The Rhetoric and Reception of John Milbank’s Radical Orthodoxy: Privileging Prejudice in Theology?

Abstract: This paper uses Douglas Pratt’s typology of religious extremism and fundamentalism to argue that John Milbank’s Radical Orthodoxy employs styles of rhetoric and representation of the religious Other that have clear affinities with such ideologies. While clearly demarcating Milbank’s theology from what is normally termed fundamentalism or extremism, the paper shows that nevertheless similar rhetoric and judgements are employed that suggests that his theology is at best unhelpful, and at worst potentially dangerous. Focusing upon Milbank’s early work, the paper suggests that such rhetoric can be found through much of his writings, but notes that a different approach can be detected in his most recent writings. Suggestions for more productive modes of theological encounters with the religious Other are advanced, which suggest how the ideology of Radical Orthodoxy may be in potential sympathy with such ideas.

Keywords: John Milbank, Radical Orthodoxy, extremism, Theology of Religions, Douglas Pratt, religious Other, fundamentalism.

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Introduction

Contemporary Christian theological thinking is divided into a great diversity of strands, some divergent, others which criss-cross and overlap. In academic theology at least, we have reached a point where categorizations of many theological types as liberal or conservative, reactionary or progressive, are often unhelpful or misleading. This is especially true of a particular theological style labelled Radical Orthodoxy, and associated especially with the name John Milbank.1 It will not be my aim to spend much time in definition, this is work done elsewhere, rather, I will discuss why Milbank’s work excites such deep animosity and reactions from scholars.2 While I do not wish to make any specific claims as to the nature of Milbank’s project, nor his theology as such, I will argue that, at least as far as the rhetoric goes, Radical Orthodoxy as expounded by Milbank can be shown to embody many qualities associated with “fundamentalist” or “extremist” thought, employing a typology advanced by the distinguished scholar of religion Professor Douglas Pratt. As I will argue, Milbank is certainly not a “fundamentalist” in the way this term is normally employed, indeed there are aspects of his thought which

1 I address this issue in “Is John”, where I argue that aspects of Milbank’s thought are what may be seen as typically liberal, although his work is also seen as the “scourge” of liberalism.
2 This issue is picked up by a number of commentators, and is perhaps exemplified by the fact that, besides individual chapters and articles, three whole volumes have been written in response to, mainly against it may be said, Radical Orthodoxy, and most particularly Milbank’s representation of it, see Isherwood and Zlomislic, The Poverty of the Postmodern, and Hankey and Hedley, Deconstructing Radical. The author notes that John Milbank feels the reception does not present his belief that Christianity has and can learn from other religions as a ‘fulfilment’ of them, although he acknowledges that this is not always represented by his earlier writings although it is clearer in his most recent work which is addressed below (personal email correspondence with author).
may be termed “liberal” (notwithstanding the problematic of such terms as noted). Rather, I wish to suggest, more modestly, that the language Milbank uses, especially in relation to religious Others, has resonances with “fundamentalist” and “extremist” ideologies which may arguably contribute to discourses which can be seen to privilege prejudice in theology; and this may, at least in part, contribute to the strong reactions against his work. As such, my focus will be as much on the reaction and interpretation of Milbank’s work as on what Milbank himself says, although highlighting the passages in Milbank which give rise to the impression of privileging prejudice. Nevertheless, I will also address the question of what foundations exist in Milbank’s work for the kind of rhetoric and appearance of prejudice that appear that will address his broader corpus and the wider context of Christian theology, however, given the limitations of space this cannot attempt to assess Milbank’s project nor Radical Orthodoxy as a whole in depth. Notably, given the limitations of space, I will focus particularly on Milbank’s earlier writings, however, I will make references to some later texts to show that something of the tenor remains while I will also note that an arguably less abrasive style appears in his most recent work, but one that is still not free of the kind of rhetoric analysed herein; nevertheless, I am not attempting a systematic account of all of Milbank’s work as the length of the paper simply does not permit it. This focus is also taken partly because a lot of the reaction to, and against, Radical Orthodoxy comes from Milbank’s earlier writings and so this is often what people are responding to, and mean by, Radical Orthodoxy. Towards the end of the paper, I will also sketch some pointers towards theological styles that avoid what may be seen as the problematic discourse found in Milbank, but noting that aspects of Milbank’s own work, especially in his later writings but also as found throughout Radical Orthodoxy, may contribute to more positive engagement with religious Others.

Defining Radical Orthodoxy

I will not attempt an analysis of Radical Orthodoxy here, and will instead reply on my own previously published scholarly analysis of its nature. I will therefore briefly outline a number of key factors that have been said to represent John Milbank’s form of Radical Orthodoxy, for it should be noted that despite being a new system with a relatively small number of key members, such as Milbank, Graham Ward, Catherine Pickstock, and Gerard Loughlin, it takes a different formulation under the pen of each author. Indeed, while what I am outlining here may be said to represent a fairly classical form of Radical Orthodoxy based in the ideas of the man described as its founding father, Milbank, others have taken it in other ways. Notably, perhaps because of the problems it entails, Ward has tried to distance himself from the movement. For this reason, hereafter, when I say Radical Orthodoxy I will be referring to Milbank’s form of that movement, or what has been termed Milbankianism. A set of seven factors has been set out as defining of Milbankianism, which I will use as indicative, and can be listed (and briefly elucidated) as follows:

1. **Chalcedonian Orthodoxy and tradition**: Radical Orthodoxy sees itself as standing within the line of “orthodox” Christian theology as established at the early ecumenical councils, as well as looking back to the major figures of (Western) Christian thought, especially Aquinas and Augustine, as foundational.

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3 The primary text for this study is Milbank, “The End”, as his only sustained commentary on the Theology of Religions, but also looking at the rhetoric in Milbank, *Theology*, and his work in the *Radical Orthodoxy* text as representative of his early work. Alongside this a range of other texts, generally later, where he discusses – mainly brief mentions – of the religious Other are also used as appropriate. Most important amongst these later works is Milbank, “The Integrity”, a very recent piece (consulted in draft form as still in press) which we will note seems to indicate a change in Milbank’s thinking and approach on a variety of perspectives. My thanks go to John Milbank for allowing me access to it, and for one of the anonymous reviewers for alerting me to its existence.

4 Some of the main secondary literature on Radical Orthodoxy found helpful here include various papers in Hankey and Hedges, *Deconstructing Radical*, Hedges, “Is John”, and Hyman, *The Predicament*.

5 It has been suggested that ignoring Ward means that Radical Orthodoxy is misrepresented (Wisse, “Book Review”, 16-17), however, as others have suggested Ward has increasingly removed himself from the movement, while his thought tends to be different from much of what is often taken to be “typical” of Radical Orthodoxy, which is often based on the work of Milbank, and to a lesser extent Catherine Pickstock (Hedges, “Is John”, 796).

2. **Reliance upon “pure” Christian resources**: in line with other broadly post-liberal theologies it believes Christian theology is an internal dialogue upon what the tradition already maintains and has passed on, which for Radical Orthodoxy is not adulterated with “external” influences.

3. **Overcoming the genealogy of modernity and secularism**: it argues that almost all forms of modern Western thought develop as aberrations, or heresies, from Christian thought, and so can be “corrected” by “pure” Christian theology. Therefore, understood correctly, they form no legitimate assault upon Christian thought.

4. **Not being a movement but a disposition**: it sees itself as a way of doing theology, rather than a group, although there clearly are thinkers and texts which form something of a “movement”.

5. **Return to the Via Negativa and a Neo-platonic Augustinianism**: from within the tradition, these are areas of Christian theology which are seen as particularly congenial by Radical Orthodoxy.

6. **Non-violent ontology**: it argues that all other worldviews contest at the level of competing ideologies, whereas, being based in “truth” and revelation, Christianity does not compete like other systems of thought but transcends them, and so only it can reconcile differences in true non-violence.

7. **Rethinking tradition in contemporary form**: while it sees itself as based in Chalcedon orthodoxy, it argues that doctrine must be expressed anew for each generation and so it sees it permissible to give new interpretations, and even very different expression to older ideas. Hence it is “radical” in its orthodoxy.

For those familiar with Radical Orthodoxy, these points need little further extrapolation, and where necessary we will expand upon them in what follows. However, for those unfamiliar with it, it may be useful to summarize by saying that it is a theology that attempts to locate a strong space for an orthodox Christian theology in the contemporary late modern / post-modern world, returning to classical and medieval writers but engaging problems in new ways and not being bound by the forms of what has gone before.

### The Religious Other and the Theology of Religions in Milbank

Before outlining Pratt’s typology and placing Milbank in relation to it, it would be useful to look at Milbank’s work, and the response it has elicited within writings on the Theology of Religions. It has been observed that Milbank is normally silent, even worryingly so, on the religious Other. However, he has in at least one place systematically sought to relate Christianity to the religious Other, which was part of Gavin D’Costa’s edited collection, *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, in response to John Hick and Paul Knitter’s *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*. In relation to this it should be observed that Milbank’s response can best be understood as part of what is now generally termed the particularist model within the Theology of Religions; it has been convincingly argued that the classical typology for Christian approaches to other religions, exclusivisms-inclusivisms-pluralisms, can not only can still be deployed, but that it can be extended to include a new paradigm, that of particularities, which is typified by those within...
the post-liberal spectrum of theological thought. Limits of space mean that we cannot enter into a detailed account of what particularities involve, or how Milbank fits into this paradigm, however, it has been argued that his work fits within the more “exclusivist” end of this model, with his insistence that Christians can learn nothing from other religions but should instead approach them as objects for conversion. We will, nevertheless, pick up on some specific ways in which of Milbank’s engagement with the religious Other in this paper has been portrayed. It may also be noted that his most recent work no longer seems to fit the particularist paradigm, a point to be addressed in due course.

In “The End of Dialogue”, it is argued that Milbank does not seem to show any serious engagement with the tradition he engages, in this case Hinduism, showing a rather stereotyped portrayal of that tradition, employing sectarian sources to mask any possible connection with the Christian tradition. Perhaps, in fairness to Milbank, it may be suggested that he is not a scholar of Religious Studies and so his limited and partial understanding of Hinduism is understandable. However, we may note other instances where the religious Other is displayed disparagingly not only in his own work but in others associated with Radical Orthodoxy: it has been noted that a “most uncharitable” (even distorted) reading of Indian religion traditions has been observed in the work of Pickstock, perhaps the figure closest to Milbank’s own version of Radical Orthodoxy within the movement; while, in Milbanks’s later work, he links traditions like Buddhism with what he sees as failed systems, citing as his only authority Slavoj Žižek, a writer who has been convincingly argued to embody a very negative attitude to the religious Other, even being dubbed a “Colonial Master” for his ideology. His most recent work displays the same disregard for scholarship of religions, treating Daoism in a stereotyped way that owes more to colonial misperceptions than contemporary scholarship, while he also seeks to overturn contemporary scholarship on Indigenous Religions (which claims that contrary to colonial and missionary scholarship that they do not have a “high god” as had previously been claimed) by reference to theologians who lack any training in the study of these traditions.

10 See Hedges, Controversies, 17-30. While for some time it seemed that Race’s typology was on the wane, it has never disappeared from discussions within the Theology of Religions, and indeed, now seems firmly established as a useful part of the discussion. On the one hand critics, like Costa, have once again returned to employing it (see Christianity, 9-33), while it is used widely across a wide range of literature, and perhaps its main opposition through advocates of Comparative Theology has seen a new attitude, with significant names in Comparative Theology like Theology Kristin Bollinger (“Relating Theology”) and John Thatching (discussed online with the author) cogently arguing that the two are compatible and make use of it, while Hedges (Controversies, 53-4) and Perry Schmidt (Transformation, 92-6, 101-2) have both argued that Comparative Theology requires an initial Theology of Religions typology style judgement. It has been suggested that there are now two main usages in the typology’s deployment today, one following Schmidt-Leukel that the threefold terms exclusivism-inclusivism-pluralism amount to all Christian/ religious options as a matter of logical necessity (“Exclusivism, Inclusivism”), the latter following Hedges that a rough heuristic deployment is preferable which allows the addition of the fourth paradigm of “particularities” (forthcoming). For an extended discussion on the particularist spectrum of thought, see Hedges, Controversies, 146-96.

11 Milbank, “The End”, 190, where he suggests we should replace “dialogue” with “mutual suspicion”, and advocates “continuing the work of conversion”. For a discussion on Milbank as a representative of particularities, see Hedges, “Radical Orthodoxy”, 129-30.

12 See Hedges, “Radical Orthodoxy”, see Milbank, “The End”.


14 Milbank, “Paul against”, 27.


16 On the issue of Daoism, Milbank portrays it as a tradition without political interests and essentially politically quietest and based on a peasant economy (“The Legitimacy”, 96, 111), which plays into typical Western representations of it as a counterpart to Confucianism in this regard and neglecting the actual historical manifestation of the tradition. On this particular interpretation Russell Kirkaldy offers an excellent representation of the reasons for the misrepresentation and overturns the image through historical scholarship (Taoism: on the Western colonial misinterpretation, see 1:19; on its political engagement, see 116-26, 14-71). On Indigenous Religions, disputing the consensus of contemporary scholarship (although acknowledging that the matter is not clear cut as in relation to Australian Aborigines for instance, one tradition Milbank cites, both Muslim and Christian followers of Aboriginal traditions will insist that their traditions contain intimations of the monotheism demanded by their other tradition – my thanks go to my colleague Christina Welch for a discussion on this), rather than citing any specialist scholarship Milbank relies rather upon theologians with no specialist training, one being David Bentley Hart a specialist in Orthodox traditions, another being Winifred Corduan in a book published not by an academic press but by a partisan Christian publisher whose website tells us that it seeks to promote “Biblical truth without apology” and holds to “the infallibility of scripture” (see About B&H Academic, http://www.bhacademic.com/about.asp, last accessed 12 August 2014). For a fair and general assessment I would direct readers to Cox, The Invention.
In focusing upon the rhetoric, it has been noted that Milbank's work on the religious Other has a strong focus on alterity: this focus on alterity, of absolute difference, is a particular strand of particularist thinking. For those seeking to place Milbank in relation to other theological styles, this emphasis may be seen to relate to certain aspects of internal dynamics within post-liberal, as well as Neo-Orthodox, theologies: the world is best understood from within the dynamics of one's own tradition. As such, the religious Other can, as Karl Barth suggested many years ago, be understood a priori, without knowledge or reflection of the other. One particular strand of thought that Milbank develops, which could be seen as tending towards this, is the way the Trinity is argued to distinguish Christianity from other religious traditions. In line with particularist thought in general, Milbank foregrounds the Trinity, and argues that the Christian conception is not only different, but also superior to that of other traditions. Of course, this raises problems. One critique that particularist style thinkers often raise against the pluralist tradition is that it assumes the bird's eye view, that it can, from above, understand all religious traditions. Leaving aside the way this caricatures sophisticated expositions of pluralisms, it can been argued that Milbank engages in the same ploy. He employs a monolithic metanarrative about true and false religion. Indeed, Radical Orthodoxy has been criticized for its simplistic employment of dichotomies, of dividing the world between those who expound true religion, and those who expound false religion. In this case, it has been asked, where does Milbank gain his knowledge that the Christian Trinity is the best, or utterly different from all other systems? We can see here that there appears to be a certain assumption made from within the dynamics of the Christian tradition that allows it to place the religious Other from within its own resources without regard to what that Other may say of themselves nor the criteria by which such judgements are made. We can see therefore why assumptions can be made that Milbank's thought can feed into a discourse on the Other that can privilege prejudice. Certainly, as regards the reception of Milbank's work he has been seen to represent a theological style which is not open to the religious Other. It may, of course, be argued that all religions, inherently, understand other traditions from within their own terms (I shall address this point further below when I address Milbank's ideology and rhetoric within the context of historical and contemporary Christian thought), nevertheless, my claim here is that a particular form of discourse is found in Milbank's work which not only describes the other from within one's own system but does so in derogatory ways, which aligns it with the forms of extremism outlined in Pratt's typology.

Another aspect of the critique of the particularist model that can usefully be considered here, is the way that it is seen to refuse discourse with the Other as a way to bypass (potential) criticism. Once the principle of alterity is in place (that the religious Other is utterly different), there can be no real communication, which means in turn that no legitimate criticism, let alone insights, can arise from them. In Milbank's case he argues that if religions are not one “genus” then the notion of meaningful dialogue

17 Hedges, Controversies, 146.
18 Certainly, it has been suggested that Milbank's thought has affinities with both these schools of thought, see e.g. Crockett, “Introduction”, 3, Hedges, “Radical Orthodoxy”, Hyman, The Predicament.
19 This famous quote, often seen as Barth's last comment on the religious Other, is cited in Niles, “Karl Barth”, 10.
20 Milbank, “The End”, 188ff.
23 For instance, Milbank makes claims of the kind that we need “a goodness which is ontologically plenitudinous and so social in character, as the Christian doctrine of the Trinity especially well articulates” (“The Legitimacy”, 94) but does not make the case as to why we need this particular version, and even less why the Christian Trinity is the (as it seems) best articulation of this. It is, as it were, asserted and in as far as any argument can be discerned it appears essentially circular: the Christian notion is ‘x’, ‘x’ is the best concept, therefore the Christian concept is the best.
24 Hedges, “Radical Orthodoxy”. As will be discussed later in the paper, in some ways Milbank's thought in this area is not atypical of Christianity as a broad tradition in historical context, nevertheless, in terms of contemporary theological movements, see for instance Ustorf “The Cultural”, it may be suggested that Milbank's work is somewhat reactionary in its representation of religious Others. We consider this further later in the paper, while also noting ways in which Milbank's work may have more positive resonances with aspects of contemporary theologies which have sought to engage more dialogically with religious Others.
can be called into question. It therefore appears that the Other is utterly refused and neglected: s/he can have no role to play in the scheme of Milbank’s Radical Orthodoxy, except as a lesser to be dismissed. Certainly, while some of his work including his most recent strikes, as noted, a more reconciliatory attitude towards the religious (and in places theologically liberal and secular) Other, Milbank admits no new insights may arise from them or they at best embody partial representations of truths fully expressed within Christianity. Indeed, while I would suggest that Milbank’s more recent work can be seen to move beyond a particularist stance it does not seem to place religious Others on a much higher footing in his rhetoric. We will examine how the general tenor found in Milbank’s work can be read in relation to Pratt’s typology which we will now outline.

**Douglas Pratt’s Typology of Religious Extremism**

Pratt has sought to define forms of religiosity that are associated with what may, broadly, be termed fundamentalism and extremism, resulting, in some cases, in acts of religiously motivated, or legitimated, violence and terrorism. This work is directly linked into his research networks in these areas. Now, I am not claiming that Milbank, or other exponents of Radical Orthodoxy, are, or are likely to become, purveyors of religiously legitimated violence; however, I believe that we can see legitimate links between the ideology of Radical Orthodoxy and other groups associated with extremism. This, I will suggest, allows us to see why there have been such strong responses to Milbank’s Radical Orthodoxy, because, in some ways at least the rhetoric he uses can be seen as comparable to fundamentalist or extremist ideologies.

Pratt’s work in this area has been developed over a number of years, and has seen various expressions in publications and papers. For the purposes of this paper, I will employ his most recent exposition of this idea, while employing insights that can be gained from earlier versions of it. Fundamentalism or extremism, Pratt suggests, may make us think of the margins, however, it also has connotations or strands that can make us consider it focused upon central concepts, certainly this is seen in relation to some traditions. Indeed, by seeking to define a fairly “conservative” set of core ideas, fundamentalisms are not simply marginal thought forms, and this centrality within the tradition, I would suggest, is where Radical Orthodoxy wishes to position itself. As noted above, I will address some aspects of this further below, because Milbank’s stance towards religious Others may not be seen as atypical in relation to the history of Christian thought as a whole where vituperation of various Others has been common practice.

Pratt’s typology makes use of:

“… of some twenty factors into a progression of ten sets – or ‘features’ – of paired factors. These features are further subgrouped into three ‘phases’ so as to yield a paradigm typology involving a sequence of passive, assertive, and impositional forms of fundamentalism.”

The sequence, he argues, makes his typology more nuanced than other definitions of fundamentalism. He presents his sequence of three phases in a table which we can see in Table 1.

Pratt would agree with me that Radical Orthodoxy is not out of place in relation to the typology, as he claims that most forms of “reactionary conservatism across both Christianity and Islam” are characterized by the first phase, although it tends to be only sectarian groups, such as “Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Moonies, the Exclusive Brethren [at least traditionally]” who are found within the second phase; Pratt himself regards the assertive phase as the place where he would locate Radical Orthodoxy. This coincides with what we said about the way fundamentalisms are not marginal, but seek to occupy what they, at least, see as central territory within a tradition.

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29 Pratt, “Religion and Terrorism”, 642.
30 Pratt, “Religion and Terrorism”, 643.
31 Personal email correspondence with author, dated 1st April 2011.
An important change exists, for Pratt, between each phase. In the passive phase, groups tend to be inward looking and focused upon their members. In the assertive phase they tend to see their message as applicable beyond their group to the wider society. However, the most drastic move, and the one Pratt sees as worrying and dangerous, is the move to Impositional Fundamentalism, where the group wishes to impose its ideas upon the wider society, and will seek what may be termed extreme means to do this.

At this stage, it will be useful to suggest in what ways Radical Orthodoxy employs similar discourse strategies to the kind of groups Pratt is discussing, including, I would suggest, aspects of what he terms the Impositional phase. In so doing I will also further elucidate Pratt’s typology.

However, before doing so, it would be useful to discuss terminology. Pratt employs “fundamentalism” in a broad sense, distanced from its origins, as a way to classify a variety of extreme points of view within religious groups. Moreover, Pratt often seems to employ “fundamentalist” and “extremist” as essentially interchangeable terms, or to see “extremism” as simply the exhibiting of the most extreme “fundamentalist” tendencies. However, in what follows I will employ a somewhat narrower sense of “fundamentalism”, closer to its origins, where it implies an ideology that takes certain texts and beliefs as unchallengeable norms, and “extremism” as applying to ideologies which exhibit a more expressly negative or hostile attitude to the Other.

**Table 1**

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<th>Phase 1: Passive Fundamentalism</th>
<th>Features</th>
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<td>Principal Presuppositions</td>
<td>Authority Derivation</td>
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<th>Phase II: Assertive Fundamentalism</th>
<th>Features</th>
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<td>Epistemological Construction</td>
<td>Identity Structure</td>
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<th>Phase III: Impositional Fundamentalism</th>
<th>Features</th>
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<td>Value Application</td>
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33 Elsewhere, Pratt advances a somewhat similar distinction, suggesting that while a problematic term (especially apart from its original meaning in a Christian context) it is one we are stuck with, and suggests fundamentalism may be taken as a broad term with extremists being those who act out the more militant aspects of the fundamentalist ideology (see Pratt, “Religious Fundamentalism”, 195-7 and 212, and Pratt, “Exclusivism”, especially p. 293). On the origins and uses of “fundamentalism”, Christopher van der Krogt gives the following definition: “fundamentalists, reformulate and reassert what they understand to be the original, authentic version of their religions in opposition to modern challenges—including traditionalist, liberal, and secularist interpretations of the meaning or political role of religion” (“The Rise”, 12, see also Emerson and Hartman, “The Rise”). Here, the fundamentalist is seen as anyone who seeks to reassert and reformulate their tradition against broadly modernist/secular trends, and as such understands it as a type of modern religious expression. I would suggest, as is noted further on in the paper, that in this broad sense Milbank could be seen as a “fundamentalist” as he is reworking the Christian tradition against liberal and secular trends, however, I think this too broad and suggest that it tends to involve a particular kind of reworking that relies upon such tropes as a literalist reading of scriptures, and other aspects picked up in Martin Marty and Scott Appleby’s Fundamentalism Project (1988-1993) which includes, for them 9 features: Reactivity to the marginalization of religion; Selectivity; Moral dualism; Absolutism and inerrancy; Millenialism and messianism; Elect membership; Sharp boundaries; Authoritarian organization; Behavioural requirements (Almond et. al., *Fundamentalisms Comprehended*, 405-16). Pratt has his own set of markers which we will discuss below. Notably, though, as Krogt and others note a fundamentalist ideology does not lead automatically to extremism if we understand this as violent militancy (“The Rise”, 5-9, 16-8). A further term worth noting is the French intégrisme, which can be seen as similar to fundamentalism noting primarily Roman Catholic responses to theological modernism, however, it carries a very different connotation in terms of its etymology which “is the precise opposite of fundamentalism, for it implies a concern to maintain the integrity or wholeness of Catholic tradition including its connection to the state, whereas fundamentalism suggests merely a defense of essential doctrines” (“The Rise”, 5). In this sense, if we inhabited a primarily French speaking world we would be speaking of Radical Orthodoxy as type of intégrisme which I would suggest would fit it better than fundamentalism, with its own etymological and historical connotations, does. Certainly, Milbank has spoken favourably of Ratzinger’s understanding of the relationship of religion and society which may suggest that he finds an accord with Catholic reactions against liberal, modernist, and secular trends (“The Integrity”).
Radical Orthodoxy and the Ideology of Religious Extremism

As noted, I am not seeking to argue that John Milbank, nor any involved with Radical Orthodoxy, are likely to become violent militants. Nevertheless, it is useful to see a marked likeness to the fundamentalist/extremist groups that Pratt identifies in his typology. I would also note that we can clearly distinguish Milbank from those typically termed, or self-proclaiming as, “fundamentalists” within the Christian tradition. The openness to exploring issues of sexuality within Radical Orthodoxy, and Milbank’s work on a poetic Christology, which may be read as in some ways a form of “liberal” theology, clearly set it apart. I will also below draw some further distinctions, however, it is the nature of the rhetoric and discourse – and in part the reaction that this elicits which is our concern – rather than the comparison of specific points of doctrine or teaching. The reasons and usefulness of using this typology in relation to Milbank’s Radical Orthodoxy should therefore become clearer as we proceed.

Within each phase, Pratt subdivides the thought structure of the groups he is looking at into various groups. This includes the “principal presuppositions,” which he sees as having two factors: “perspectival absolutism and immediate inerrancy.” In this way, a group suggests that because it has direct access to an inerrant source that its perspective is unchallengeable. While Pratt sees this as embodied in text, Radical Orthodoxy’s thinkers are too sophisticated to simply see the Bible as an inerrant text, nevertheless, by invoking a pure Christian tradition that alone can interpret the world, I would suggest that Radical Orthodoxy shares in the discourse patterns of the fundamentalist groups that Pratt discusses – we will discuss this shortly. Herein, we see the one essential difference between Milbank and fundamentalists, that he does not invoke a single text as the truth, nevertheless, as we will see, he is still led to certain aspects of what we may call, in Pratt’s terms, extremist ideology. For instance, in the second and third aspects of the passive phase, Pratt suggests that by seeing their source as unambiguous they are led into a deep indwelling within their own ideology. While Milbank, and others, employ thinkers who are far from unambiguous, such as Aquinas, they nevertheless employ their own readings of these figures in ways that suggest other readings are illegitimate. At this stage, it may seem that the connections are somewhat tenuous, however, further up the stages of the typology we will see a much clearer resonance between Radical Orthodoxy and the stages of the typology. These early links merely tell us that Milbank and others are sophisticated and subtle, we may even suggest needlessly obtuse, thinkers and writers, rather than simple ideologues. Certainly, Pratt himself suggests it is the next phase where we will most likely be able to place Radical Orthodoxy in relation to his typology.

As suggested above, it has been argued that Milbank portrays the whole Christian tradition as a pure form of Christian discourse, for instance, suggesting that theology comes “directly out of the Biblical tradition, without any recourse to external supplementation”, or that it should be “thinking out of the resources of revelation alone”. Certainly elsewhere Milbank clearly relies on other schools of thought,

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34 See Hedges, “Is John”, 799 and 809-10. As an Anglican theologian Milbank’s espousal of homosexuality would certainly set him in opposition to many of those who would define themselves as traditionalists within that ecclesial grouping, with it being arguable that the issue of sexuality has become the primary marker between “liberal” and “traditionalist/conservative” groups within the worldwide Communion (though within the UK the recent debates over women bishops has also been an almost equally strong marker of contention). There are numerous sources on this, but for a very brief overview see Clatworthy (“Introduction”).

35 See e.g. Milbank, Theology, 389, Milbank, The Word, 36, and for commentary on this see Hedges, “Is John”, 797, and Hyman, The Predicament, 82.

36 See Janz, “Radical Orthodoxy”.

37 Personal email correspondence with author.

38 Milbank, Theology, 389, and, Milbank, The Word, 36. Things are more complicated now considering Milbank’s most recent work (“The Integrity”), a matter which is addressed in the next note.
especially Marxism and he uses postmodern thought as a strong influence.\textsuperscript{39} Nevertheless, it is certainly the former type of statement which has been picked up by critics in the way Milbank is read, and indeed, it cannot be suggested that this is simply an outside and misrepresentative reading as even Ward has seen the need to argue that such an idea is misguided.\textsuperscript{40} Indeed, while I am unaware of Milbank employing this approach, his reliance on Augustine and Aquinas suggest that it would not be unreasonable to understand his use of non-Christian resources as a process of “baptism” whereby any merit in them becomes a valid part of the Christian tradition itself.\textsuperscript{41} Certainly, as we have seen above, Milbank’s major engagement with the Theology of Religions seems to legitimate a discourse which allows Christianity to ignore the Other as alien, although his most recent work opens up the possibility of all religions sharing a common source, and seeing a wider range of resources forming the basis for Christianity. It is important to note here, however, that Milbank’s earlier work violates the nature of the Christian tradition, which is inherently an inter-religious tradition. Early in the twentieth century Ernst Troeltsch argued that Christianity was a mix of Judaic, Pagan and Greco-Roman traditions, and, if anything, the basis of such an argument, i.e. that Christian origins are inherently bound up with the cultural times in which it grew, have strengthened. Moreover, Christianity has subsequently become intermixed with an increasing number of other religious, cultural and philosophical streams and traditions.\textsuperscript{42} As such, even to suggest as a rhetorical move that there could be a “pure” Christian discourse would seem to add legitimacy to any interpretation of Milbank as upholding an “extreme” position within theology, and helps us to understand, at least in part, the reception of Radical Orthodoxy by its critics.

Pratt sees the assertive phase as hardening the position held in the previous phase: “The fundamentalist’s own perspective on knowledge is regarded as necessarily the case.”\textsuperscript{43} This is something we see expressed in Radical Orthodoxy’s writings, where the internal logic of the chosen tradition becomes a self-authenticating system. Again, the perspective differs from the more simple ideologues Pratt describes, because he suggests that this self evident truth is based on facts, whereas for Radical Orthodoxy it is interpretation. Or, more precisely, the persuasive interpretation of authoritative figures that provides the truth – by positing himself as the legitimate interpreter of Christian truth, who alone has revealed the previous false turn in theology, we may even suggest that Milbank himself becomes the legitimating fact of Radical Orthodoxy.\textsuperscript{44}

The next set of paired factors in the typology looks to identity, the assertion of group membership. If, as has been argued, Radical Orthodoxy divides the world into the black and white tones of true interpreters...
of Christianity against false interpreters, then there is a clear identification of who is within and without, even if the borders of Radical Orthodoxy are not tightly drawn in communitarian terms.\(^{45}\) However, our concern is not with whether Radical Orthodoxy forms a fundamentalist/extremist community, but with its expounding a theological position that justifies a rejection of the religious Other akin to fundamentalist and extremist groups. It is in these terms that we see a remarkable affinity with what is, arguably, the main ideological aspect of this phase of the typology. As Pratt expresses it:

> “It involves the holding together of an ideological exclusivism with an inclusivist polity: on the one hand, religious fundamentalism excludes, virtually automatically, anything that relative to it appears “liberal”; that admits of, for example, any limitation, provisionality, otherness, openness, or change. It excludes religious liberalism of any ilk. On the other hand, this same fundamentalism displays a propensity to include, in respect to considerations of the policies and praxis of social organisation, all others that fall within its frame of reference or worldview understanding.”\(^{46}\)

As commentators have noted, Radical Orthodoxy is almost written, in some senses, as a rejection of liberalism, and will admit of nothing that can be provisional in its theological outlook (notwithstanding the argument that it actually embodies many features it vilifies as the worst features of liberalism, but such ideological hybridity is not untypical of extreme groups, who often take on the forms of those they see themselves as opposing\(^ {47}\)). However, of particular interest, is the inversion Radical Orthodoxy performs, where rejection of the liberal/ secular tradition is mapped onto its claims that only theology, as understood and mediated by itself, provides the potential to be the true model for politics, economics, philosophy, and, indeed, for all areas of human life.\(^ {48}\) Like the extremisms and fundamentalisms Pratt defines, the very alterity it draws between its own ideology and others, becomes the legitimation for reversing that alterity in radical inclusivism that brings everything else under its own mastery. In tracing the genealogy of all liberal and secular thought back to theology, something we noted above was one of Radical Orthodoxy’s key themes, it claims a prior ownership over all spheres – an argument we will develop further below.\(^ {49}\)

Radical Orthodoxy does not make the full move of assertive fundamentalisms into what Pratt categorizes as “negative judgemental values” coupled with “a pietistic tyranny.”\(^ {50}\) However, our aim is not to show a perfect match with fundamentalist group activity, but to examine the extremist ideological components found within Radical Orthodoxy’s world view. Here, we do see links with the first part of this pairing, and I would suggest three examples. First, Milbank’s portrayal of the relationship of Christianity to religious Others is one he characterizes as mission and suspicion, which I suggest we interpret as an aggressive

\(^{45}\) Hedges, “Is John”, 806-7. Milbank’s drawing of boundaries around identity is far from unusual, indeed, contemporary identity theory has very clearly shown us that far from identities being primarily composed of what we may term “positive” markers of who we are, they are at least just as composed of “negative” markers of what we are not, see Coco and Hedges, “Belonging, Behaving”, 167-8.

\(^{46}\) Pratt, “Religion and Terrorism”, 446.

\(^{47}\) On the latter point see Heck, Common Ground, chapter 4, on the former see below. However, see note 44 above where Milbank suggests that he relies upon the “uncertain” and “vague”, nevertheless, I would not see this as undermining this point because part of many religious, and thereby including fundamentalist, groups is an appeal to faith and the unknown. In Christian theological terms in the modern period it is Søren Kierkegaard who has become the primary exemplar of such an ideological move through a specific interpretation of his Fear and Trembling which recounts the Akedah story of Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac, and it is notable that Milbank sees him as part of a chain of figures who create what he terms a “counter-modernity” (Theology, 4).

\(^{48}\) See Oliver, “Introducing Radical”. Following my point in notes 44 and 47 above about a potential “uncertainty” in Milbank’s most recent work, the centrality of his narrative on this point still prevails, with his conclusion telling us that: “it is Christianity which supremely upholds both religious liberty and freedom as such” (“The Legitimacy”, 120), emphasizing that, for him, all other worldviews and areas of life should be set within the context and management of Christian theology and hegemony.

\(^{49}\) Especially relevant is Milbank’s Magnum Opus, Theology. It may be emphasized here that some of Milbank’s later work softens this dichotomy so that other worldviews like Marxism can be seen as mediating useful political ideas (see note 39), while at places he notes that some other religions provide similar insights, primarily the other Abrahamic traditions (see note 55), but also including Buddhism (“The Integrity”, 97, 109). This, however, must be set within the context which we explore elsewhere within this paper where such discourses are elsewhere vituperated and/ or finally placed beneath Christian supremacy as the ultimate master narrative (see e.g. note 48).

\(^{50}\) Pratt, “Religion and Terrorism”, 446.
missionary (understood in traditional terms as seeking conversion) approach, certainly it is so in relation to contemporary ideas of mission as dialogue and aid, concepts which have become more prominent within missiological circles.\textsuperscript{51} (This approach typifies his earlier work, and we discuss below how his latest work appears to alter this). Second, he adopts a supercessionist attitude towards Judaism; while this typifies the Christian tradition, within the context of contemporary academic theology it is a very problematic stance, where the contribution of Christianity to the history of Anti-Semitism has long been recognized; indeed, many institutional churches have attempted to grapple with this question in ways that will allow them to move to a space that is not directly supercessionist, while the most progressive have rejected it altogether.\textsuperscript{52} Third, he seeks to characterize the religious Other in essentialist terms that suggests it is not capable of attaining the same ground as Christianity, for instance when he dismisses the Jewish and Islamic traditions, seemingly in their entirety, as focused upon what he terms “pure law”, which he says cannot compare to the notion of “infinite primary equity” found in “the Christian sense of analogical eminence”.\textsuperscript{53} Again he suggests that only Christianity can resolve the errors within the Hebrew tradition, and that the problems within later Christian thought arise when it became what he termed “internally ‘Jewish’ and ‘Islamic’... and hence monotheism itself started to crumble.”\textsuperscript{54} His language of terms like “infinite”, or again “radical response” that he sees in Judaism and Islam are very suggestive of stark absolutist and essentialist readings,\textsuperscript{55} or even his radical claim that monotheism itself fails in any but his own Christian reading. In these ways, I would argue, Milbank has positioned himself in direct judgement against the religious Other; as D’Costa points out, Milbank’s own claim is that he can determine “true” and “false” forms of Hinduism, and can properly assess Islam’s relationship to Greek philosophy.\textsuperscript{56} I would also suggest that, in intellectual terms, that some degree of pietistic tyranny exists where, by seeing certain thinkers within the true tradition and others beyond it, Radical Orthodoxy exerts an influence on writers who can be used as viable Christian resources, and writers who cannot be used in this way. As we may expect, anyone who expresses a positive attitude to the religious Other is generally not found within the bibliographies of Radical Orthodoxy’s texts, unless they are a subject of criticism.\textsuperscript{57}

We turn next to ask what, if any, of the elements characterized as Impositional Fundamentalism can be found in Radical Orthodoxy. Certainly, there is no militant attempt to force its ideas upon others; such is, apart from anything else, beyond its scope. Nevertheless, I would suggest we do find uncomfortable resonances between aspects of the ideology of such impositional worldviews and Milbank’s own words.

\textsuperscript{51} For an account of Milbank’s own views on the religious Other see Milbank, “The End”, and for a commentary on this see Hedges, “Radical Orthodoxy”. Another account on Radical Orthodoxy which concurs with this can be found in Smith, “Mission”, 51ff.
\textsuperscript{52} Milbank, \textit{Theology}, 387 & 393, see Brown, “Radical Orthodoxy”, 49-50. On the history of supercessionism and moves to go beyond it, see Miller, “Judaism”.
\textsuperscript{53} Milbank, “Paul against”, 50. This essentialism continues in his most recent writings where he quite happily speaks about “Eastern” religions as a whole, taking in Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism as a seemingly common Other (“The Integrity”, 94), and he makes sweeping claims about the entirety of various traditions (see ibid., 96, 110-1, although in fairness in this latter instance he does at least distinguish for instance Sunni Islam and Theravada Buddhism from Shi’ite and Mahayana Buddhism, but hardly taking consideration of the vast historical differences found within these various traditions). Moreover, as has been noted above he employs colonialist stereotypes, even arguing against contemporary scholarship for older missionary apologetic visions of some traditions (see note 16).
\textsuperscript{54} Milbank, “History”, 395.
\textsuperscript{55} Milbank, “Paul against”, 51.
\textsuperscript{56} D’Costa, \textit{Christianity}, 318. It should be noted, though, that elsewhere Milbank does concede some parity between the three Abrahamic traditions seeing them alone as the only traditions which can offer a safeguard against torture, see Milbank, “The Gift”, 236, however, here he gives no explanation as to why he thinks Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Confucianism or Sikhism, for instance, cannot. However, I would argue that even such places are the exception, and elsewhere, for instance, he castigates Judaism and what he terms “the Jewish law of its tribal nation” (Milbank, “Christ the Exception”, 550).
\textsuperscript{57} Interestingly, in recent work Milbank even has something positive to say about Schleiermacher even if he says that he “dilutes this position” making his own work problematic, but saying that we can make “an extension of Schleiermacher’s more radical insight” (“The Integrity”, 88).
It will be worth quoting Pratt at some length here:

“The first feature, namely that of ‘discriminatory value application,’ occurs where alterity, or ‘otherness’ per se, is negated and, as a necessary corollary, the superiority of the self is asserted. The discriminatory negation of otherness is perhaps critical at this juncture, for the scene set by the feature of contextual scope—the contextualising exclusivism and inclusivism—together with the feature of condemnatory stance, now emerge into a devaluing and dismissal of ‘otherness’ as such, whether in terms of rival community or competing alterities, ideological or otherwise. Indeed, such alterities may be—and in fact often are—demonised. The religiously ‘other’ on this view is often cast as ‘satanic,’ or at least seriously and significantly labelled as a hostile opponent, and so hostilely regarded. However expressed or referenced, it will be clear that the fundamentalist is applying negative valuation to otherness as such, together with a corresponding assertion of self-superiority vis-à-vis any ‘other’.”

It strikes me that there is a difference primarily of degree only between the ideology seen here, and that found at the level of the assertive phase. Pratt suggests that the Other is demonized, and as far as I am aware Milbank has never suggested that Satanic influences operate within the secular world, or even liberal theology – though in his most recent work he does castigate what he terms “the diabolical Occidental-Oriental hybrid”, but I read this more as rhetorical excess. Nevertheless, as Pratt notes it may simply be a matter of “hostility”, and certainly commentators on Milbank have noted an aggressive tone in his ideas, for instance McMahon claims Milbank has “the tendency to vilify the religious and secular Other unnecessarily”; perhaps his use of “diabolic” above being a case in point. Indeed, it has been argued that despite Radical Orthodoxy’s rhetoric of ontological peacefulness it does not do away with violence, but merely resituates it to a transcendent level; this certainly is not the endorsing of violence, but, as studies of bullying have shown, intimidation and violence do not need to be physical to be real. Rhetorical violence is itself a phenomena that should be taken seriously.

Milbank continually draws upon the rhetoric of alterity and the other as devoid of value and utterly bereft of meaning in his constant refrain that the Christianity he espouses represents the ontology of love, whereas other discourses are based in “nihilism” with the inherent and inevitable violence (at least ideological, if not actual) that this entails. More broadly, he seems determined to suggest that, in at least most situations, there can be no peaceful co-existence, due to the aggressive missionary stance he proposes, where he speaks of “mutual suspicion” (I say in most cases because he does suggest that Marxism provides a useful tool of analysis on the political scene, and elsewhere suggesting that we should always find the “... contestation of the universal among modernists, nihilists, Christians, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, Taoists,” such that each will always be opposed to the other). Indeed, Radical Orthodoxy’s attitude towards discourses beyond Christianity have been described as being like “a colonizing power sweeping aside the ‘paganism’ of indigenous religion and culture,” or, in stronger words, as “locked in a war to the death” against them. It should be noted here that his most recent work does step away from this, with a suggestion that Christianity can provide the “sacred canopy” (not a term Milbank uses, and of course, and hence my conclusion suggests better stories or narratives about how the Christian tradition relates to religious Others.

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59 Milbank, “The Integrity”, 119. As an example of his rhetoric, though, it remains interesting perhaps indicating a tendency to extremes of expression. It has been noted that part of the reception of Milbank’s work has focused upon his rhetoric (especially Hyman, The Predicament, 65-94, and Hedges, “Is John”, 805), which focuses upon his desire to out-narrative his opponents and thereby implying that to “overcome” Radical Orthodoxy it is necessary to tell a better story (see on this also Hedges, “Book Review”), and so it may be noted here that part of the work of this article involves a recognition that some rhetoric is involved in the response (Hedges, “Is John”, 805), and hence my conclusion suggests better stories or narratives about how the Christian tradition relates to religious Others.
60 McMahon, “Theology”, 791.
63 Milbank, The Future, 146.
64 Milbank, “The End”, 190.
65 Milbank, The Future.
66 Milbank, The Future: 165. As we have noted already his latest work modifies this stance and will be addressed in due course.
course drawing upon Peter Berger’s classic image) under which other worldviews may live in harmony; it remains though nevertheless an unequal relationship with Christianity as a necessary master narrative and the guarantor of equity.  

While, as I have stated at several points, but feel it worth reiterating, I do not think that Milbank himself, or anyone associated with him, sees the Radical Orthodoxy movement as a project that will, or should, lead to the imposition of a single narrative of Christianity, and practices according with it, upon any others. However, my analysis here is important for several reasons. One of these is that, while clearly a (passive) academic movement, the ideology it expounds can spread beyond these confines: it has been noted that certain American Evangelical communities have shown an interest in the project of Radical Orthodoxy, and his ideas have therefore exerted an influence beyond academia. Second, if there are clear resonances between the ideology of extremist groups who vilify, either verbally or physically, those they see as other, and a theological movement that, at least potentially, legitimates such an attitude this needs to be exposed and condemned. In as far as it could provide intellectual legitimation to such groups I suggest we see it as very problematic. Third, at a theological level, while the post-modern turn has warned us about the dangers and fragility of metanarratives, there is a question of truth. What, if anything, is the truth that a Christian tradition should promulgate? Now, I do not wish to suggest, as many (especially within the interfaith movement) assert, that the true heart/essence of religion is peace and that those who go against this are not real representatives of their tradition; such a position is deeply problematic at a variety of levels. Nevertheless, I find Milbank’s representation of Christianity to be deeply problematic in its vilification of Others. Radical Orthodoxy, I have argued, privileges prejudice in theology by creating a zone of exclusion that is typical of fundamentalist and extremist ideologies. Because it bases itself in a religious claim of absolute and sole truth it is playing dangerously with a very powerful form of legitimacy. Even if it does not manifest, in any guise, as a violent expression – Pratt acknowledges that groups which can be classified as having aspects of all three phases do not necessarily become violent – we may suggest that it manifests what may be seen as an “unhealthy” (potentially dangerous?) form of religiosity. The upsurge in its following and popularity worldwide has shown that it has a tremendous appeal, however, given that it denies dialogue with the Other, and paints Others in ways which deny their legitimate expression it becomes an ideology that legitimates violating the religious Other and so stands apart from more open and positive theologies. Although I will suggest below that it is not Radical Orthodoxy per se but rather the rhetoric of its presentation that underpins this. Of course, in such theological matters it may be suggested that rhetoric rather than proof is the criteria by which one would attempt to argue either position, but I would suggest that despite its appeal to return to a pure Christian orthodoxy, the spirit which inspires Radical Orthodoxy is entirely antithetical to what I would see as the Gospel principles of that tradition, it is not a bearer of Good News but prejudice.

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68 See Milbank, “The Integrity”, 120-4. It is not the place of this paper to analyse Milbank’s wider political thought (though I have addressed this in part elsewhere, Hedges, “Book Review”), but we should note that Milbank’s work tends to a holism which sees his theological, historical, and political ideas as related and this should not be neglected. We will address this later in the paper. Here, though, we may note that what Milbank seems to suggest is that we need something of a Christian caliphate where a benevolent Christian ruler may ensure others are treated with respect and tolerance even if living in some form of “dhimmitude”, it is notable though, as I have stressed elsewhere, that Milbank’s desire to subsume all things to a controlling theocracy is as open to abuse, if not more so, than many other alternatives (“Book Review”, 547); indeed, historically it has been noted that religious Others tended to live with greater freedom and security under Muslim rule than under the Catholic vision that founds Milbank’s vision (see Randall, “Loving the Enemy”, 39-40).

69 Eugene Gallagher, cited in Pratt, “Religion and Terrorism”, p. 651. This relates to notions of identity and identity politics where religion may be a cause of an escalation of problems if people feel that conflicts become tied to some form of “ultimacy”; in relation to identity see Coco and Hedges (“Belonging, Behaving”, 169), in relation to conflict more generally we may relate it to Mark Juergensmeyer’s notion that religious conflicts may become what he terms “cosmic wars” (Terror, 144-66).

70 Pratt, “Religion and Terrorism”, 454. Religion has what R. Scott Appleby has called an “ambivalent” relationship to conflict being both sources of peace and violence, and on the wider discourse around this see his own work (The Ambivalence), as well as Juergensmeyer (Terror), and Ramsbotham et. al. (Contemporary Conflict, 332-46).

Radical Orthodoxy’s Ideology and Christian Theology on the Other

As has been noted, in the context of Christian historical reactions to the religious Other Radical Orthodoxy may be seen as part of a fairly mainstream tradition, indeed, as Pratt’s typology notes part of the rationale of fundamentalisms tends to be that they see themselves as representing the core tradition. From the traditional Catholic maxim of *extra ecclesias nulla salus* (“outside the Church there is no salvation”) to the missionary imperative of Protestant traditions during the colonial (and indeed post-colonial) era, and indeed more extreme views such as those of figures like Bernard of Clairvaux which justified the crusades, and Luther’s attitudes to Islam and Judaism, vituperation of the religious Other may be said to be normative. (The extent to which an exclusivist attitude predominated can be questioned though, and it is quite arguable that amongst major theologians an inclusivist position was at least equally historically dominant). We find ourselves in a very different situation in the contemporary context where, post-Holocaust and post-colonialism, we have entered an age of dialogue. While space will permit me to do no more than sketch an outline of some other options available to theology, it is important to note that, while influential, Radical Orthodoxy is not the only contemporary theological tradition, and that these theologies – often ones to which Milbank in particular sees himself opposed – offer more positive ways of seeking to engage with religious Others. In this section I will briefly mention four theological traditions (which are certainly not monolithic, nor always entirely positive in their attitude or approach to religious Others [but]) which provide the possibility, at least, for engagement that does not involve the prejudicial approach which I have suggested can be found in Milbank’s work. I will then address the question of Radical Orthodoxy’s ideology to suggest to what degree it prevents it from endorsing or accepting such options. Before proceeding though, it is worth emphasizing that the general use of religious Others here does not suggest a broad lumping of all “Others” as one type, or that a single approach is suited in all instances, certainly the theological styles I discuss here are aware of, and employ, more nuanced approaches; my usage indicates simply an openness to such possibilities with a range of Others.

First, there are Intercultural Theologies. The term is used in a variety of ways by different authors, but can be seen as a methodological way in which theology seeks to engage with contemporary cultural conditions. However, given the historical conditions under which the term developed and, arguably as it is most widely understood and employed, it refers very much to the way that Western theology has sought to come to terms with its implicit or explicit involvement with a colonial hegemonic ideology which has spread around the world as a normative mode of doing theology. Instead, Intercultural Theology, understands all theology to be contextual, and, as such, always open to new transformations, especially as it meets other religious and

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72 My thanks go to two of the anonymous reviewers who suggested addressing this issue more directly.
73 Hedges, *Controversies*, 23. Nevertheless, Reuven Firestone argues that an exclusivist attitude is a natural counterpart to a monotheistic tradition (see “Can Those”). Elsewhere I suggest that Christian theology has mediated between what I term “open” and “closed” poles in its theological stance on religious Others, see “Radical Orthodoxy”, 120-1. For a discussion on such exclusivist attitudes, see Strange, “Exclusivisms”, Hedges, *Controversies*, 20-3, Race, 10-37, and Francisco, “Luther’s Knowledge”.
74 The issue of theology post-Holocaust has been addressed above (see discussion in text, and references in note 52), while there is a considerable literature on the post-colonial situation, for a good summation and account see Hedges (*Controversies*, 44-52) and Ustorf (“The Cultural”). For a critique of Milbank’s views of religious Others in the light of this see Hedges (“Radical Orthodoxy”). On dialogue as the prevailing paradigm, see Hedges (*Controversies*, 59-62), and Swidler (“The History”), but for a more thorough account see Pratt (*The Church*).  
75 I certainly do not see these four as exhaustive of all possible approaches, and the tradition of Comparative Theology most closely associated with Francis Clooney (Clooney, *Comparative Theology*), or the pluralism of John Hick and others would also be worth mentioning (Hick, *Rainbow*), however, for reasons of space I have limited it to four. However, these are by no means meant to be the only, or even best, examples, and a notable omission is Comparative Theology which has been excluded partly because the length necessary to cover it would be prohibitive, although we may note that it is to some degree presupposed as a necessary corollary of the types of theology suggested here (see, e.g. Hedges, *Controversies*, 52-5, 262-3). More broadly, many strands in Global Theologies as they engage with the religious Others who are their neighbours (and in situations where it is more proper to see Christians as the Other amongst more dominant groupings) are also significant, a matter addressed in Hedges, “Radical Orthodoxy”. Another strand would be moves towards forms of Dual or Multiple Religious Identities, although again this is assumed in part in what is found here (see note 79 for two examples which endorse this option). 
76 Cheetham, and Cartledge, “Introduction”, 3.
philosophical cultures, which can radically change the nature or form of the Christian message.\textsuperscript{77} In particular, Intercultural Theology would be critical of the Western norms and elitist traditions we see prioritized in Milbank’s work, and would be far more open to engagement with the religious Other.\textsuperscript{78}

Second, what may broadly be termed the dialogical movement in theology, which certainly has links to Intercultural Theology in some ways, is another trend that is in opposition to Radical Orthodoxy. Understood as a representative of the particularist strain in the theology of religions, Radical Orthodoxy suggests that no genuine meeting should be attempted, or is even possible, between religious traditions, although as noted Milbank’s latest work seems to move from this position, yet still does not entail a real dialogic encounter with religious Others. Against this, other prominent theologians argue that Christianity can fruitfully learn, be enriched, and benefit, from an engagement with other religions. Examples would include such theologians as the German Anglican Perry Schmidt-Leukel and the American Roman Catholic Paul F. Knitter, to name but two examples of figures who have recently written high profile works endorsing such a view;\textsuperscript{79} we could expand the list with many others.\textsuperscript{80} Certainly many would suggest that not only is it a theoretical possibility but that the fruits of meaningful dialogue are shown in such things as the vibrancy of many Asian theologies, inter-monastic dialogue, and other areas, which show, contra particularist arguments, that not only can meaningful dialogue and cross-fertilization take place, but that it does.\textsuperscript{81}

Third, the style of theology generally known as liberal or modernist theologies represents another strand of thinking that is, or can be, opposed to the agenda espoused by Milbank. What is clear is that Milbank regards liberal theology as one of the “heresies”, or wrong turns, in theology which, especially through its entanglement with Enlightenment attitudes, is compromised with what he would regard as non-Christian values (although it has been argued that Milbank himself shares much of the liberal legacy).\textsuperscript{82}

Given the necessities of space we must (over)simplify, but liberal theology can be said to represent, or at least include, strata that seek engagement with systems beyond Christianity from which it can fruitfully learn, whereas the Neo-Orthodox and Post-Liberal trends which inform Radical Orthodoxy insist upon a discontinuity with other worldviews and set them in dialectical tension.\textsuperscript{83} For a brief note on where some forms of liberal theology take issue with the attitudes found in Radical Orthodoxy we can note the type of Engaged Theology suggested by Ian Markham, especially as related to all forms of correlational theologies inspired by Paul Tillich.\textsuperscript{84} The current author has argued elsewhere that a Radical Openness to religious Others, which can be said to have much in sympathy with many contemporary expressions of liberal theology, is found embedded in scriptural precedent.\textsuperscript{85}

Finally, I would also suggest that feminist theologies, especially as they engage interfaith relations, stand in marked contrast to the Radical Orthodox approach. In some ways, parallels could be drawn between certain

\textsuperscript{77} Ustorf, “Cultural Origins”, see also Hedges, Controversies, 44-52.

\textsuperscript{78} The failure of Radical Orthodoxy in the perspective of Intercultural Theology is argued in Hedges, “Radical Orthodoxy”. It is worth noting that Graham Ward has written about the extent to which he would be open to some form of intercultural context for theology (if not Intercultural Theology as he understands it), and so the fact that our critique here is specifically directed to Milbankianism can be reinforced (see Ward, “Intercultural Theology”).

\textsuperscript{79} See Schmidt-Leukel, Transformation, and Knitter, Without.

\textsuperscript{80} Examples would include such figures as Aloysius Pieris, Elizabeth Harris, Rose Drew, Leonard Swidler, Alan Race, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Kwok Pui Lan, and a host of others. For a discussion of this see such works as Schmidt-Leukel, “Pluralisms”, and Hedges, Controversies.

\textsuperscript{81} Hedges, Controversies, 175-82.

\textsuperscript{82} The stance of Radical Orthodoxy against liberal theology is clearly forwarded in Milbank, et. al., “Introduction”. On Milbank’s “liberal theology”, see Hedges, “Is John”.

\textsuperscript{83} For a more considered exposition of such views, see Hedges, “Is John”, which breaks down the simplistic notion of “liberal” and “conservative”. Certainly, although Milbank’s rhetoric is clearly centred upon the notion of pure Christian resources (as discussed above), he does engage various forms of post-modern thought (see Hedges, “Is John”) and Marxism as things which can give insight beyond, or supplementary, to that found within the Christian tradition (see Milbank, The Future, 75-111, especially in the light of 125 fn. 30).

\textsuperscript{84} See Markham, Theology.

\textsuperscript{85} See Hedges, Controversies, pp. 111-13, and 137-45. It must be born in mind in this context that liberal theologies are by no means uniform, and that some theologies, such as the fulfillment paradigm, which in various forms, owes much to liberal theology, is quite antithetical to the Radical Openness expounded here (see Hedges, Controversies, 24-25).
forms of liberal theological engagement with religious Others and feminist engagement with religious Others, while many women are involved in dialogue movements, especially at the grassroots level.86

This brief overview of some of the alternatives gives us, perhaps, some hints although little concrete idea of how the kind of prejudice which I have argued is embedded within Radical Orthodoxy’s rhetoric can be countered. To this end I would like to suggest a theological manifesto for what good Christian (and, I may presumptively suggest other religious) theologies should embody in their attitude to the religious Other. I would therefore advocate we need:

1. a theology that is genuinely respectful of the Other;
2. a theology that is not dismissive of (the possibility of) dialogue with the Other;
3. to redefine the possibilities within the Christian tradition for engaging the Other;
4. to overcome entrenched, and reinforcing, theologies of alterity.

This is not the place to develop what such a theology would look like, although I believe that steps towards it are to be found in various theological publications, which form a ground work for future developments.87 However, as I have suggested it would be useful to address Radical Orthodoxy’s ideology to see whether it could accord with such an attitude, or whether it is fundamentally antithetical to what I would see as more positive relationships with religious Others. Addressing such a question in full would require another paper, as such I will make a set of five principle claims or points which I hope will give us an indicative answer. First, it should be noted that the Christian tradition as a whole has moved towards much better relations with religious Others in the historical period. Of course, if we see, as Milbank appears to do,88 that this is part of a falling into a secular/modernist heresy then it may be part of those areas within the Christian tradition that wish to resist such moves. Second, contrary to our first part, I have noted what appears to be something of a “softening” in Milbank’s rhetoric towards the religious Other between his 1990 paper “The End of Dialogue” and his latest work represented by “The Legitimacy and Genealogy of Secularization in Question” where an aggressive missionary stance of hostility and suspicion is replaced by peaceful co-existence albeit under Christian hegemony. Third, we must be wary (unlike Milbank I suggest) of essentialism in categorisation for while, as has been observed, he will speak about what “Confucianism” or “Christianity” properly is (even if noting variations in each), we must recognise that every tradition is a living tradition and is marked by the changes and permutations of its expression by representatives.89 As such, while I may

86 There are certainly many feminist theologians, and others, who would take issue with my associating it with liberal theology, and it holds many critiques against much traditional liberal thinking, nevertheless, if we understand liberal theologies broadly as those theologies which believe we should give place to the human experience, and stand in line with Enlightenment ideals of equality (which includes the emancipation of women), and which think that contemporary cultural concerns should inform theology, then I suggest we can see some form of common genesis and shared concerns. Even if this is not accepted it is certain that critiques arising from feminist theologians are often strong against Radical Orthodoxy, as exemplified in some of the work found in Isherwood and Zlomislic, The Poverty, and Ruether and Grau, Interpreting. The way interreligious feminist theologies are opposed to the trends we have seen in Radical Orthodoxy, but accord with at least some found in many liberal theologies, can be seen in Egnell, Other Voices and Hedges, Controversies, chapter 5. These latter two alongside, for example, Brecht, Virtue, and O’Neill, Women Speaking, are good examples also of the depth of women’s views in grassroots and theological debates in this area.87 For examples see Schmidt-Leukel, Transformation, Hedges, Controversies, Pieris, Fire and Water, Knitter, Without, Fletcher, Monopoly, Eck, Encountering God.
88 Milbank, “The End”.
89 In Milbank’s terms this may mean that I am not giving a theological answer as he seems to assume that this allows a kind of phenomenological reading of the essence of something, whereas a secular theory must always be historically conditioned (see “The Integrity”, 113). However, I would argue that unless one adheres to a simplistic fundamentalism (as I have noted Milbank does not) where the truth is a once and for all given, then you recognise the historically constructed and open to revisitation nature of doctrine and belief (as we have noted is the case of Radical Orthodoxy) so one becomes caught in the historicism which means that any theological construction is of its own times (and hence his critique of others on this ground applies to himself, see “The Integrity”, 101). Here I think we see a crux point in Milbank’s thought, for he is post-modern/modern enough to recognise the provisionality of all thought including our constructions/ perceptions of the sacred, yet wishes still to cling to selected certainties or essential religious claims which his system cannot support, an argument I have made elsewhere (see “Is John”, 809-11). On the question of Milbank’s essentialism, see Hedges, “Is John”, 805-6, while in relation to religious Others, see Hedges, “Radical Orthodoxy”, 130ff, while see note 53 herein.
assert that early Milbankianism is antithetical to a positive relationship to religious Others (I see this as uncontroversial), I would not say that there is such a thing as Milbankianism which is inherently so, while other versions of Radical Orthodoxy, for instance in Graham Ward despite his distancing from the term, seem more amenable to positive interfaith relations.\(^90\) Fourth, despite the seemingly antagonistic rhetoric which marks Radical Orthodoxy in its relationship to Others, some of its foundations may be indicative that a closer relationship is possible. For instance, Milbank’s neo-Platonic Augustinianism and his use of the via negative suggest other options. In relation to the latter, the fact that Christianity, alongside most other major religious traditions, asserts that there is an ultimate unknowability or unsayability within their traditions and doctrines has been employed as a foundation for arguing for a pluralist option within the Theology of Religions, such that disagreements may be seen as essentially part of a human construction.\(^91\) As for his neo-Platonism, this I would suggest could undergird a worldview which sees the divine as within and behind all things, as indeed, he uses it, and as such in his later work he argues that all religions are founded from an original divine source.\(^92\) While I still see Milbank’s rhetoric as problematic it is nevertheless a very significant move that in part involves a rejection of the particularist categorisation in which his previous Theology of Religions stood towards a more traditional Christian inclusivist approach. I will work through this in the next point. Fifth, Milbank’s current position may therefore allow us to see him as in some ways analogous to other figures in Christian thought of whom Nicholas of Cusa (often Cusanus) is one example.\(^93\) Cusanus’ position as a forerunner of more positive approaches to religious Others, and his exceptional understanding of the religious Other (specifically Islam) for his time, has long been noted.\(^94\) In this sense Milbank’s polemical rhetoric against the Other may make Cusanus seem an odd choice for comparison. However, if we avoid an essentialist reading of Milbankianism and take note of the potentially inclusivist

90 Ward himself has not addressed such questions at length, but the general tenor of some of his more recent work is suggestive of this (e.g. Cultural Transformation). It goes beyond the scope of this paper to argue such a case.
91 This is part of John Hick’s original case for the tenability of his pluralist hypothesis (see An Interpretation, 343-61, though he emphasises the mythological character of language), but has been most especially developed by Schmidt-Leukel (see, e.g. “Pluralisms”, 92-6).
92 Milbank, “The Integrity”, 103, 104, 111. Such a position would mean that rather than being a representative of a particularist attitude towards religious Others, which generally entails seeing all religions as playing different language games or being different modes of activity and so not responses to a common religious source or experience (see Hedges, Controversies, 147-8), Milbank’s work could be seen as representative of an exclusivist attitude towards religious Others although it is possible that he has actually modified his stance towards a more inclusivist position. As I have argued the typological terms are best seen as heuristic devices which mark a range of attitudes rather than being monolithic theological stances (see note 10), as such each involves a variety of forms, and in some forms of what may best be termed as falling within “inclusivisms” we actually see something bordering on exclusivist attitudes (my discussion of Farquhar and Rahner as exemplars of varieties within inclusivisms represents this, see Hedges, Controversies, 24-6). While it is hard to assess from one article which is not directly focused on this issue if I had to give a quick heuristic assessment of Milbank’s present position I would suggest that we see a form of inclusivism at the exclusivist end of the spectrum, and marked by a distinctly exclusivist tone (for a more developed discussion around different tones and approaches within the typology, see Hedges, “The Theology”).
93 I am grateful to one of my peer reviewers for making this analogy which while not representative of Milbank’s earlier work certainly makes sense of his attitude in his recent work (i.e. “The Legitimacy”). We may also note that understanding Milbank in this way, and also the change represented in his thinking, would allow us to make more sense of some of his broader ideas. For instance, Milbank appeals to the English Platonists and to Coleridge as forebears for his theological pedigree, however, these figures fit within a tradition in relation to religious Others which is quite different from that which is represented in Milbank’s earlier work. Coleridge, for instance, is an important figure in mediating what becomes known as Fulfillment Theology a tradition which, in its liberal form (as derived from Coleridge and the English Platonists), looks to a Logos Theology as the basis of seeing a common religious heritage in humanity which is what we find in Milbank’s own most recent work. On the tradition of Fulfillment Theology in British theology and some reflections on Coleridge’s place in this, see Hedges (Preparation and, 22-5, 36-7, 47-8), a full account of Coleridge’s thought in this area and the influence of the Cambridge Platonists still remains to be written. As a note, I have argued elsewhere that Milbank’s approach to religious Others is also contrary to some of his medieval Christian predecessors who he takes as significant, Augustine and Aquinas, see “Radical Orthodoxy”, 121.
94 He is invoked in this respect by many, e.g. Schmidt-Leukel, “Pluralisms”, 89, Bauschke, “Islam”, 196, Firestone, “Can Those”, and Valkenberg, “Learned Ignorance".
tone of Milbank’s recent work, it may seem a reasonable comparison. For Cusanus, though, the diversity
of religion is an inherent good, and he believes that Christians may actively learn from the religious Other
and their differences, as such he may seem to exceed Milbank’s own theological position in terms of how he
assesses religious Others in positive ways. I believe the comparison useful, though, in that it suggests that
within Milbankianism itself there lies the potential for an even greater openness towards religious Others
which exceeds the rhetoric often displayed and which, as I have noted, has been prominent in the reception
of Milbank’s work.

Conclusion

To conclude, I would like to assess the value of this analysis. While, Radical Orthodoxy is not a fundamentalist
or extremist group (it is too sophisticated to be the former, and lacks the community/institutional elements
of the latter), we have found resonances with the ideological stances of such groups through the lens of
Pratt’s typology. This shows, I believe, that its theological stance, as found in Milbank’s early work at least,
upholds views that exclude religious Others, and, given the possible consequences of this, it may be said
to promote a dismissive and dangerous attitude to religious Others. Even if this does not take full blown
form as a forceful attack on religious Others, it can, by its very internal logic, reinforce breakdowns of
communication between traditions and a distancing of religious traditions at a time when many believe
we need better relations and communications. Alongside this, its voice could sideline other discourses
within the Christian tradition which would seek to promote such communication and exchange. As such,
opolitising the discourse of Radical Orthodoxy, certainly as presented by Milbank, in favour of the kind of
manifesto for a more inclusive theology I outlined above, which respects the other and seeks dialogue
and engagement, seems a very real necessity. However, as I have indicated this very much concerns the
“discourse” and “rhetoric” with which Radical Orthodoxy is associated, while its theological basis could
point towards more fruitful engagement with religious Others. Indeed, Milbank’s more recent work includes
a “softening” in this area, nevertheless, his language is still marked by quite a polemical tone (the use of
“diabolic” being the strongest instantiation), and the overall tenor of his work remains problematic as such
I still find in the presentation, if not the substance, a danger in Milbank’s theological voice. Nevertheless, I
would seek to encourage a broader dialogue amongst all strands of theology, which would include Radical
Orthodoxy. Within this I may also suggest that this study suggests that any stark or essentialist portrayal
of the Other must be aware that any thinker or school of thought may change and develop, for as we have
seen here the rhetoric of Milbank’s earlier work and his missionary aggression has softened into hope for a
more irenic living alongside the religious Other, and has potential for even further dialogic possibilities in
its ideological underpinning.

95 I would classify Cusanus as an inclusivist within the typology, although Firestone terms him an exclusivist but one open to
religious Others which I would suggest helps support my own reading. It is also notable in this regard that both Race (Christians
and, 71) and Schmidt-Leukel (“Pluralisms”, 89) see him as anticipating the pluralist approach, something perhaps also indi-
cated by Knitter as an exception in historical Christianity for whom “grace, revelation, and salvation” could appear in another
religion (Introducing Theologies, 67 n. 8). However, I would not suggest it is important which of the typological terms we apply.
On Milbank as potentially inclusivist see note 92.

96 If I may note a quote from a review of one of Milbank’s books: “There is no room in this system for any other perspective…. But
there are other paths. For God’s sake, there must be other paths” (Jones, “Review”, 7, italics in original). I would suggest in
my analysis that this is not quite so, while Milbank’s rhetoric suggests no other path (and my own review of Milbank’s previous
work upholds Jones’ statement, see “Book Review”), as I have suggested elsewhere there are aspects of Milbank’s work which
seem indicative of something different and could be capable of reform in what I would see as more positive forms of theology
(see “Is John”), and is an argument I extend further herein.
References


