

***Theology and Social Theory***  
and Its Significance for Community Building:  
A Conversation with John Milbank

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John Milbank: Charles has told me that you were looking at the last chapter of *Theology and Social Theory* and he has asked me to say a bit about how I came to write it. A few autobiographical remarks and where I saw it situated in the church scene, in the British scene. My autobiographical remark takes one into slightly curious territory . . . in that in some ways the most resonance with my work has been at Duke very much under the promotion of Stanley Hauerwas; both of us have holiness backgrounds. I am sure this is not an accident. I mean Stanley has a holiness/Methodist upbringing. I am not only a Methodist by upbringing (although I am an Anglican by conversion) but my paternal grandparents were both . . . members of independent British holiness churches, churches which were eventually swallowed up by the church of the Nazarene. So that although my parents then became Methodists, from my youngest childhood I had this fine kind of American resonance coming through because I was taken to these weird (to me), weird and actually I'd have to say extremely frightening churches, very authoritarian churches . . . I must say I found it completely terrifying. But incredibly, I can't assert how unusual this is. As a child, I knew about stuff like full sanctification, and second blessing, and all this sort of thing. And that Christian life was about, you know, you were supposed to be a very very good person. And I suppose it was because of this very strong back to Wesleyan sanctification that when I grew up and I naturally mixed with good Christian young people who were kind of evangelicals and went to youth group, I quickly felt that they were on a completely different wavelength and I finally worked out that they were much more sort of good Calvinists or good Lutherans who believed in imputed righteousness and had fairly tight accounts of the atonement in terms of substitution and this sort of thing. So I began to realize that my background, while evangelical, was also kind of strange in many ways. And I think that it was then that eventually made me conclude, "Well really this takes me into a much more Catholic vision of things," and so I returned to high Anglican roots. And when I did that I found

that everything started to click more into place for me. I was also able to get it together with my natural romanticism and love of knights and battles, etc.

I must say that is only one strand of influence but in retrospect it seems to me curiously significant in some way. I mean, once I became an Anglican I was . . . drawn into a completely different world, e.g., the long traditions of Anglican social theory which are not particularly well known in this country, although they have many parallels here. For example, Rauschenbusch is very like the kind of traditions that come from S D Morris and so on. I was also heavily drawn into traditions of Christian Socialism . . . I mean I was always brought up left of center. My father comes from generations of non-conformists. They were always liberals. My father's a liberal to this day. After the sixties, I was drawn more towards socialist radicalism and became a rather loose Marxist for a long time, and probably only in my late twenties and early thirties did I really start reading through some of this Anglican social tradition stuff. And then I got the job at Lancaster which was funded by something called the Christendom Trust of the Christendom movement in the 1930s, which involved T. S. Eliot, who is the most famous member of that movement. People like V. A. Demant, for example, parallel very much things going on on the continent in terms of Maritain and so on: the idea that you would try to restore Christianity to the center of culture but without political coercion. So you had to talk about "New Christendom." The Christendom Trust just had a lot money left and certainly when they appointed me they would have assumed more or less that their tradition was over. And I think they assumed that I would be telling everybody about liberation theology with enthusiasm. But as part of my duties I did have to teach the Anglican Social tradition including the stuff about Christendom in the 1930s and I felt to the contrary that this stuff was still relevant. And I suppose I was then reacting in turn against the post-WW2 . . . against all that stuff. Because after the WW2 people felt you had to be very enthusiastic about liberal democracy and maybe take a positive view of secularization as the providential will of God in some weird way. But for some reason, ever since I was a teenager when I read some watered down versions of Tillich and Bonhoeffer, I was always worried about the bad faith of saying, "Well, secularization is really good news." It has struck me as maybe wishful thinking or a slightly strange kind of apologetic, though I wouldn't have put it to myself in those terms. But I had always had that kind of gut reaction and always been drawn to a whole range of people more from the 1930's period both in England and on the continent. And then, while I was writing *Theology and Social Theory* (it was written during the

Thatcherite era), I think I was very much in the back of my mind interpreting the Thatcherite era as the final outcome of secularization--and in a funny kind of way, the final overthrow of the classic State/Church concordat in England that reached its last expression at the end of the second world war. And I suppose in some way I felt I was like the child of that concordat, you know, the Welfare state, and all these things which were very much the result of Christian thinking, more so than most historians say . . . witness the phenomenal success of the Commonwealth Party during the Second World War which was a directly Christian party. And in many ways a new mood took hold for a while. But again I think I would be very unusual in having this kind of feeling about that sort of period because in many ways my generation simply found all that period very boring or it was regarded as far too cozy, which in some ways it was, and you got the outburst of 60's individualism, to which I guess I always had a very ambivalent relation, and I think it is interesting now that there are a lot of rows going on in the French left. There is a French novelist, I forget his name, but he's been expelled from some left wing group for arguing that actually the whole of the 68 movement was the beginning of the turn to the right and that it abandoned older communal republican traditions and was actually a disaster and has lead to what he describes as a market economy of sexual relations along with everything else--but the left is somehow just failing to see it as part and parcel of something like Reaganism and Thatcherism. Well, I don't take completely that view, but I think there is something in that kind of perspective. I think certain sorts of attitudes towards the sixties, then towards Thatcherism, were lurking in the background of *Theology and Social Theory*, which I think is informed throughout by the idea that now there can only be theological resistance to the end of the historical dominance of everything by the market and bureaucracy; once the sacred has vanished this is going to be the only way of managing what's going on.

Otherwise, the book came to be written really by accident in the sense that I was asked to write a textbook, and the publishers were totally horrified when I didn't produce a text book. And when I set out to write it I really honestly and truly assumed I was going to talk about the mutual help that theology, sociology, and Marxism could give to each other. But somehow quite quickly when I started to get into that I felt that there was an incredible assumption going on in the usual approaches, that somehow social/scientific discourses were sort of theologically innocent or neutral, and that theology wasn't inherently itself a social theory and an account of history. And I suppose that is the main methodological point in a sense that is being made. That

it is not as if this is the meeting of two different expertises in two different areas, but that both camps are already in each other's camp, if you care to put it that way. I think this is sometimes read as if I was saying something stronger than that and in a way I think that can be a kind of misreading.

But then I argue that sometimes unrecognized theologies of metaphysics at work in some of these secular narratives do amount to sort of unjustifiable ideologies, and this is particularly strong in my conclusions about sociology where I argue that the whole thing seems to be constituted by a kind of ahistorical hypostatization of the notion of the social. I want to trace the genealogy back through Comte and ultimately into the Catholic reactionaries and argue that it does have its roots in a kind of Malebranchean ontologism, which is to say, in de Bonald's and Maistre's version of ontologism, in which . . . society is a kind of original revelation; it's a sort of original given framework and nothing is constructed, everything is laid down as a kind of general framework. And so the given social order is practically equated with God, just as Malebranche thinks we have direct access to parts of the mind of God, so now there is a kind of direct presence of God in the social order. I am trying to argue that, by complex ways, through Comte and Durkheim, this gets inverted into the thesis not that God is society, but that society is God--but something of this strange metaphysical structure remains. Redoing it now I would want to stress the ways in which this is part and parcel of certain ways Cartesianism can go. I usually get into trouble from sociologists who always insist that this stuff about Comte is nonsense and that sociology was founded by Durkheim, and I just think this is wrong, that if you actually read Durkheim and even Mauss they are clear about their lineage. That Mauss says very clearly, "I am a positivist." I am often in trouble for saying that sociology just is positivistic, but I mean positivism in a slightly more precise sense than the term is sometimes used, it is a sort of almost quasi-religious attitude towards the social order and the sacrality of the social order.

Manuel Vasquez: Can you unpack that for us?

JM: Maybe I'll do that more a little bit later on. I think if I was dealing with it now I would make the qualification (I already have in print) that I think sociology has called our attention to the synchronic dimension and that is important. Although in principle historians should be doing that, it doesn't really take you outside the realm of empirical history to say that there are these

synchronicities as well as these diachronicities. I think also people have sometimes not realized that I'm not necessarily saying that these people have nothing to say to us; they may have a very great deal to say to us and they may have made incredibly important empirical observations, but I am wanting to free that from what I see as a questionable metaphysical framework. Some people in England have read it as if I was critical of the empirical study of religion, but in a way the very reverse is true, I am wanting to free the way up for greater empiricism and a sort of purer ethnographic approach, in terms of thick descriptions and so forth.

Because I'm trying to put together this book on the 'gift,' I am sort of wrestling with Mauss and where I think at certain points Mauss is also guilty of the same kind of sociologism and of having a sort of theory of what society in general really always is and how eventually that will somehow emerge almost in an evolutionary fashion. Once we have understood the principles behind society we can get rid of delusions and have sort of pure society in some way. But because Mauss chose to focus on the gift he somehow picked out an incredibly good candidate for this kind of thing--if you are going to do this kind of thing--in that he was picking on the category of exchange, and the way exchanges work. This is pretty much close to something like a transcendental aspect of society. I still think he does strain towards a kind of theory of how the *real* gift, the *real* exchange, is somehow *given*, and he still in the end does have this kind of questionable metaphysics. But an awful lot of what he says can also be delivered from that. In fact, there are incredible amounts of overlap between what Mauss is saying and what the Christian socialist tradition is saying. They share an enormous amount in common.

I think probably when the gift book finally emerges what you will see is something like more of a positive engagement with people who have been doing work on genealogy and even the social sciences. Not that this in any way is going back on what I have done before, but it is more of a positive engagement with the empirical things that have emerged from these traditions, and particularly because I am dealing more with ethnographic material.

Anyway, I suppose part of the point of the book would be to say that too often the kind of dialogues that go on between theology and the social sciences are conducted as if the scientists supplied the facts and theology came along with the values, and there is that neat division of labor. And so all the time I am wanting to say how actually all that the social sciences are doing is really telling stories, writing narratives, but are themselves inevitably valued imbued. And

then, inversely, the Christian values are inseparable from the narratives that Christians tell and therefore they are inseparable from their version of the facts, if you'd care to put it that way. And here of course I've learned a huge amount from other people, from Karl Barth who wrote a kind of narrative theology, from Alasdair MacIntyre, who has been insisting upon the importance of narrative categories in ethics, from the Yale school which had noticed you could describe the Barthian traditions in terms of narrative theology and was trying to take that forward (although it seemed to spend more of its time theorizing about it rather than, like Barth, actually doing the stuff). But I think where I was taking this a bit further was suggesting that the Christian narrative, indeed the Biblical narrative, in the end is a narrative of the whole of history once extrapolated. If you are saying Jesus Christ is the center of history, then you are interpreting history in the light of Christ, and this implies that all the time you are going on writing this narrative. And that's why I started to talk about a Christian meta-narrative that seemed to extend a bit more into Church history, and indeed into something like universal history, than the Yale school really intended. And then I think, looking back on things . . . I mean Stanley [Hauerwas] was quoting a remark just yesterday from *Theology and Social Theory* where I said something like, "Narrative is the only science of the particular." And I had forgotten that I 'd said that! But I think there is a continuing tension in my work between meta-history and metaphysics in that already in that last chapter you've been reading I was slightly saying against Lindbeck, well . . . narrative does always assume a kind of setting, it sort of always does assume an ontology, but nevertheless there is a sense in which maybe your ontology can never be quite finished if events in history can really make a radical difference to your account of ultimate truth, which seems to be the presupposition behind something like the Incarnation. So there is a sort of tension, if you like, between the ultimacy of a meta-history and the ultimacy of theological metaphysics. And I guess I am still trying to think of that and there is a new version of how to do that in the Milbank-Pickstock *Truth in Aquinas* . . . So I think you can see that kind of tension going on in the final chapter, and it is also there that I am suggesting that if we look back into Augustine there aren't just a few reflections on providence at work in history, or something like Luther's two kingdoms theory, it is a real genealogy. It is a real kind of socio-historical diagnosis of the structural logic at work within the pagan Roman Empire. His account of the nature of pagan virtue and the way the empire depends upon the vices of others, etc., I tried to set all that down and then say that Augustine is doing a kind of Christian genealogy. He is exposing the logic at

work here, and then suggesting how there might be a more fundamental kind of logic which would presuppose original peace and not original violence. So I am suggesting that Augustine is saying that pagan logic is always presupposing a prior violence or problem that then virtue has to deal with. So virtue is always heroic virtue, and virtue is always fighting and controlling the passions, and this works both at an individual and at a social level. And I think implicit in that, although I probably make this claim more explicitly later, is saying that Augustine is really more Nietzschean than Nietzsche because this truly is the production of a non-reactive ethics. Any ethics that is presupposing a more original violence is going to be reactive ethics. And again I get into a lot of trouble here for seeming to say that we live in a happy world without any problems. Of course I am not trying to say anything like that, I am more trying to say that belief in creation involves the belief that more originally there was this benign world of gift that was pure gratuity, not response to violence, pure gratuitous charity allowing the world to exist harmoniously. And that has been lost--that's been interrupted through the fall. We can't get back to that, we have to work through all this difficult stuff and therefore we are now always in a reactive situation, but somehow acting in a reactive way has got to be infused by a sense that there is something beyond just making the best of things, or just doing damage limitation. The foundation for an eschatological hope, not being resigned, is precisely this belief in an original good creation, and that through the incarnation has been offered to us the means to restore this originally good creation.

I think one thing that I don't say in *Theology and Social Theory* very clearly is that I definitely line up with the die-hards who think that death comes into the world after the fall. And I agree with the nut cases who say, "If you abandon that, you abandon Christianity." In fact, if you abandon that, then Christianity becomes really a rather nasty sort of doctrine in some ways that is going to get into all sorts of peculiar theodicies and so forth. The New Testament is quite clear: sin and death are somehow profoundly linked with each other and they go together. We can't make sense of sin without the idea that we are in this world of death for which we are not responsible. And its (the NT's) sense of what is bad is in a way very objective. The whole Bible's sense of what is bad is very objective; it includes natural evils as well as moral evils, and it doesn't really distinguish between the two a lot of the time. At least in the Old Testament that seems to be true, that there is cosmic disorder. And it seems to me that the New Testament has a sense of how these interact, but we live in a world into which death has entered and this makes

malice possible. Conversely, malice reinforces the reign of death and terror. Again this contains the unsettling reflection that evil is only possible because we live in a fragile world. That is intrinsically beyond the ethical perspective of Christianity; it is never content only with ethical solutions because it does see sin and death as going together and as reinforcing each other, so it has the hope for something beyond that, just as I think that the hope that there can be peaceful coexistence is more than simply an ethical statement, “We’re going to work for peace.”

This is something I’m still trying to develop and work on and I have written a recent paper on the notion of affinity. Really, what I am arguing there is that peaceful coexistence is a bet on the idea that we can really and truly harmonize. I mean: not just agree to live and let live, but truly come to understand and appreciate each other. Not everybody equally appreciating everybody--but somehow fall into the real places or the real narrative sequences in which we belong. I think this is probably why the whole idea of marriage is so important. Maybe that’s at the core of things, that we tend to think that erotic affinity is trivial. But maybe it is not trivial; that’s part of the religious beyond the ethical--and it is almost a precondition for our trust in the ethical, the trust that we really do live in a universe that is supposed to be networks and affinities, horizontal participations that are grounded in our vertical participation in God. So it becomes a trust that we will find our right places.

I think this very much drives Gillian Rose’s autobiography *Love’s Work* when she is talking about the terrible erotic failures and going on hoping. But I think that has a much wider resonance because I think all our links are to do with desires and elements of co-belonging, finding the way we can appropriately share things with other people where we can work out what we share in common. I think a lot of us have our experience that you start off with lots of good intentions in practical projects and it often runs into the sand on things that appear to be completely trivial. But maybe we need to think more about all that kind of stuff, and it’s also at that point that you might say that there is a profound aesthetic dimension. To be ethical means we are searching for harmony, therefore we are having hope in the possibility of the arrival of harmony. That is where hope, a theological virtue, is ineliminable. If you are merely sticking at the ethical level, there is nothing to ground this hope that coexistence really and truly is possible. Another way of putting this would be to say that notions like the common good and notions like equity depend upon the idea that to some extent we can agree on the common good and we can agree that there is a right way of sharing things out. And yet, there are no formulae for those

things. It is more like an ongoing search for the nature of the common good, and an ongoing search for correct principles of distribution. But if we are going to have faith in that we must somehow believe that reality is such that indeed things can turn out such as to deliver that kind of arrangement. It is there that faith and hope have a terrific role and that they also involve some kind of bet on the nature of reality, and it is at that point that the eschatological horizon and ontological articulation are deeply connected with each other.

I am trying in a way to bring out some of the things that are latent at the end of *Theology and Social Theory* in terms of later developments of that kind of view. So there is both a metaphysical horizon and a meta-historical horizon. I end up trying to begin to redo Augustine, or fill it out in some kind of way, all too briefly and sketchily and the book almost ends in three pages and I finally tired out and gave up. I always intended that bit to be longer but it never was. But in a way the last bit about the Middle Ages in Catherine Pickstock's book *After Writing*, the whole middle section there is very much like an expansion of what I was trying to do in that last section. Well that is probably enough of general comment.

Charles Marsh: Thanks John, terrific. Questions?

Omar McRoberts: Please say a little more about what is unique about this sociological metaphysics that you say is implicit . . .

JM: I think it is something to do with things like Durkheim's social fact. It is the idea that there is something social that you can hypostasize. I think Mauss is much nearer to saying that all dimensions of society have some kind of shared logic, and we can see this more clearly if we look at so called primitive or indigenous societies. In indigenous societies we can see how the religious, the economic, the social, the organization of kinship, the aesthetic, how all these dimensions are really one dimension--and these peoples are much clearer about that than we are and they can see that in a way we can't because we have separated everything out and therefore we are more confused. But I think more that Mauss manages to say that all these dimensions are interlinked. He will talk about the "total social fact" without necessarily picking out the social as some kind of general framework that exists apart from all the psychologies and interaction of those psychologies. In other words he, much less than Durkheim, makes it transcendently prior

to the acting subject. And not only is there a tendency to do that, but there is a tendency in sociology to say there is a kind of *ahistorical* essence of the social. Somebody like Talcott Parsons, for example; it seems that when you get the differentiation of different social spheres, that this is just people getting clearer about things. It is not seen as a historical contingency that people have made these distinctions. It is seen like an unfolding of a flower . . .

OM: But there are also questions within sociology about whether that holds any water . . .

JM: That is why I am trying to . . . obviously, there is also the Weberian model, but that tends to do another kind of hypostatization, *a priori* categories derived in a neo-Kantian way from the perspectives of the individual. Whereas I would want to say that Mauss is nearest to what I want. He is more talking about the interactions between individuals, and he is more talking about a relationality that's irreducible either to the social or to the individual. This may just be a question of terminology. My argument is that the more you do that, the less you are a sociologist in a strict sense, because at that point I agree with Paul Veyne's argument in *Writing History*, where he develops at great length the argument that really once you have a rigorous *histoire totale* there isn't really anything to distinguish history from sociology any longer because *histoire totale* does try to take account of the synchronic and so on. And I suspect that sometimes sociologists are almost outside sociology. I don't want to get too trivial here because this is partly a matter of how one defines things.

My general feeling is that sociology has become something looser, and indeed a lot of people see themselves as doing cultural studies, which is sometimes in some ways retrograde because at least sociologists were trying to look at the big picture and I don't want to knock looking at the big picture. But I think often when people are looking at the big picture they have seen themselves more as doing genealogy in a Nietzschean sense where everything is much more up for grabs, contingency is much more the king in this way of looking at things.

OM: How would you make sense, then, of Peter Berger's and Thomas Luckmann's collaboration on *The Social Construction of Reality*? Would you say that they were sociologists?

JM: Oh they're sociologists in the bad sense of the word. They have bought what I call the liberal modern protestant meta-narrative. Berger is a particularly pure example of that I think . . . Under the guise of sociology he is doing a certain kind of liberal theology, and he gets quite explicit later on. He is the easiest case in a sense. For sure there are harder cases I think than that, but I have been recently challenged as to what I think about new debates on secularization suggesting that we are not so secular as we think. Particularly, and I think most significantly, the people who argue that maybe America is not the exception, that Europe is the exception on the grounds that everybody is religious in America, or many more people are religious and church going, because religion and the churches are not in America associated with political authority and not necessarily so associated with oppression in various ways. It seems to require you to say that this association of religion is not a natural one. But on that kind of argument you would say, well gradually the political authority of religion has faded away in Europe, but there is a terrific hangover of association in peoples minds with the *ancien regime* and so on. Whereas America was founded with people wanting to 'do their own thing' religiously. The most profound assumptions are here completely different.

I think the trouble with this model is it does seem to require one to think that eventually Europe might get religion again, and I just don't know what the statistics are on that. It would require charismatic Christianity to spread through Spain and Italy like wild fire, rather like the way it is doing in Latin America, and I have no knowledge that that kind of thing is going on, but it is not impossible. I don't have any simplistic reaction to all this sort of thing, except obviously to say that I think there are certain crucial ways in which America is nonetheless deeply secularized in terms of the boundary divisions and the way religion tends to be confined to a sort of internal set of attitudes. A lot of people argue that America has a tendency towards Gnosticism, and I don't think that is entirely untrue--that everything to do with the public and the visible is in fact drained of religious significance, and therefore religion is often like a weird kind of secret. The whole of Hollywood is all about spending money, having sex, and being a star, and yet when you go to Beverly Hills in Los Angeles there are these vast churches that a lot of these stars go to. So it is as if they have a secret religious life in which they sign up to all sorts of things. I don't quite understand this kind of thing. Sometimes, maybe particularly in African-American religiosity there is a way in which spirituality and a certain kind of reasonable hedonism coexist in a way that Europeans never did discover. Sometimes America can really

have that positive aspect to it, you know, that you can have God and have fun as well. But more often it works in a very dualistic way.

CM: This is just pointing to a passage on page 422. It is the top paragraph. “The Church while recognizing the tragic necessity of alien external punishment should also seek to be an asylum, a house of refuge from its operations, a social space where different forgiving and restitutionary practices are pursued. This practice should also be atoning, in that we acknowledge that the individual’s sin is never his alone, that its endurance harms us all, and therefore its cancellation is also the responsibility of all. Here we do echo God, not in punishing but in suffering, the duration of the saeculum, the consequences of sin beyond considerations of deserved and undeserved.” I really like that passage. I would like to comment on how lovely the prose is at times. I wanted to ask you a bit more about what the church looks like in its reforming activist mode, and I can think of many examples in the history of Christian resistance to idolatrous social structures, of the way in which, in the American civil rights movement, many Christian communities not only attempted to model in itself, in its inner sense and its practices of Beloved Community, but it also had to go out and challenge racist structures and create strategies for voter registration, and for freedom of speech and the like. And I am just wondering how this model is transformed into that more confrontational model . . .

JM: Yes. Good. I guess I was thinking particularly about the handling of crime, and certainly in 19<sup>th</sup> century England, Christians, and probably particularly evangelicals, were very well to the fore in terms of prison reform. I talk about Pierre Mendes-France earlier in the book, and Mendes-France connected with houses of asylum for prostitutes and other convicted criminals. And he very strongly had this idea that there must be penitence rather than punishment, or beyond punishment there must be penitence. Again, back in England, others were linked to movements for rethinking the nature of prisons and connected with people trying to get inside prisons and try to understand the process of punishment more in medicinal terms, as going through penance and trying to reach transformation. They were, in a way, trying to question the idea that punishment is either utilitarian in its basis, or deontological in its basis. Either it’s a deterrent or it is intrinsically deserved, and they were more trying to talk about punishment as remedy and as good for the person literally. Without saying this, in a sense they were going back

to an Aristotelian medicinal view of punishment, and also a restitutionary view of punishment, that you have to start to put back what you've done wrong . . . that would be more in line with the kind of ethics of virtue approach.

There is probably much much more to be known of practical examples of people who tried to do this sort of thing. I am sure Heather [Warren] probably knows much more about Christian practical involvement in prison reform.

Heather Warren: It came from the United States, particularly in the first part of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. That is why de Tocqueville came here in the first place, to look at prison reform.

JM: Really? I didn't know that . . .

HW: That is because there were two big forms, the Auburn and the Philadelphia, and I forget which one the Quakers were behind, but the whole idea behind the prison reform that the Quakers did was to make people penitent, was to give them an individual cell so that they could contemplate essentially what their sin was and come to a knowledge of their wrong, and then do better. And that was a huge change in prison, actually to have individual cells.

JM: Has anybody done any work on how that interacts with all this so called Panopticon model?

HW: Not that I know of.

JM: Because I suspect someone really needs to qualify a lot of Foucault's work on this sort of thing. It seems to me it doesn't take much account of these kinds of religious movements.

Mark Gornik: Have you ever been to Lincoln Prison?

JM: No. In the castle? I haven't done anything bad enough yet.

MG: In the chapel everybody was brought in individually, put down in a pew and then a wall was moved between you and the next person so you couldn't see anyone else, but you could be seen by the preacher. It is still panopticanic.

JM: It often still is a panoptican because they are trying to discipline the individual. It is a very bad model really.

MG: It seems to me quite easy that this penitential model can easily be co-opted by the state as just a way of disciplining you to accept this social structure.

JM: Well, I think that some of the movements I have been talking about, the evangelical ones were entirely collusive with that. I think that the French one that I am talking about was much more radical in its implications.

MG: Doing that is almost--it's using the states prisons.

JM: Yes, and I wasn't really talking about activities within prisons so much. The practical context of this will probably be something more like post-prison work. My aunt who is about 75 is involved with this practically the whole time. She has dangerous men staying in her house. Her brother, my father, thinks this is crazy, but I try to explain it is what she thinks she's trained to do and be as a Christian. And she always survives . . . How you create an ecclesial space inside the prison space, I don't know. Again, I have a friend who is an Anglican chaplain, and the only people I know who are prison chaplains who are doing their job in any way I would recognize theologically have been kicked out. They are always kicked out.

HW: By the prison authorities?

JM: Yes. This is England . . .

HW: If you've ever been in a prison here you know that even to have access to certain people, you have to somehow give some element of cooperation to the people who run the prisons

because they are controlling it. And it is interesting when you look at groups like Prison Fellowship that Charles Colson runs, it is fellowship, it is not ecclesia in that sense. It is very lay run, it is very local, and it came out of that kind of an organization where there weren't any clergy and it was very site specific. It is interesting in the way that that kind of an organization functions in terms of authority and what ecclesial authority is . . . I can see how that would conflict with prisons.

JM: Do you think the state any longer has any interest in this kind of disciplining people? Because a lot of people argue that nowadays the state doesn't work through disciplining people, instead it just gets people internally to absorb norms of pursuing their own kind of hedonistic interests that keep the system going perfectly well. And I wonder whether maybe there has been a loss of interest in trying to transform the behavior of prisoners in the old sense. If you don't conform you just shut up now and you are just kept in confinement in a fairly bad kind of way.

Amy Laura Hall: Increasingly it is about making money. We have this strange thing of for-profit prisons now so it doesn't really matter what happens as long as we keep them profitable . . .

JM: Yes, exactly, so it has become a market system--they don't even mind that there are prisoners now.

OM: In the beginning of your remarks you spoke rather disparagingly about positivism, which of course does have tons of flaws. On the other hand, in your project to construct a kind of a Christian Sociology you spoke of a need for a pure empiricism . . . so I wonder what that looks like?

JM: I suppose when I said pure empiricism what I really meant was one that more keenly recognizes historical contingencies, and when it does, is more honest about its metaphysical assumptions. I mean, I am not trying to say you can't [have metaphysical assumptions], you *will* have those metaphysical assumptions, but they are not somehow smuggled in as science in some way. You're more honest about your bias and level of commitment--I think that is the point. So I am not really arguing for totally pure empiricism, but there is more continuity between the

Comtean legacy and post-modernism than people realize. It is for sure that people like Gilles Deleuze, when they reject dialectics, are in some sense still the heirs of . . . I mean Deleuze is an heir of Bergson and Bergson is very Comtean in many ways. This whole kind of a difference that is not dialectical has some sort of resonance deep within it that is a French positivist legacy, I think . . .

Steve Fowl: John, isn't there also a sense that the purity comes from an eschatology that gives you a clearer, purer, perception on what's going on around you because you know where it is headed? And isn't this revelation?

JM: Yes. You have to unpack what you mean by revelation, but yes.

OM: It sounds like what you are saying is that this is a kind of grasp of human life and flow of history that isn't somehow limited by positionality in so far as it is connected somehow with eschatology or a sense of the transcendent . . .

JM: Yes definitely, that would all be the case.

OM: But that wouldn't be empirical at all.

JM: No, no, no. But it is also not exactly anti-empirical in that one's concrete sense of those things has to do with the way one has taken/experiences certain facts. Well maybe you can say more about that, Steven.

SF: It is a sort of empiricism in that it is directly observed. It is just directly observed through a particular sort of lens. And so it is a sort of empiricism in that way I guess.

OM: There is a part where you were talking here about Lindbeck . . .

JM: I mean I am not going back on Lindbecks's correct critiques of a certain kind of purist experientialism. I am sure that you shouldn't have a duality of experience and interpretation.

But I think one needs to beware of any kind of idea that we are trapped inside grids that predetermine everything. Sometimes Lindbeck is a bit near to doing that with the Biblical narrative . . . We do have new experiences but they always are also new interpretations in a sense. Yes, empiricism would come in as well in insisting that we are consistently being shown new things. The Incarnation is an event. The work of the Spirit in history is a continuing event, so there is an empiricist element in that, but it is not obviously an empiricism of facts. You know, 'here is a clear isolated little fact.' It is more like an empiricism of phenomena that can't be constrained within any notion of what the basic elements are. But it is not a pure phenomenology even either because I think there is always the question of interpretation. And that is not to say that there is the phenomena and then we interpret it. In interpreting we are going on encountering.

MV: I think you are entirely right about the sociologism . . . there is no question about the fact that there is a kind of metaphysics of presence in sociology in the sense both of either you have a macro perspective where the facts are taken to be outside of social interaction, or you have neo-Kantian/Weberian subjectivism. And this kind of micro/macro tension has always been a problem that has plagued sociology . . . and so I think you are right. But the question is whether this ontologism is an ontologism that is constitutive of human experience? Whereas in a certain sense as Derrida says once we open our mouth we already have inscribed the world ontologically, by trying to deconstruct it we have restarted a narrative that we are trying to deconstruct. And so in a certain sense would it be possible to have a sociology that is . . . modeled trying to explain the social, by the social in the sense that it is just an approach to the world that I wouldn't say privileges, but starts from, a particular set of rules that the sociological community has agreed upon that provide a particular useful tool to understand the world. In other words, is it more of a conversation that is intelligent, that has its own standards of rigor, and that provides a particular input into the world?

JM: OK, what sort of rules would these be?

MV: You know, for example, what counts as a sociological fact would be the fact that there are regularities in the world, that there are distributions of wealth in the world, there are power

concentrations in the world that you need to explain, that you can't just say, 'the world as it exists right now isn't as it should be.' Right?--that you can always historicize the world and basically try to explain it.

JM: Well I think if I was criticizing *Theology and Social Theory* on the sociology chapters now, I would say that one thing it doesn't really deal with is the statistical and probability revolution in the 1840s. In other words, it never addresses the point that people started to become aware that certain moral things had statistical constants. In other words, things like suicide, how many people kill themselves, etc., that you could really see regularities and therefore people started to worry about what this implied for human freedom. And I don't really deal with that debate which I think is actually an important element of the genealogy. I think there would be a way of recognizing that sort of thing because you are saying that there are certain general, structural rhythms, sort of social habits if you like. And I think you can do that without committing what I would call sociologism about some kind of theory of some universal ahistorical essence.

MV: I think the best sociology for my money is the sociology that basically looks at correlations, basically looks at coincidences and convergences and multiple levels of analysis, etc. It is interesting to look at biology, how biology is connected to self . . .

JM: That's right. And I think that at that point you are getting to a point where you are doing what good history should, good ethnography, and you are also not making an absolute division between the biological and the cultural either. But again, I think you can say that such an approach is still committed to something like narrative contingency. Narratives can take account of big constants. They are not necessarily about kings and queens.

Wallace Best: Such a course in sociology, how is it different from history? I mean in so far as it is grounded in a sense of interpretation, the way I hear you. So I am wondering where the distinction would be between the two . . . you alluded to this distinction between sociology and history and this sounds very much like an interpretive history.

MV: It seems to me that that is another essentialism that has plagued sociology: how to explain the synchronic and the diachronic. That is a problem with structuralism. Part of the thing is that it is easy to pick on Durkheim and Comte and Parsons. As Omar was saying, even within sociology, that is the kind of straw man that we always like to kick because now it so connected to ‘empire,’ so connected to Euro-American hegemony . . . In any case, this kind of dichotomy between the synchronic and the diachronic has been disabling . . . And it seems to me that if you understand “social facts” as artifacts [as socially] produced in a kind of flow then the distinction between history and sociology is blurred to a certain extent.

JM: Well, yes. As I have already said, I would tend to argue that the whole post-Michelet *histoire totale* tradition takes into account the more valid side of sociology. In other words it does attend to geography and synchronicity, and it is true that historians have an implicit failing . . . a tendency not to take account of space, and not to take account of simultaneity, etc. The French tradition has always been aware of this. And so I suppose the only kind of synchronicity/structuralism angle I worry about is the Levi-Straussian. In other words, I favor more accounts of simultaneities where you nonetheless see that ultimately that simultaneity is itself contingent. So I guess time wins out on my model in the end, but the alternative seems to be that the ultimate framework is sort of special as if we move through this space that has ultimate determining parameters.

MV: In the end, but I think the attempt is to bridge space and time.

JM: I think it is very Maussian, and I’m not sure that Mauss uses the word *habitus*, but people have pointed out that Mauss already has something a bit like that. Maybe with less of a structuralist bias. But Mauss seems to have been incredibly reluctant to come up with any kind of system.

OM: What exactly do you mean by the deterministic influence of space itself . . . because you could take it to a point where you begin to sound rather Deist, where the universe is just this clock winding down and things just happen and it is over?

JM: Well no, I don't mean it like that at all. It is a way of saying we are not individual actors on a sort of time corridor, but that my actions are always simultaneous with a lot of other actions that are enabling. Like these lights are working because of something somebody else is doing elsewhere. So that there are these special structures of simultaneity and without them life would be a whole lot slower. That is part of the reason why modern life speeds up all the time because more and more we get coordinated simultaneity. And so this is why you can do things at a staggering rate of speed. It is a paradox isn't it that things speed up in time because we have more and more spatialization, more and more control of spatial simultaneity? And that was the only thing. I thought that in *Theology and Social Theory* I didn't really say enough about that, and that would more enable me to extract from the sociological tradition what is of great value within it. I would stress that now.

ALH: I have a question about love . . . when you started out talking about creation, and the gift, and reciprocity, and after the fall that it is not as if everything is coherent. Obviously it is not, there is brokenness, but through the Incarnation we have a hope for affinity and for harmony. And I am fascinated by your pulling in the aesthetic after the ethical. I work on Kierkegaard and I am continually intrigued by your readings of Kierkegaard on this. But I thought maybe one way I could get at my question . . .

JM: I try to read Kierkegaard as an aesthete all the way through. Carry on . . .

ALH: Oh but yes. . . I just. . . I read him so differently . . . I think that aesthetics on the other side of redemption have to be really radically redefined . . . I am not even sure you can use the word Eros after or in the midst of redemption . . .

JM: No, no. I don't like *Works of Love* . . . It is not my favorite book. I like the Kierkegaard of the pseudonymous writings. I think they are more Christian than when he was trying to be Christian. But I seem to be alone in thinking this.

ALH: I read *Works of Love* through the lens of *Repetition* and *Fear and Trembling*. I think it is a much more complex book than this kind of pedantic, 'this is what love looks like.'

JM: No. This is true. Jamie Ferreira has argued this with me and I think in that way that does blunt some of the edge of the apparent sort of sharp Agape and Eros distinction.

ALH: Well you see I think it is sharp. That is where Jamie and I actually differ. I think it sharpens them.

JM: Really? Well that is interesting.

ALH: Well, we could talk about that, but I was actually going to draw on Thomas [Aquinas], and I have not read the new book that you wrote with Catherine Pickstock. But in teaching Thomas on love, in one of the more interesting parts of the *Summa*, I talk to students about how Thomas talks about loving the neighbor. In his discussion of charity proper in the *Summa*, in talking about love of neighbor, he talks about it in terms of commonality, of kinship . . . as you put it, through the incarnation we then have a new kind of affinity with one another.

JM: Yes, this is partly why I am trying to draw out this topic of affinity.

ALH: Yes, yes. I mean it is very Thomistic. But then he has a question on mercy. It is not within the discussion of charity proper but he has a question on mercy. And when he talks about mercy he answers the question of why we should love the sinner differently than when he is talking about charity. When he is talking about charity and he talks about loving the sinner you love the sinner in as much as the sinner is of course even himself related to God, that God is his Father as well. But then when he talks about loving the sinner in his question on mercy. . .

JM: You really have to go round through God to get to the sinner in a very strong way don't you.

ALH: Yes, yes. But in his question on mercy, Thomas, in talking about loving the wicked, talks about a different kind of affinity, the kind of affinity wherein we know ourselves as *also* fallen. So it is not a kinship in terms of our worth within the household of God, but it is a kinship of

knowing ourselves also fallen with the sinners. I don't know if he uses the word vulnerable, but he uses the imagery of being sick, that we know ourselves as also sick, that we know ourselves also as fallen. And he talks about our courage, the kind of courage that goes into being merciful is in recognizing that you yourself are kin to them and that you are fallen. You are willing then to be humiliated with them. You are willing then to be in proximity with those who are fallen. You don't have this false notion of coherence within yourself.

JM: That is very interesting.

ALH: And one of the things that I have been working on is how he construes the love of the giver and the love of the sinner very differently in these two questions, and it gets at how I think I want to struggle with what you are saying of hope and the arrival of harmony, and I am not going to say this very well because I am still working on it, but that when you talked about the Incarnation as that which allows us the hope for harmony, I would want for you to say that the crucifixion allows for our hope in a kind of harmony that ends up looking very different after the kind of incarnation that we get in Christ . . . Let me put it this way: I think that Thomas is right to answer this question in two different ways because I think the tradition is appropriately polyphonic on this. But it is something I worry at times is missing when you talk about beauty or when you talk about the kind of hope that allows for marriage. Does that make some sense?

JM: I think so. You are saying that the reconfiguration via the cross is not there, or is not there enough?

ALH: Let me just put it in terms of this one statement that you made; it's about marriage, that you have to have a hope for harmony so that the difficult details of marriage don't end up breaking you completely apart . . . But another way to look at it is that you acknowledge the effects of the fall in both of you and you are able then not to let those overtake your love, but it would be this kind of affinity that Thomas talks about in his question on mercy rather than the kind of affinity that occurs in this question on charity.

JM: Well, I mean I guess all those things would be important wouldn't they—that it would be the mercy for the fellow sinner, but presumably in appropriating the work of Christ some sort of moving beyond that. But I think what you are probably protesting at would be supposing I was saying (and let's stay with this marriage example), 'Things are not working out, but you know I've got this kind of hope that it could.' Presumably, the hope is much more invested in the very struggle itself. That is much more what I would want to say. But thank you, yes, because I think that really does need to be underlined. Also the assumption is that you are going to have to go through this struggle and . . .

ALH: And it doesn't end!

JM: And it doesn't end.

ALH: But if what you are hoping for is a kind of coherence or harmony, you are not going to get it, you will be sorely disappointed.

JM: I agree with you. I guess if I can put this in historical context, I am probably slightly reacting against the Anglican obsession with tragedy that goes a long way back. And I feel it does come jolly near to undermining Christianity because it seems to say it is more sophisticated to say we never get beyond the cross. And like David Hart, who is with you now at Duke, I am with David here. Maybe I am a bit American about this—perhaps there's some element of shallow optimism, but I don't think it is shallow optimism because what can it mean. There can't be some kind of surd tragic element to the world, it seems to me, without getting into a kind of pagan fatalism. I mean we are really supposed to believe that the providence of God can prevail. We are not supposed to have a shallow view that we will struggle for a while in time and then it will all be alright. But we are supposed to have an eschatological hope and. . .

ALH: Yes, yes, but doesn't it look more like a banquet of a bunch of drooling demoniacs and prostitutes and really short men who crawl up into trees so that they can look bigger? It looks like a really odd configuration. It doesn't look beautiful in the way that we have in Western culture talked about beauty. Absolutely, I want to throw out the tragic, I am with you. But what

is it going to look like? It is going to be something much more . . . we in America have a tradition of the grotesque . . . it is going to look something much more like the grotesque than the coherent.

JM: It is very interesting to introduce that category of the grotesque, isn't it? . . . I think a lot can be done with that because there is a lot of it about, particularly the more Northern Christian art does seem to reckon with this, the sort of Dostoevskyan grotesque, etc. So yes, I agree—and you are trying to say that this is a new kind of beauty after it has been reshaped in a different kind of way.

ALH: Yes, it is a good marriage for example. But a Christian good marriage is going to look very different than . . .

JM: It is the transformation of the wounds rather than simply just the wiping away of them . . .

ALH: Exactly! When he [Jesus] comes back, he's still got them. When he eats fish on the shore, he still has them.

HW: But wouldn't that also be the connection with the atonement?

ALH: Yes.

HW: This is where you get back to the cross, you get beyond it, but you never. . . it teaches you to see. . .

ALH: Right. The resurrection bares the marks of it. And Kierkegaard doesn't have the resurrection. Lindbeck, in reading my book said that it became so clear [to him] that Kierkegaard never gets past the cross. Absolutely. And it is a problem that . . . but I think you have to go through that chastening . . .

JM: These often come down to questions of emphasis. And it may very well be that in this slight worry about the overstress on the tragic, which I think at its worst sounds like, ‘Well, we must come to terms with the fact that all our desires end up being disappointed and are subjective illusions.’ It does seem to me that Christianity does presuppose an account of correct and true desiring, and that these desires are not going to be unfulfilled . . .

JM: This is a question for you now, and back to Aquinas. My assumption tends to be that *Works of Love* doesn’t really have that kind of kinship account of love, and sometimes seems the opposite end of the extreme, when it starts talking about love for the dead being the most genuine kind of love . . .

ALH: I think he is being somewhat comical in that chapter. I think he is being self mocking in some ways . . . and the only people he could love were the people from whom he had distanced himself considerably.

JM: I think that is right, but nowadays people like Levinas, that really does seem to be what they are saying. That you can only love the people with whom you don’t really have a connection.

AHL: Right. I have got your little article from *First Things* and as I go through it, I think, ‘he is arguing with Levinas, but is he arguing with Kierkegaard?’ It’s something I am still trying to work through.

JM: Well, I think it depends how you read Kierkegaard. But you are wanting to say what?--that the Agape/Eros distinction is a very good thing?

ALH: Yes, that the way Kierkegaard makes extreme that distinction is, I think, important. That reading that text is to form in us a kind of humility and a kind of sense of debt that is crucial for being able to love well. But I read him in a very Lutheran way so you’d probably hate it.

JM: Not necessarily

ALH: Stanley [Hauerwas] does.

JM: Remember my *Can Morality be Christian?* article? I am nearer to being sympathetic to Luther than Stanley is.

ALH: Yes, but, for example, the kind of love you would have for someone with whom you were intimate--so a spouse, a child, a close friend--that that kind of love has to be the kind of love that goes through the chastening of this radical Agape. Therefore the friendship, the marriage, the parenting is transformed.

JM: So that would make it more like the usual structure of the suspension of the ethical by the religious and then the return of the ethical but in a transformed manner?

ALH: Yes. It was interesting, in *Stages on Life's Way*, Kierkegaard has the 'diarist, in a section entitled *Guilty?/Not Guilty?* go through this trial . . . and one of the things Kierkegaard is playing with there [through the character of the diarist] is the person himself who is incapable of believing that forgiveness is possible, who is incapable of expecting reconciliation. And so I think that even in Kierkegaard's texts, spelling out the tragic is crucial because if you stay within the tragic then you will just keep attempting to determine guilt or innocence [thus the title of the section]. Instead you have to disclose yourself and be forgiven, believe that forgiveness is possible.

JM: Instead of what?

ALH: Instead of what he calls the demonic, of continually being obsessed with one's own guilt.

JM: Yes.

ALH: And being obsessed with one's own iniquitous desires.

JM: Yes, I agree with you that that suggests how Kierkegaard would be very critical of complete tragic obsession. It would be to remain stuck in melancholia . . .

ALH: Yes! And he doesn't want us to stay there--even if *he* was incapable of [going] beyond it, he doesn't want *us* to stay there.

JM: No, I really agree with all that.

ALH: Thank y'all for indulging.

CM: We have six or eight minutes. If you don't mind I have one further question. I don't know if you have seen this book? It is by an historian named Eugene McCarragher. It is called *Christian Critics: Religion and the Impasse in Modern American Social Thought*. Very interesting . . . it is kind of a political and social history of American theology in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and he explores how it was that several generations of theologians shaped by the liberal/ neo-orthodox divide in America in various periods both managed to oppose racism and to give support to labor movements, and movements for women's liberation and the like, and at the same time unwittingly legitimated the military industrial complex or the professional managerial class as the dominant national force in the United States, and the final chapter, the Epilogue, is a pointing beyond, and McCarragher mentions in this final section one of the most promising new movements as Radical Orthodoxy. And I thought I would just read a paragraph and see if you could respond to that . . .

JM: Well, I like this book. [laughter]

CM: Don't get too hopeful, there are some caveats. He says:

“More promising perhaps will be the search among a growing number of Anglo-American religious intellectuals for a renewal of church that resurrects the largest ambitions and quandaries of the Christian critical tradition. ‘The Church does not have a social ethic,’”

Sound familiar?

“. . . as one of the more acerbic of their number writes, ‘the church is a social ethic.’ The Church is a polis and in their view a community, with a distinctive way of life, hence a distinctive politics and culture. Recalling the black international envisioned by H. Richard Niebuhr, the personalist cells of good living, and the base communities lauded by liberation theologians, the partisans of radical orthodoxy see the Church as a disciplined historical agent on an emancipatory mission, a cosmopolitan movement that does not acknowledge nation, race, gender, or class as the ultimate ground of identity. Building the beloved communities demanded by orthodox radicals is made, however, all the more difficult by the separation of religious intellectuals from their brethren, a gulf that covers much the same distance between secular left academics and their potential publics. As Leon Fink writes, “Intellectuals have trouble dislodging themselves from their own sheltered purchase to make honest, let alone efficacious contact with the world of ordinary citizens.” Along with their secular counterparts most of the critical religious intelligentsia work as symbolic professionals of post-Fordist capitalism, teaching in universities or seminaries, writing primarily for academic readers, and attending conferences in agreeable and occasionally sumptuous settings.”

[Laughter]

“They live the lives of mobile, harried, e-mail deluged professionals whose commitments curtail the time and labor available for a religious popular front. At the same time, the proliferation of theologies, liberation theologies based on sexuality, race, or gender as well as post-liberalism, or radical orthodoxy parallels the creative and debilitating multiplication of identity politics; besides, all of these approaches remain concentrated in the academy with only the most diluted impact in the pulpits or the pews.”

I was just wondering what your thought is . . . ?

JM: I think this is a fair comment. I mean I do think I feel that radical orthodoxy is the furthest removed from the identity politics of such people because I think it aspires to have a more comprehensive agenda. I don’t know. I mean Wells Cathedral organized a series called *Is Radicalism Orthodox?* and they had an amazingly large turn-out--it was not a working class audience, but it was not an audience mainly composed of academics,<sup>1</sup> and you have to remember in Britain in any case that it is almost an inverse image of America, that almost all less educated people are not in the churches anyway, and that it is much more of the professions that are represented. In some ways I think this is unlike America.

I mean there are some signs of interest in the church. I am not completely sure what to say. The trouble has been that people in post-liberalism and radical orthodoxy, all these sorts of movements, have been terribly focused on the idea of the monopoly of the enlightenment

accounts and are dislodging the necessary legitimacy of that. And I do think that that is a very very important task and that one should keep at that task because the academy will ultimately exercise some kind of influence and it is more shaking of the academy that is probably required. Particularly shaking the dominance of the assumption that natural science is telling the big truth. And that front will be very important. If you really in the end started to transform the academic culture, I don't think it would be anything just happening in an ivory tower. But that, of course, raises the very complicated question of, well why did secularization occur, it didn't just occur at the level of ideas. I tend to agree with Ezra Pound when he said something like, "it arose because money started to dominate." That it goes along with the commercialization of the world. So that I don't think that only an intellectual strategy would work. You would have to try concurrently to develop different practices and the two things would have to fertilize each other. And it is here that things get so difficult, what truly radical practices would the churches now try to get involved in? Because there seems to be so little room for purchase the way things are set up at the moment. We seem so deadlocked into what some people call the American empire; where exactly is going to be the room to maneuver?

Maybe the answer really is that churches need to start thinking in terms of creating alternative community spaces at an almost micro level. But then the issue becomes: do you abandon the macro political level as well? This is the issue facing a lot of people nowadays I think: with globalization do you develop global strategies or local strategies? I think the answer must somehow be neither the one nor the other, or neither exclusively. It is very hard to know where there is some more general political movement that you could tie yourself to or feel you could to some extent espouse in the way there was with certain forms of socialism and social democracy in Europe. There were movements, the less massively Marxist and atheist, large sections of the church could broadly speaking espouse and feel they were going somewhere. It is today extremely difficult to think that there is such a movement that is really aspiring to make any real difference to anything. Maybe green parties would be one question the church is going to have to ask themselves, but you are often confronted there with a relatively limited agenda or a diagnosis that you may in some ways want to question and you might feel worried about making ecology the center of the whole thing. And yet it is probably those parties that are the nearest to raising the kind of questions that we would want to raise. And incidentally I don't

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<sup>1</sup> Wells is one of the most popular destinations for retired clergy in the UK!

blame Ralph Nader for organizing a party, it is not his fault, it is unfortunate that it spoiled Al Gore's chances, but you can't really blame him. He probably feels the long-term stakes are too high. He is very easily condemned by everybody, but I don't know whether other people have ideas on all that kind of front.

WB: I think I've got a question, I don't know if I'll be able to get it out quite right, but it seems like. . . it's just in the statement that was read from *Christian Critics* here and apropos of the way radical orthodoxy seems to transcend or dismantle boundaries of faith and class. This is happening at precisely a moment when multi-culturalism . . . Who is "we" in radical orthodoxy? How are you constructing the "we"?

JM: Yes, well I mean I assume we're just seeing it as a Christian "we." I would see some connections here with the more valid part of Hardt's book *Empire* where they really slate cultural studies and suggest that while there had to be very particularist considerations of race issues, gender issues, all the rest of it, it is really now got to the point that there isn't any radicalism because nobody's making the links and seeing how all these things connect up and seeing the big picture in the way that things like Marxism once attempted to do. So I don't feel very apologetic about trying to see the big picture or of aspiring to have an identity that transcends.

WB: So do you see it as a call for inclusiveness in the construction of. . .

JM: Yes. It needs for certain for there to be people working within this perspective on race and gender issues, and I think Jay Carter at Duke, it seems to me, is trying to do something like a radical orthodox take on a lot of race issues. The way, for example, he is trying to, I think quite brilliantly, deconstruct Kant in terms of Kant's racial geography and to show how even the critical term is somehow bound up with a kind of racist geography. It is really quite amazing. And the way he is making links between some of the slave theologians and the Eastern Orthodox perspective, suggesting there are deep affinities in here in the eschatological and deification stresses, that they took these slave theologies clean out of the Protestant framework in which they had been taught. They just foresaw this almost by reading the scriptures for themselves, it

just leapt out at them. And that is really exciting work and more promising probably than some of the ethnic theologies we have had so far.

ALH: One of the things that is going to happen at Duke is Emmanuel [unintelligible], a friend of Stanley Hauerwas', is coming to teach at Duke and he is trying to work off of your work and Stanley's work in the African context . . .

JM – Gosh! I hasten to say that there isn't really some kind of institutional movement of which I am the organizer or anything like that so. . . you know . . . it is not like that.

AHM: It is not a supportable club, I know that.

JM: Absolutely not, it is just a very loose tendency which still. . . the boundaries are quite properly inchoate, and I keep saying to people, it wouldn't surprise me at all if in 5 years time we are not talking about the same kind of group. It doesn't really matter. Something more comprehensive may emerge. But this is great if there are . . . but it is not up to me to say this is relevant in Africa. If somebody finds it so, I am overjoyed.

CM: I would say too just by way of wrapping up if that is OK, that in the American church scene right now there is a movement called loosely the Christian Community Development movement where these kinds of counter-ontologies, counter-ethics, are embodied and performed in the creation of intentional communities. Some of these are in urban settings, some are in rural settings, alternative Christian communities. Extraordinarily rich material for grounding some of your work in particular examples.

JM: Well I need to find out more about what's going on.

CM: Here is a nine-minute tape [proffers the tape] . . .

CM: It is a nine-minute introduction to one community we looked at this morning in Baltimore. So just take that and when you finish looking at it . . .

ALH: Could we give him the flyers too?

CM: Yes, there is a flyer for that. There are so many interesting parallels between your work and this community.

JM: Well I think a better answer to your question might be that we need more interactions set up between these people working at the practical level and others like the people in this room . . .

CM: That's what we will be doing here in the project for sure. John thanks so much for coming out.