To Enchant or Disenchant? A Plea for Ambiguity in the Contrasting Musical Ontologies of Slavoj Žižek and John Milbank

BRIAN D. ROBINETTE

Saint Louis University

If Jean-François Lyotard famously described the postmodern condition as incredulity towards metanarratives, the projects of Slavoj Žižek and John Milbank might well be described as metanarrative's revenge. *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?* is nothing if not a shootout between dueling genealogists.[1] Indeed, the pairing of Žižek and Milbank in this co-authored volume seems wholly fitting, almost inevitable, if at times insufferable. Granted the intellectually intoxicating quality of the contest, one cannot help but sense that what most unites them in their densely elaborate exegeses of Eckhart, Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Chesterton, Lacan, Deleuze, and Badiou – among many others – is their relentless determination to exhaust and finally dominate the opponent. It is perhaps not a fit of histrionics that compels Creston Davis to declare in his introduction that the encounter staged here is "the intellectual equivalent of Ultimate Fighting" (19). The satisfaction derived from such blood sport will in some measure depend upon the reader's appetite. It may be, however, that a reader less moved by such "titanic" styles of thought will look for ways to bring mediating finesse to coarse opposition, or at the very least seek out ambiguity and permeability between positions that in the thick of battle seems all too fleeting.

In his spirited response to Milbank's only (though quite lengthy) essay, Žižek attempts to clarify and sharpen the nature of their debate – a debate which, Žižek confesses, looks more like a sequence of monologues than a genuine point-counterpoint (235).[2] The principle issue at stake, declares the Slovenian philosopher, is not merely that one believes in a transcendent, creator God while the other takes the "death of God" with unflinching, metaphysical seriousness. Nor is it that one advocates an analogical mode of thought as superior to a dialectical mode in the task of theology. (Žižek fully embraces the work of theology precisely as a radical materialist-atheist and is far more willing to take on its doctrinal content than many postmodern theologians, whom he routinely accuses of cynical obfuscation.) Push come to shove, the difference between them can be expressed in this way: whether we can, or should, declare that life has transcendent *meaning*, i.e., whether life in this "out-of-joint" universe can be considered "whole," whether it makes some ultimate, even if hidden, "sense." It is a matter of ontology as much as it is question about the "modern disenchantment of the world."

Appealing to Jacques Lacan's view of religion as drowning the world in sense, and thus congenitally prone to domesticating "the Real" – Lacan viewed psychoanalysis as

squarely opposed to the all-too-human tendency to mask the constitutive Void at the heart of desire – Žižek declares that we must renounce the effort to re-enchant the world and instead follow the modern forces of disenchantment all the way down, follow them to their bitterest end, and accept with honesty (and not a little humor) that our symptoms admit of no final cure. To follow such a path is, Žižek argues, to opt for a direction diametrically opposed from the one Milbank would lead us on. It is a path that, rather than yearning with nostalgia for a harmonious order of being, a world dripping with "juicy sense," to borrow again from Lacan, chooses to accept the desert of the Real as the first step towards discovering the truth about ourselves. Such a path represents the true legacy of Christianity, a legacy whose founding moment is and remains Jesus' cry of dereliction from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Against Milbank's "neo-pagan" effort to re-enchant the universe with a quaint ontology, which only serves to frame his genealogy of modernity as the story of a "fall," Žižek proposes a more radically Christian enterprise that can be named so, not despite his atheistic materialism, but precisely because of it. The de-sacralizing impact of modernity is not a "fall" but a moment we must pass through and radicalize. "So while Milbank advocates a post-secular re-enchantment of reality," writes Žižek, "I claim that we should learn to 'live in a disenchanted world without wanting to re-enchant it'" (247).

Milbank, for his part, thinks his opponent's Hegel-fueled materialism is not just a piece of heterodoxy; it's hopelessly drab. Whereas a Catholic metaphysics "achieves a materialism in a joyful, positive sense," Žižek's atheism "achieves only a sad, resigned materialism which appears to suppose that matter is quite as boring as the most extreme of idealists might suppose" (125). Milbank wonders how genuine love, whether agapeic or erotic, is possible in a "disenchanted cosmos" (123). Indeed, once we imagine human desire as hollowed out by an infinitely yawning Void that promises nothing but the hell of interminable dissatisfaction; or once we replace a "Catholic" metaphysics of participation with the "Protestant" metaphysics of dialectic, which only devalues the sacramental-aesthetic character of being; or once we affirm modernity as a necessary moment in the historical itinerary of world spirit that only comes to itself through self-alienation, which would give priority to ontological violence over eschatological peace (didn't Heraclitus declare war as the "father of all," and didn't Hegel boast that not a single fragment of this pagan master was left out of his system?): once we've entertained and embraced all this, can we finally say that life is worth bearing, much less a gift, or worthy of social and political redemption? "Must we be confined within this Protestant, Jansenist, and totalitarian gloom?" Milbank asks. "Or can an alternative Catholic metanarrative be sustained by both the metaphysical plausibility of the Catholic outlook and its fidelity to the core of Christian doctrine" (131)?

As both Žižek and Milbank are only too willing to acknowledge, their views about the origins, history, and legacy of "disenchantment" (*Entzauberung*) – a term first made prominent by Max Weber to describe the way modernity progressively purges the pre-

modern cosmos of "sacrality" – are thoroughly shaped by their ontological commitments. Perhaps without too much distortion those commitments can be summarized as follows: whereas Milbank envisions being in terms of "original peace," as freely imparted by a triune God in whose infinite, and infinitely pacific, relations creation "participates," Žižek argues for what he describes as the "ontological incompleteness of reality," a view of being in terms of rupture and instability, a "being thrown" (in an expanded Heideggerian sense to include the whole universe), a sprawling multiplicity that can neither lay claim to an anterior peace nor expect some eschatological *dénouement* in which all discordant pieces will be made to fit, i.e., "make sense." This is why Lacan saw a "life-and-death struggle" between religion and psychoanalysis (241): the former posits some "big Other" that can guarantee meaning through the promise of human desire's fulfillment, whereas the latter, while recognizing that such desire cannot finally be extirpated, resists and critiques the fantasy of wholeness and allows the trauma of our primal alienation to remain uncovered. Understood thusly, the difference between religion and psychoanalysis cannot be reduced simply to whether one believes in God; for it is quite possible to operate with an implicit ontology that valorizes "harmony" and "balance," yet without making any explicit theistic or atheistic claim. Žižek regularly cites in his writings the modern ecological movement, New Age movements, and Western appropriations of Buddhism as illustrations of late modern nostalgia. In their different ways, whether by romancing the "balance of nature" or through meditative techniques of "letting go," aspirants can soften the trauma of the Real – and meanwhile inure themselves from the disorienting effects of modern technological society and global capitalism.

To say more about ontological commitments, and their role in shaping assessments of modern disenchantment, it might be useful to invoke a few musical references. To do so is hardly beside the point, despite the fact that music is not much discussed in *The Monstrosity of Christ*. (Žižek dedicates a section of his first essay to Richard Wagner, but it is the composer's plays and librettos that preoccupy him.) Žižek drops a musical allusion early on in his first essay that is especially suggestive. It is in reference to the so-called "Pittsburgh Hegelians," a recent North American retrieval of Hegel's philosophy that engages his dialectical logic to elaborate theories about discourse and argumentation. Žižek complains that such a movement would slay the "scarecrow image" of Hegel as thinker of the Absolute by separating his ontological commitments from his logic. It is Hegel's procedure, not the content of his metaphysics, that interests them – and which might render him "safe." The problem with this sanitizing effort is that it dismisses outright the epochal character of his work, which, willy-nilly, casts everything in a different light after him. To be a Hegelian, without undergoing along with him the "breakthrough into a unique dimension of thought," is to feign innocence. The effort would be like writing tonal music after Arnold Schoenberg's atonal revolution (26).[3]

Žižek's throwaway reference to early twentieth century atonal music – as the end of musical innocence – might seem unworthy of lingering over were it not for the fact that Milbank's ontology is so characteristically Baroque. Those familiar with Milbank's work will likely recall the role Augustine's *De Musica* plays in his *Theology and Social Theory*, as well as his early programmatic essay, "Postmodern Critical Augustinianism: A Short *Summa* in Forty-two Responses to Unasked Questions."[4] In the latter piece Milbank sketches an ontology that accounts for the "differential flux" of creation in terms of harmony. The doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* means that being is suspended between nothing and infinity – "a reality without substance, composed of only relational differences and ceaseless alterations" (267). It is just this "being suspended" that Milbank elaborates quite at length in *The Monstrosity of Christ*, and in conversation with William Desmond's philosophy of the "between" (or *metaxu*) of being. (More on Desmond later.) On its face this differential flux of creation seems rambling and cacophonous, perhaps indistinguishable (musically speaking) from atonal serialism, which organizes sound by working through all twelve tones in the chromatic scale before one tone is repeated – a compositional process that effectively dismantles all "classical" canons of tonality and harmony. But this is not to Milbank's tastes, nor is it consistent with a Christian ontology that embraces the serializing differences of creation as a dynamic openness to polyphonic reciprocity, i.e., the "body of Christ" (268). To say as much does not imply that creation is a closed system. Milbank very much wishes to affirm an open ontology, even to the point of coming near to some postmodern accounts of differential flux. And yet a Christian ontology would internalize and redeem postmodern equivocity by showing how the differences *in* creation, no less than the difference *of* creation from God (*ex nihilo*), participate and share in God's own pacific relationality. Such an ontology is redemptive since it affirms "difference" as originally given in peace, as gift, and as open to an eschatological reconciliation yet to come. It is difference, after all, that allows for harmonic relationships to take shape. Though created differences may (and frequently do) produce conflict and violence, such amounts to a diminution or privation of being, which is how Milbank, in Augustinian fashion, characterizes evil: as a "fall" from the primordial peace of a triune God who at once is infinite relationship and perfect unity. Violence, on such a view, might be thought of as "an unnecessarily jarring note, a note wrong because 'out of place', or else the premature ending of a development" (268). By saying "unnecessary" Milbank means that conflict is not constitutive of being (as Žižek's ontologizing of the negative would have it) but instead a contingent happening that is parasitical upon a prior good. That violence and conflict exist, there can be no doubt. That violence and conflict *must be*; this is what a Christian ontology denies by describing it as "fallen."

In the conclusion of his *Theology and Social Theory*, Milbank puts the matter this way: "The harmony of the Trinity is not the harmony of a finished totality but a 'musical' harmony of infinity" (424). There is, he declares, "something 'Baroque'" about such a

view, aesthetically speaking, and "in contradistinction to both the antique-classical and the modern avant-garde. In Baroque music, the individual lines become increasingly distinct and individually ornamented; there is an increasing 'delay' of resolutions, and an increasing generation of new developments out of temporary resolutions." Such temporal delays and spatial differences entail a fluidity and openness that allow for the surprise of contrapuntal interplay; and though it may seem that the interplay is on the verge of careening out of control as the possibilities of consonance are stretched to their outermost limits, "yet the path of dissonance is not embarked upon" (428).[5]

Of course, it is the "path of dissonance" that is the very stuff of Schoenberg's atonal revolution, which is why Žižek's reference to it as a loss of musical innocence is so suggestive when characterizing the legacy of thought after Hegel. His point is obviously not to compare Schoenberg to Hegel, as though the latter's philosophy in some way "sounds like" the early twentieth century composer's music, but to describe the game-changing significance of situating dialectical difference (rather than harmonic coincidence) at the heart of the philosophical enterprise. Neither is this to say, incidentally, that Žižek slavishly follows Hegel, any more than he mindlessly parrots Lacan or Marx; for how else could we explain the sometimes-ferocious opposition to Žižek from those who lay claim to greater interpretive fidelity?[6] In any case, Žižek's ontology is very far from the Baroque sensibilities of Milbank. It is not as though Žižek is unwilling to grant something of the "spiritual authenticity" of Milbank's vision, which has as its premise "the beauty of an order mysteriously emanating from its unknowable center" (248). This is indeed one of the most basic insights of positive religion – that our "commonsense reality is not the true one," that there is a "higher order" that casts into question mundane appearances (240). But if positive religion would make the world of common sense problematic in some way, it finally undermines the insight by promising a final reconciliation for all the world's loose ends. It covers over the traumatic gap at the heart of fidgety human desire, i.e., our non-self-coincidence, by assuring us of a wholeness (or *pleroma*) yet to come. Religion is fabulously effective in the effort to enchant because it *identifies while repressing* the symptom. It detects the disturbing non-sense that resists our best efforts at present harmonization only to re-contextualize it by some hidden, transcendental sphere of meaning. "Religion is made to do this," says Lacan, "to cure people, that is to say, to make it sure that they do not note what doesn't go smoothly."[7]

It is just the "smoothness" of Milbank's ontology (despite the hardness of his opposition) that Žižek finds so objectionable, and indeed un-Christian. Never mind that Christianity is typically regarded as a species of religion. Žižek thinks of genuine Christianity less as a religion in this sense and more as "the religion of the end of religion," to borrow a phrase from Marcel Gauchet.[8] Christianity is the religion of "the death of God," and as such must be thought of as leading to the (apocalyptic) undoing of religion itself (260–8). By identifying God precisely where alienation from God is at its

most extreme – the dialectical logic of Jesus' cry of abandonment implies that God *is* where God most *is not*, or that God is alienated from God's self – Christian faith exposes a rupture in the fabric of being that not even the most elastic application of the *analogia entis* can hope to repair. Whereas Milbank would take safe harbor in the Chalcedonian formula that affirms Christ as God *and* human in paradoxical unity, which he believes underwrites the medieval Catholic "synthesis" of matter and spirit (as well as reason and faith), Žižek opts instead for a Hegelian (or "radical Protestant") trajectory that situates these terms in dialectical opposition, with the effect that Christ is seen, not as the earthly "manifestation" of an absolute, invisible transcendence that remains self-subsistently in reserve, but as the absolute *kenosis* of God in which divinity is at last emptied of all content. The death of Jesus does not mean that once there was a transcendent God and now there isn't; it means that there never was a transcendent God who might rescue this "miserable individual, this ridiculous and derided clown-king" from the horror of the cross – and now we have no way to avoid this monstrous truth (80).

"A truly logical materialism accepts the basic insight of religion," writes Žižek, "its premise that our commonsense reality is not the true one; what it rejects is the conclusion that, therefore, there must be another, 'higher', suprasensible reality. Commonsense realism, positive religion, and materialism thus form a Hegelian triad" (240). Put with such economy, it is not difficult to see why Milbank accuses Žižek of reading the history of thought as a "series of ineluctable advances" leading finally to the "voluntarist disenchantment of the cosmos" (115). Though Žižek vigorously denies the charge that he reads history as in any way a "necessary" process, Milbank is quite right to urge a reading of nascent modernity with far greater sensitivity to historical contingency than Žižek seems to allow. Of course, such urging also applies to Milbank's own genealogical effort, which at times appears equally reductive.

One thinks especially in this regard of the detailed and remarkably nuanced account of modern disenchantment provided by Charles Taylor in his *A Secular Age*.[9] What makes Taylor's presentation a helpful intervention here, at least potentially, is its success in demonstrating that any attempt to comprehend the relationship between late-medieval reform movements and modern secularization will not easily yield to a narrative of decline or ascent. Only with a painstaking "zig-zag" account, as Taylor puts it, will we be able to make much sense of the many passages to modernity and postmodernity; and even then only the most tentative conclusions can be reached, given the emergent complexity and frequently ironic mutations that inflate the "expanding universe of disbelief," which Taylor also describes as a historical "nova effect" (299-419). The effort to discern the connective tissues between the pre-modern "cosmos" and the modern (and postmodern) "universe" requires a patient eye for granularity that big-picture accounts too often simplify or distort. There are the many proximate factors that contribute to this shift, naturally, including a growing "this-worldly" orientation in popular devotional practices, increased emphasis on interiority, the "democratizing" instincts of late-medieval

mysticism, the flourishing of courtly love traditions, renewed interests in classical literature and rhetoric, the growing influence of nominalist realism and technical reason, and the hardening conflicts between ecclesial and temporal power that set the stage for dramatic realignments. But there are the more tectonic forces of a de-sacralizing sort that run very deep in Jewish and Christian self-understanding, and which therefore require us to assess modern disenchantment as an ambiguous achievement *of* that self-understanding. Taylor points for example to the deep "Abrahamic unease" with sacral kingship (to borrow a phrase from Francis Oakley[10]), the legacy of creation *ex nihilo* (which views the world as "wholly other" to God, yet sustained by divine will), the anthropological significance of the *imago dei* traditions, the incarnational imagination that gave earthly "grip" to spiritual aspiration, the extension of ascetical regimes to society, and the universalizing impulses of apostolic mission: in these and many other ways we can identify structural patterns that, while not leading ineluctably to the modern sense of worldly "immanence," are unmistakably involved in its formation.

Although Taylor is certainly willing to risk generalized assessments, the overall impression when reading his account, especially in light of the encounter between Žižek and Milbank, is that, while a debate may genuinely be had over the nature and ongoing significance of modern disenchantment, adequate comprehension of the complexity involved is not best served by viewing it through the scopes of polemically-shaped metanarratives, especially those as narrow as a "Catholic" versus "Protestant." It is not as though Žižek and Milbank provide no historical insight, of course; and surely the sort of detail and shade offered by Taylor is not news to them. (Milbank cites Taylor, in fact, and Taylor himself acknowledges a debt to Milbank.) Yet their readings of the history of theology, governed as they are by their sharply contrasting ontologies, do not often permit them to offer the tentative and conciliatory gestures that a more dialogically-shaped engagement is likelier to produce. And so a plea: Is it possible to acknowledge greater ambiguity in historical assessment where excessive clarity dominates? Or, to put it in the terms frequently used in *The Monstrosity of Christ*, is there more room for equivocity where interpretive univocity tends to crowd?

Which brings me to my second and final plea for mediation. It is a great strength of Milbank's essay that he enlists the philosophical work of William Desmond[11] in support of his claim that "metaxalogical" thinking provides a richer and more generous account of being than does univocal thought (which we might associate with nominalism), equivocal thought (which we might associate with many postmodern modern accounts of difference), and dialectical thought (which obviously aligns with Hegel and Žižek, [131–60]). Though Milbank has long championed a "metaphysics of participation" as the appropriate philosophical-theological response to modern univocity and postmodern equivocity, with the *Monstrosity of Christ* serving now as his most extended engagement with Žižek's self-described "postmetaphysical idealism" (91), Desmond's work allows him the opportunity to clarify and flesh out how the "between" (or *metaxu*) of being is

most richly accounted for through analogical thinking because, among other things, it accords a legitimate place for univocal, equivocal, and dialectical aspects of reality without reducing to the sum of them (166). The generosity of such a view (as well as its rigor) is on open display throughout the whole of Desmond's stunning work, and not least in his handling of Hegel, on whose thought he is a widely acknowledged authority. It is precisely the subtlety of Desmond's work, however, that may lead those familiar with and appreciative of it to be disappointed in Milbank's comparative lack of subtlety when treating of those very aspects. By so thoroughly opposing paradox to dialectic as an either/or proposition, which the mimetic doubling of the debate seems to require, the capaciousness and "finesse" of analogical thinking (as Desmond frequently puts it) becomes constrained and unnecessarily defensive, at times overly systematized and self-confident in ways that make it vulnerable to Žižek's charges of nostalgic insularity. This is perhaps nowhere more evident than in Milbank's tone deafness to the trauma of the cross.

When Žižek accuses Milbank of a "regression to paganism," what he means is that his musical ontology sounds strangely innocent of the shocking dissonance of Jesus' crucifixion (248). "In Hegelese, Milbank's vision remains that of a substantial immediate harmony of Being; there is no place in it for the outburst of radical negativity, for the full impact of the shattering news that 'God is dead'" (249). What ontological whole, Žižek asks, could possibly justify the historical disasters that Jesus' crucifixion so horrifically typifies? What invisible harmony, what teleological outcome could make "juicy sense" of, or finally redeem, the Holocaust, the recent slaughters in Congo, the AIDS epidemic, or ecological devastation (53–55)? "Christ's death on the Cross thus means that we should immediately ditch the notion of God as a transcendent caretaker who guarantees the happy outcome of our acts, the guarantee of historical teleology – Christ's death on the Cross is the death of *this* God, it repeats Job's stance, it refuses any 'deeper meaning' that obfuscates the brutal reality of historical catastrophes" (55). It is with statements like these that the reader is made to understand that when Žižek declares the universe as "ontologically incomplete" and "originally out-of-joint," it is not just the heady brew of Hegelian dialectic, quantum mechanics, and Alain Badiou's use of Cantorian set theory that is talking (90–101); it is also a protest to the scandal of evil, and the greater scandal of its domestication through enchantment.

It may well be that readers who do not find Žižek's manner of ontologizing the negative especially convincing will nevertheless find his commentary on Job and the crucified Christ among the most gripping and challenging pages of the entire volume. If those same readers are, like myself, far more inclined towards to the sort of analogical thinking that funds Milbank's incarnational materialism, and which looks to the paradox of Christ as the "*infinite* particular" or the "concrete universal" (187), they will likely have hoped for a more thorough and humble engagement with the disturbing reality of evil and suffering than Milbank provides. Readers may justifiably be troubled with

Žižek's own approach to evil, which, as Milbank points out, incorporates several gnostic motifs. (Witness Žižek's reading of the Void and desire's tragic lack through what Cyril O'Regan calls the "haunted narrative" of Jacob Boehme[13], which Hegel also incorporated [41–2; 111–12; 194–6].) And yet those same readers may be disappointed that Milbank's basic reply is to declare theodicy only "a modern project, mostly unknown to the Middle Ages […] For that epoch, as for the earlier Patristic one, evil was the 'impossible' denial of one's loyalty to the all, to being as such. It was an act of privation and of self-deprivation – a matter of trying absurdly to be less than one really is. Evil therefore had no ontological status, and in consequence did not need to be explained" (196). To declare evil of "privation" of the good may not be inappropriate when properly understood; and, indeed, it may itself reflect a hopeful protest against (and not merely a rationalization of) its reality in a way that stimulates ardent action for its overcoming, to the extent this is possible for us here in "the between." But the sort of response Milbank offers here, namely, to summarily declare it without ontological status on account of the plenitudinous goodness of being, neither does justice to the lived reality of evil in its disturbing equivocity nor to the scandal of the crucified Christ that the very incarnational materialism of Milbank demands. It will not due to turn up the volume on a Bach cantata to drown out the wails of Penderecki's threnody, or to characterize the gravelly, dolorous growls of Blind Willie Johnson as the privation of Claudio Monteverdi's vespers. "An outcry from the stricken soul," writes Desmond, "a rasping plea: we do not know what evil means at all, what it all means – this is what the stutter says, and perhaps the sleek argument too."[14] As Desmond is careful to show, a more comprehensive and finessed account of the "betweenness" of being will expose itself to the equivocity of evil, its many meanings, its baffling resistance to meaning, and the "primordial strain" its power places on "any naïve faith in the goodness of being itself" (79). Such exposure in the *passio essendi* need not render faith in the created goodness of being a matter of willful ignorance, much less the "soft-Fascist" ideology that Žižek attributes to it (250). But it will give added poignancy to Jesus' apocalyptic cry of dereliction that invites us to imagine how precisely *in* our suffering and exposure to evil we "participate" in the trinitarian life of God.

Notes

1.   Slavoj Žižek and John Milbank, *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?* ed. Creston Davis (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2009).
2.   An assessment only confirmed by their post-publication responses (see Milbank, "Without Heaven There is Only Hell on Earth: 15 Verdicts on Žižek's Response," *Political Theology* 11.1 (2010): 126–35; Žižek, "The Atheist Wager," *Political Theology* 11.1 (2010): 136–40.).
3.   Žižek makes clear that the "breakthrough" achieved by Hegel cannot itself simply be accounted for in Hegelian terms. Hegel is "the last of the idealist metaphysicians and the

first of the postmetaphysical historicists," which means that Hegel's thought is more properly fulfilled when passed through (26–7).

4. John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1990); "Postmodern Critical Augustinianism: A Short *Summa* in Forty-two Responses to Unasked Questions," in *The Postmodern God: A Theological Reader*, ed. Graham Ward, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 265–78.

5. Compare to the striking assessment given by David Bentley Hart, Milbank's best known student: "Bach is the greatest of Christian theologians, the most inspired witness to the *ordo amoris* in the fabric of being; not only is no other composer capable of more freely developing lines or of more elaborate structures of tonal mediation (wheresoever the line goes, Bach is also there), but no one as compellingly demonstrates that the infinite is beauty and that beauty is infinite. […] Bach's is the ultimate Christian music; it reflects as no other human artifact ever has or could the Christian vision of creation" (*The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 282–3).

6. It is worth noting that for as much as Milbank and Žižek dispute each other's readings of Chesterton, Kierkegaard, and Eckhart, with Milbank dedicating an inordinate amount of space in his essay to reclaim the "hyperbolic orthodoxy" of the Meister – and with somewhat uneven results – Milbank declares Žižek to be a "relentlessly accurate interpreter" of Hegel, who, he hastens to add, was "already a Christian nihilist and 'atheist'" (112). One wonders whether Milbank's eagerness to push Hegel into Žižek's corner too readily serves the tactical purpose of treating them with minimal discrimination. Might there be greater space between Hegel and Žižek than is here supposed? Without venturing a reply here, the effort to determine the suitability of this nihilist-atheist reading of Hegel might profitably be served by interacting with the kind of assessment characteristic of, say, Rowan Williams, perhaps all the more so given the theological proximity of Williams and Milbank (see especially, Rowan Williams, "Logic and Spirit in Hegel," in *Wrestling with Angels: Conversations in Modern Theology*, ed. Mike Higton (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007]: 35–52).

7. Quoted in Žižek and Milbank, *Monstrosity of Christ*, 242.

8. Marcel Gauchet, *The Disenchantment of the World: A Political History of Religion*, trans. Oscar Burge (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

9. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap/Harvard, 2007).

10. Francis Oakley, *Kingship: The Politics of Enchantment* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006).

11. William Desmond, *God and the Between* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2008).

12. Cyril O'Regan, *Gnostic Apocalypse: Jacob Boehme's Haunted Narrative* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2002).

13. Desmond, *God and the Between*, 78.