 242-273.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/43251132>
- Cavanaugh, William. “Killing for the Telephone Company: Why the Nation-State is not the Keeper of the Common Good”. *Modern Theology* 20 (2004): 243-274.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0025.2004.00252.x>.
- Cavanaugh, William. “La mitología de la Modernidad: un diagnóstico teológico”. In *La Modernidad cuestionada*, edited by Carmen Ubieta, 13-30. Duesto, 2010.
- Cavanaugh, William. “The Body of Christ: The Eucharist and Politics”. *Word & World* 22/2 (2002): 170 - 177.
- Cavanaugh, William. “The City: Beyond Secular Parodies”. In *Radical Orthodoxy: a new theology*, edited by John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward, 182-200. Routledge, 1999.
- Cavanaugh, William. *Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire*. William B. Eerdmans, 2008.
- Cavanaugh, William. *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Root of Modern Conflict*. Oxford, 2009.
- Cavanaugh, William. *Torture and Eucharist, Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ*. Blackwell, 1998.
- Davison, Andrew. *Participation in God, A study in Christian Doctrine and Metaphysics*. Cambridge, 2019.
- De Lubac, Henri. *The Mystery of the supernatural*. Crossroad, 1998.
- Doak, Mary. “The Politics of Radical Orthodoxy: A Catholic Critique”. *Theological Studies* 68 (2007): 368-393. <https://doi.org/10.1177/004056390706800207>.
- Dreher, Rod. *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation*. Penguin, 2018.
- Edward, Oakes. “The Paradox of Nature and Grace: On John Milbank’s *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate Concerning the Supernatural*”. *Nova et Vetera* 4/3 (2006): 667–696.
- Ge, Yonghua. *The Many and the One*. Lexington, 2021.
- Gillespie, Michael. *Nihilism Before Nietzsche*. University of Chicago, 1995.
- Grumett, David. “Radical Orthodoxy”. *The Expository Times* 122/6 (2011): 261-270.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0014524610394523>.
- Hadden, Jeffrey. “Religious Broadcasting and the Mobilization of the New Christian Right”. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 26/1 (1987) 1-24.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/1385838>.

- Hennandii, Khrystokin, and Vasyl Lozovytskyi. "Reform of Orthodoxy: Current Challenges and Tasks". *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* 43/8 (2023) 13-31. <https://doi.org/10.55221/2693-2148.2467>.
- Herman, Fritz-Gregor. "Metéchein, Metalámbenein and the Problem of Participation in Plato's Ontology". *Philosophical Inquiry* 25 3/4 (2003): 19-56. <https://doi.org/10.5840/philiquiry2003253/437>.
- Malloy, Christopher. "Participation and Theology: A Response to Schindler's 'What's The Difference?'". *The Saint Anselm Journal* 3/1 (2005) 38-61.
- Michael, Hanby. "Desire: Augustine beyond Western subjectivity". In *Radical Orthodoxy: a new theology*, edited by John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward, 109-126. Routledge, 1999.
- Milbank, John and Andrian Pabst. *The Politics of Virtue: Post-liberalism and the human future*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2016.
- Milbank, John and Catherine Pickstock. *Truth in Aquinas*. Routledge, 2001.
- Milbank, John, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward. "Introduction, Suspending the Material: the turn of Radical Orthodoxy". In *Radical Orthodoxy: a new theology*, edited by John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward, 1-20. Routledge, 1999.
- Milbank, John. *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate Concerning the Supernatural*. Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2005.
- Milbank, John. *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon*. Routledge, 2003.
- Milbank, John. *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*. Blackwell, 1990.
- Milbank, John. "The Programme of Radical Orthodoxy". In *Radical Orthodoxy? – A Catholic Enquiry*, edited by Laurence Hemming, 33-45. Ashgate, 2000.
- Ola, Sigurdson. "Radical Orthodoxy". In *Key Theological Thinkers*, edited by Staale Kristiansen, 581-592. Routledge, 2016.
- Pagels, Elaine. *Why Religion: a personal story*. HarperCollins, 2018.
- Papastathis, Konstantinos, and Anastasia Litina. "Orthodoxy as exclusivist identity in the Greek Radical Right: Discourse analysis and electoral behavior". In *Illiberal politics and religion in Europe and beyond: Concepts, actors, and identity narratives*, Vol. 19, edited by Anja Hennig and Mirjam Weiberg-Salzmänn, 291-316. Campus Verlag GmbH, 2021.
- Pickstock, Catherine. "Imitating God: The Truth of things According to Thomas Aquinas". *New Blackfriars* 81/953-954 (2000): 312. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43250468>.
- Pickstock, Catherine. "Reply to David Ford and Guy Collins". *Scottish Journal of Theology* 54/3 (2001): 405 – 422. doi:10.1017/S003693060005167X.
- Pickstock, Catherine. *After Writing: On the Liturgic Consummation of Philosophy*. Wiley-Blackwell, 1998.
- Pinckaers, Servais. *The Sources of Christian Ethics*. Catholic University of America, 1995.
- Rose, Matthew. *A world after liberalism: five thinkers who inspired the radical right*. Yale, 2021.

- Samet, Moshe. "The Beginnings of Orthodoxy". *Modern Judaism* 8/3 (1988): 249-269. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1396068>.
- Scherer, Matthew. "Landmarks In The Critical Study Of Secularism". *Cultural Anthropology* 26/4 (2011): 621-632. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1360.2011.01115.x>.
- Schindler, David. "Perfect Difference: Gender and the Analogy of Being". *Communio: International Catholic Review* 43/2 (2016): 194-231.
- Schindler, David. "What's the Difference? On the Metaphysics of Participation in a Christian Context". *The Saint Anselm Journal* 3/1 (2005): 1-27.
- Shakespeare, Steven. "The New Romantics A Critique of Radical Orthodoxy". *Theology* 103/813 (2000): 163-177. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040571X0010300302>.
- Simon Oliver, "Henri de Lubac and Radical Orthodoxy". In *TT Clark companion to Henri de Lubac*, ed. Jordan Hillebert, 393-418. Bloomsbury, 2017.
- Simon Oliver, "Radical Orthodoxy". In *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy of Religion*, edited by Stewart Geotz and Charles Taliaferro, 1-4. John Wiley, 2021.
- Singer, David. "The New Orthodox Theology". *Modern Judaism* 9/1 (1989): 35-54. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1396432>.
- Składanowski, Marcin. and Lukasz Borzecki. "Radical Russianness: The Religious and Historiosophic Context of Aleksandr Dugin's Anti-Occidentalism". *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 14/2 (2020): 65-93. <https://doi.org/10.14321/jstudradi.14.2.0065>.
- Sureau, Denis. *Una Nueva Teología Política*. Nuevo Inicio, 2010.
- Sweeney, Leo. "Participation in Plato's Dialogues: Phaedo, Parmenides, Sophist and Timeus". *The Society for Greek Philosophy Newsletter* 123 (1983): 1-2. <https://orb.binghamton.edu/sagp/123>.
- Thomas Aquinas. *An Exposition of the Hebdomads of Boethius*. Catholic University of America, 2001.
- Trotter, Jack. "Reviewed Work: *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* by Cathrine Pickstock". *Christianity and Literature* 47/4 (1998): 489-493. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44314143>
- Ward, Graham. *Barth, Derrida, and the Language of Theology*, Cambridge, 1995.
- Ward, Graham. *Theology and Contemporary Critical Theory*. Springer, 1996.
- Ward, Graham. *The Politics of Discipleship: Becoming Postmaterial Citizens*. Baker Academic, 2009.
- Ward, Graham. *The Cities of God*. Routledge, 2000.
- Ward, Graham. *Cultural Transformation and Religious Practice*. Cambridge, 2005.
- Westphal, Merold. "Participation and Kenosis: A List for Schindler". *The Saint Anselm Journal* 3/1 (2005) 28-37.
- Williams, David. "Review of *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy*, by C. Pickstock". *Religion & Literature* 31/2 (1999): 111-116. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40059775>.

Joseph Cyril Bassey

“Inner Change”. <https://www.innerchange.org/about/>, consulted 15 October 2024.

“William T. Cavanaugh”.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_T._Cavanaugh, consulted 12 September 2024.