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TOWARDS A POINTAL ECCLESIOLOGY: ŽIŽEK AND BADIOU IN
THEOLOGICAL CONVERSATION

(Spine title: Towards a Pointal Ecclesiology)

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by

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Graduate Program in Theology

A thesis proposal submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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Abstract

This thesis presents a survey of Alain Badiou's ontology and theory of the "event," including his understanding of "faithful subject," followed by an examination of Slavoj Žižek's materialist theology, undertaken with a view to what they can say to inform the modern Western Church. Though the thrust of their work is primarily political and ethical in nature, Žižek and Badiou will be drawn upon here to construct an outline of a "pointal ecclesiology," by which is meant the collective fidelity of the Spirit community to a truth, point by point, in a world. While wholehearted appropriation of their work is not theologically unproblematic, an engagement with their thought proves to be enriching. The result is an understanding of new possibilities for Christian political participation, Church diversity, fidelity to truth, and the collective.

Keywords: Alain Badiou, Slavoj Žižek, event, fidelity, ecclesiology, Christianity, Church, politics, experimentation, Spirit, resurrection, death of God, St. Paul, ethics, truth, subject, atheism, community.

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Table of Contents

Certificate of Examination	ii
Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Introduction	1
Chapter One: Alain Badiou: A Subject of Truth and its Consequences	
1.1 Foundations of the Subject	6
1.2 Subject	17
1.3 Change, Point, and the Political	23
1.4 Political Praxis	41
Chapter Two: Slavoj Žižek: A Crucified God	
2.1 The Death of God	55
2.2 Spirit/Collective	64
Chapter Three: Towards a Pointal Ecclesiology	
3.1 Materialists and Subversives	74
3.2 Experimentation	81
3.3 From “Christian” Subject to Collective	89
3.4 Communitas	93
By Way of Conclusion	102
Bibliography	104
Curriculum Vitae	110

Introduction

This thesis is based on a suspicion that the Church in the West, like Nietzsche's God, is dead, has been killed by what Feuerbach has called the "omnipotence of subjectivity," by its worship commodification, and its rabid striving for sensation and (false) novelty. In it, the "faithful subject" has been reduced to a "life-style participant," a feeling addict (justified no doubt by an incarnational theology which does little more than make an idol out of human sensuality), or a subject characterized by a merely "Pascalian" fidelity which thinks that because one goes through the proper motions, makes the proper gestures, one must really believe.¹ It was the rather eccentric Alan Watts who already

¹ "Vous voulez aller à la foi, et vous n'en savez pas le chemin; vous voulez vous guérir de l'infidélité, et vous en demandez les remèdes. Apprenez (les) de ceux qui ont été tels comme vous, et qui parient maintenant tout leur bien. Ce sont gens qui savent un chemin que vous voudriez suivre, et guéris d'un mal dont vous voulez guérir. Suivez la manière par où ils ont commencé: c'est en faisant tout comme s'ils croyoient, en prenant de l'eau bénite, en faisant dire des messes, etc. Naturellement même cela vous fera croire et vous abêtira." Pascal, *Pensées*, 233. Or as they say in Alcoholics Anonymous, "Fake it till you make it."

[You want to have faith and you do not know how; you want to heal yourself of unbelief and you ask for the remedy. Learn from those who have been like you, and who are now betting all their possessions. These are people who know a way which you would like to follow, and who are healed of an evil that you want cured. Follow the way by which they have set out: that is by doing all as if they believed, by taking the holy water, by saying masses, etc. Even this will, naturally, make you believe and deaden your passion.*] (* Others have translated this "deaden your acuteness," or "make you more docile," the idea being that by simply going through with the motions one's critical faculty will slowly be overcome. (See for example Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 125). This is certainly acceptable considering Pascal's argument here. It does not, in my opinion however, make the proper reference to Pascal's earlier statement: "Travaillez donc à vous convaincre, non pas par l'augmentation des preuves de Dieu, mais par la diminution de vos passions" [Work then, to convince yourself, not by the increase of the proofs of God, but by the decrease of your passions].

suspected the truth: they don't believe, they only *believe that they should believe*, and this with fundamentalist zeal. From this my basic question is thus: What can be done to reinvigorate the Church in the West?

To narrow this enormous field somewhat, this thesis explores the possibility of a marriage between the work of two contemporary atheist philosophers, Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek, and Christian thought (concerning which both have written fairly extensively), specifically towards the development of what I've called here a "pointal ecclesiology." In one sense this is a simple task. It involves an appropriation of both philosophical thought (Badiou) and a materialist theology (Žižek). How is it possible to find correspondence between the thought of two militant atheists and Christian faith without horrific distortion of one or the other? Here a polarization between the two is rejected.² This is partly due to Žižek's position in which modern materialism is viewed as a necessary manifestation of a certain kind of kenotic theology. The gap is bridged by a suicidal God who leaves the heavens empty, leaving humans with a profound responsibility for the future on their shoulders. In addition, there is little doubt that both theology and atheism are interested in notions of the true, of what's real, what knowledge

² Alan E. Lewis addresses this from the perspective of Easter Saturday: "Not only then is Easter Saturday the day of mutual contradiction between those who believe in God and those who cannot; it is also the day of shared contradiction for those who believe in the absolute God and those who cannot, by the theology of the Crucified One: faith in the life and power of the God who is dead. To the extent that both these conflicts are occurring *now*, with great intensity, at the end of the modern era, means that today is a cultural "Easter Saturday." And that is the context, where faith hears and opposes both partners in the disputation between theism and atheism, in which theology must work today, and to which the gospel must be addressed." Alan E. Lewis, *Between Cross & Resurrection: A Theology of Holy Saturday* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 236.

or teaching can be trusted etc. In this sense they are united, though their methodological approaches often diverge, sometimes a great deal as in mystical approaches, sometimes very little as in those cases so prominent in Western Christianity which engage in what Creston Davis has referred to as “secular reasoning.”³ In these instances Christian apology takes on (at least superficially) the method of scientific-rational discourse. In addition, there is also the long history of philosophical theology in which thought about Christian truth is conditioned by non-Christian philosophies.

Thus the dialogue which this thesis seeks to foster has long and deep precedent in the Christian tradition. The supposed “distortion” of faith which results from such an approach to theology, on some accounts, is in my judgment mostly an error of the uninformed who long for a pristine tradition, revelation and doctrine, unencumbered by temporal-historical considerations. Yet, there is admittedly a sense in which one might “go too far,” when complementarity spills over into the outright rejection of that which it seeks to compliment or inform. The focus of this thesis, however, is not on making this determination, as much as I recognize the importance of the issue. The thesis seeks, rather, to discover in what ways two particular scholars might inform the Church. Among the categories elaborated on in the thesis, and which have been drawn from Badiou and Žižek, the following might be mentioned at the outset: experimentation, creative novelty, truth, Christian subjectivity, Spirit, *communitas*, and related to all these, an optimistic political engagement. They are indeed all interrelated, as any theologian could easily recognize even without exact definitions, though the terminology may differ in some

³ Slavoj Žižek and John Milbank, *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009), 8.

respects. For example, “experimentation” is rarely used in theological discourse, though in constructing a pointal ecclesiology this term will be quite important. During the course of Christianity, however, “experimentation” by another name and somewhat distorted character has been rampant, leading to multiform Christian groups and thought, even though this term may never have been applied to it. It is the positive designation of the more negative term usually used, i.e. “disunity.” It is one of the wagers of a pointal ecclesiology that experimentation will form a vital way forward for the Church, an experimentation that is not simply reactionary, but intentional. This is but one small piece of the whole of this thesis, and only the very first small steps towards thinking a pointal ecclesiology based on the work of Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek. In the end, as with all of our efforts, my sentiments mirror those of Saint Paul who once said:

[F]ire will test the quality of each person’s work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.⁴

But do these words not also mirror a certain reading of theology in which the divine Other risks it all on the work of its own hands, even to the point of being “burned up?” Though I have not touched on it, “risk” certainly accompanies those categories I elaborate on here, and should not be understood apart from what Žižek has called a “monstrosity,” which is also what I recognize as the Christian Idea.

In what follows, I propose to outline the work of Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek insofar as it relates to the ecclesiological project this work might inform. In Chapter One, we will briefly explore Alain Badiou’s ontology as a basis for a later exploration of his

⁴ 1 Corinthians 3:13-15 (New International Version).

understanding of the “Subject.” Following this will be an examination of Badiou’s notion of “Change” and “Point,” leading into a brief look at Badiou’s political praxis. In Chapter Two our attention will turn to Slavoj Žižek and his understanding of the “Death of God.” This in turn will inspire the second part of that Chapter, an outline of Žižek’s notion of the “Spirit” and “Collective.” Chapter Three will present more of a critical engagement with their work, and give a preliminary sketch of what I’m calling a “pointal ecclesiology,” based on my reading of Badiou and Žižek. It will be argued that although Badiou presents the Church with some valuable ideas, his work needs to be supplemented with Žižek’s in order to bridge the gap between the former’s radical atheism and Christian faith. This will lead to a “pointal ethic,” a way of “doing” Church that draws on the categories hinted at above, which will also be explicated further in the final Chapter.

Chapter One

Alain Badiou: A Subject of Truth and its Consequences

1.1 Foundations of the Subject

Though it has fallen on hard times in recent decades, this thesis will argue that there are still immensely valuable philosophical resources that theology can draw from the political Left, which, like the Church, continually hears the call to remake itself within the flux of history and culture. Of particular interest for our purposes are two Leftist philosophers, the first of whom, Alain Badiou, lays the groundwork for the second, Slavoj Žižek.

Leaving aside the second for the present, we can begin at the beginning by turning to the first, mathematician and French philosopher Alain Badiou. Badiou has developed a theory of the Event, a philosophical explication of an evental ontology which is crucial for understanding one's fidelity to a cause, which as a *fidelity* is primarily ethical in nature. He has further elaborated a logic of *appearing*, worked out in the context of the formalized framework of the body. Critical here is the notion of a collective. To understand what these Communists mean by Communism, one must understand what Badiou means by fidelity to an Event. Before this, however, one must first understand how Badiou structures an Event, how he structures *being* itself.

Underlying Badiou's ontology is a Parmenidean premise, as Badiou himself sums up: "what *presents* itself is essentially multiple; *what* presents itself is essentially one."⁵ To understand this point, another ancient authority may be called on: Titus Lucretius Carus (c. 99-55 BCE). In his *De Rerum Natura*⁶ Lucretius expounds the Epicurean philosophy of atomic theory. All being is made up of atoms, that is to say, all that there *is*, is made up of atoms (1.483-634). Some atoms form compound structures which may be detected with the human senses (2.891-895). To use the language of Plato's *Parmenides*, being has become "visible" in these instances, made up of an infinite number of smaller parts.⁷ For Badiou too, being is a "multiple multiplicity."⁸ These multiplicities do not *exist* as such, but they have *being*. Being is pure multiplicity. How is this so? It is so in a similar way that the referent of a mathematical formula does not exist as such, and yet, has being. "For a multiple to be, is to belong to another multiple, whose being is already presupposed."⁹ This referential multiple is known as a "situation": multiples which *present* themselves.¹⁰ "Situations" designate things that *are*: "regardless

⁵ Alain Badiou, *Being and Event* (London: Continuum, 2007), 23.

⁶ Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, trans. Martin Ferguson Smith (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2001). All subsequent references are to the text of Lucretius.

⁷ Plato, *Parmenides*, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato Including the Letters*, Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, eds., (New York: Pantheon Books, 1963). This dialogue makes no specific reference to "atoms" or "particles" but there can be found here the making of a similar theory in Parmenides argument that being is infinite in multiplicity: "Thus being is parceled out among beings of every possible order from smallest to greatest; it is subdivided to the furthest possible point and has an illimitable number of parts. So its parts form the greatest of multitudes" (144b-144c).

⁸ Alain Badiou, *Infinite Thought* (London: Continuum, 2009), 7.

⁹ Alain Badiou, "Existence and Death," *Discourse* (Winter 2002), 67.

¹⁰ Badiou, *Being and Event*, 24.

of its modality; that is, regardless of whether it is necessary, contingent, possible, actual, potential, or virtual – a whim, a supermarket, a work of art, a dream... or a set of waves.”¹¹

Badiou’s first difficulty with the idea of being as presented multiplicity is very much the same difficulty encountered by Parmenides. One may speak of all being as “one,” but if we posit the being of being outside of the realm of appearance, outside of being’s presentation, how could we possibly have knowledge of it? As Plato puts it:

Parmenides: Suppose someone should say that the forms, if they are such as we are saying they must be, cannot even be known. One could not convince him that he was mistaken in that objection, unless he chanced to be a man of wide experience and natural ability, and were willing to follow one through a long and remote train of argument. Otherwise there would be no way of convincing a man who maintained that the forms were unknowable.

Socrates: Why so, Parmenides?

Parmenides: Because, Socrates, I imagine that you or anyone else who asserts that each of them has a real being 'just by itself,' would admit, to begin with, that no such real being exists in our world.¹²

Badiou, however, breaks with any notion of a Form outside of presented being: “We find ourselves on the brink of a decision, a decision to break with the arcane of the one and the multiple in which philosophy is born and buried... This decision can take no other form than the following: the *one* is not.”¹³

¹¹ Badiou, *Infinite Thought*, 7.

¹² *Parmenides*, (133b-133c).

¹³ Badiou, *Being and Event*, 23.

In his sequel to *Being and Event*, *Logics of Worlds*, Badiou further elaborates on this point. When one speaks of the “Whole” (the One/Universe, itself a multiplicity), he argues, one must include within the conception the count of the multiplicity of elements that make it up, otherwise it cannot be the Whole. Badiou refers to these types of multiplicities (those which *present themselves* in their multiplicity) as *reflexive*.¹⁴ There exist multiplicities which are not reflexive. The other customers in the coffee shop before me present a multiple, but the set of these customers is not a customer itself. Badiou accordingly divides the Whole into two parts, the reflexive and the non-reflexive. Next Badiou asks about the set of all the non-reflexive multiples. He names this set the *Chimera*. Suppose the *Chimera* is reflexive. If so it must present itself within the composition of its own set. Immediately we have a problem because the *Chimera* is the set of non-reflexive multiples. The *Chimera* cannot be reflexive. If the *Chimera* is non-reflexive it must present itself along with the other non-reflexive multiples. We have already said, however, that the *Chimera* is the set of all non-reflexive multiples. It must therefore be presented among these multiples and consequently reflexive. Badiou concludes that “the *Chimera* is not.”¹⁵ Consequently, the Whole, having lent its being to the *Chimera* is also not.

In *Being and Event*, Badiou quickly follows this argument up with a supplemental one in that he makes it clear that by no means is the symbolic function of the one, of

¹⁴ Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event II* (London: Continuum, 2009), 109. These are far fewer in number than the non-reflexive multiples below. In fact, Badiou only concentrates on one: the Whole, or Universe. While he does comment on the *Chimera* (below), this will serve to prove the inconsistency of the One.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 110.

Oneness lost in all of this. This is important for Badiou's use of set theory in developing his ontology. "Oneness," for Badiou, is only ever a "count-for-one," a mathematical conception which functions as *operation*.¹⁶ In set theory various elements (multiplicities) may be grouped together to form sets and subsets of sets and so on (they too being multiplicities). The count-for-one of a multiplicity is its presented *structure*, as Badiou says, "it is what prescribes, for a presented multiple, the regime of its count-for-one."¹⁷ For now, however, it is precisely the notion of an "event" which must be explored. Having laid the groundwork with Badiou's ontology, the next step is to grasp what he means by "event" and what role the "universal" plays in this discussion.

For Badiou (and ultimately for Žižek), Communism contains within itself a *universal* Idea (the emancipation of humanity from oppression and inequality).¹⁸ For him, philosophy, or rather a philosopher,¹⁹ is always committed to a situation in the name of universal principles. What this universality consists of has been helpfully summed up in eight theses, articulated by Badiou during a 2004 discussion with Žižek in Vienna:²⁰

Thesis 1: Thought is the proper medium of the universal

Thesis 2: Every universal is singular, or is a singularity

Thesis 3: Every universal originates in an event, and the event is intransitive to the particularity of the situation

Thesis 4: A universal initially presents itself as a decision about an undecidable

¹⁶ Ibid., 24.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ See for example Alain Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis* (London: Verso, 2010); Slavoj Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes* (London: Verso, 2008).

¹⁹ I see no reason to limit this commitment to philosophers as we shall see.

²⁰ Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek, *Philosophy in the Present* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009).

Thesis 5: The universal has an implicative form

Thesis 6: The universal is univocal

Thesis 7: Every universal singularity remains incomplete or open

Thesis 8: Universality is nothing other than the faithful construction of an infinite generic multiple

A brief explanation is in order: To say that thought is the medium of the universal is to say that no object or “objective regularity” can take the form of the universal (thesis 1). It is entirely subjective: the process of a subject-thought at the local level.²¹ This includes, for Badiou, the process of repeating the proof of a universal proposition. He uses the example, “the series of prime numbers is infinite.”²² Here universality lies in the way the statement demands us to provide (in thought) a proof for it, both at the local level (the subjective act of proving the proposition) and as part of a global procedure (the mobilization of mathematics). Thus universality presents itself as singular, or a singularity (thesis 2). That is to say, “every universal presents itself not as a regularization of the particular or of differences, but as a singularity that is subtracted from identitarian predicates; although it obviously proceeds via those predicates.”²³ This is largely why Badiou is opposed to the liberal construction of a “tolerant society” based merely on universal respect for particular cultural identities. In his view this universality

²¹ “If there is no ethics ‘in general’, that is because there is no abstract Subject, who would adopt it as his shield. There is only a particular kind of animal, convoked by certain circumstances to *become* a subject – or rather, to enter into the composing of a subject.” Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* (London: Verso, 2002), 40. This will initially present itself as problematic for the explication of a theology of the event as Badiou does not allow for a transcendental Subject in this formulation. This will be challenged by Žižek in his materialist construction of theology.

²² Badiou and Žižek, *Philosophy in the Present*, 28.

²³ *Ibid.*, 30-31.

breaks down as soon as one encounters a particularity that is intolerant towards the others, or resists any integration into this universalizing procedure:

The truth is that in order to maintain that respect for particularity is a universal value, it is necessary to have first distinguished between good particularities and bad ones. In other words, it is necessary to have established a hierarchy in the list of descriptive predicates. It will be claimed, for example, that a cultural or religious particularity is bad if it does not include within itself respect for other particularities. But this is obviously to stipulate that the formal universal already be included in the particularity. Ultimately, the universality of respect for particularities is only the universality of universality. This definition is fatally tautological.²⁴

This is why Badiou considers all universals as subtracted from identitarian predicates. Of course within a situation the “universal proceeds via these predicates,” but this is unexpected and without previous conception within the framework of particular predication. For this reason Badiou conceives of the universal, not within the order of being, but of the “supernumerary.”²⁵ It follows from this that every universal locates itself within an event, and this event is intransitive to any particularity of a situation (thesis 3). That is to say, in being caught up in the universal, the event *supplements* a presented situation.

²⁴ Ibid., 30. Or as Žižek astutely states: “We thus encounter the paradox of tolerance at its purest: how far should tolerance for intolerance go? All the Politically Correct beautiful liberal formulas on how caricatures [of the Prophet Mohammed in Danish newspapers] were insulting and insensitive, but violent reactions to them are also unacceptable, about how freedom also brings responsibility and should not be abused, etc., show their limitation here. What is this famous “freedom with responsibility” if not a new version of the good old paradox of forced choice: you are given a freedom of choice – on condition that you make the right choice; you are given freedom – on condition that you will not really use it.” Slavoj Žižek, “Antinomies of Tolerant Reason,” *Lacanian Ink*, available from <http://www.lacan.com/zizantinomies.htm> (10 March 2010).

²⁵ Badiou, *Being and Event*, 178. “The event is not actually internal to the analytic of the multiple. Even though it can always be localized within presentation, it is not, as such, presented, nor is it presentable. It is -not being- supernumerary.”

To understand what Badiou means by “event” one needs only to think of the “French Revolution or Paris Commune,”²⁶ whose themes of emancipation simultaneously inscribe them within the realm of the universal while cutting across the particularity of their situations. It is *fidelity* to the event that constitutes the human *subject*: “That is to say that at a given moment, everything he is – his body, his abilities – is called upon to enable the passing of a truth along its path. This is when the human animal is convoked [*requis*] to be the immortal that he was not yet.”²⁷ This fidelity is composed of a *decision*. The event itself is a decision about a previously indiscernible area of knowledge internal to a situation (thesis 4).²⁸

Badiou is fond of appealing to the example of the occupation at the church of St. Bernard de la Chapelle in 1996. A previously undecidable of a situation (what is the status of the *Sans Papiers*: are they citizens of France or not) was publically declared by

²⁶ Badiou and Žižek, *Philosophy in the Present*, 31. I see no reason not to include the American Revolution here, at least some of whose agents after all, must certainly have understood themselves as participating within the field of fidelity to *libertas* (though see John Phillip Reid, *The Concept of Liberty in the Age of the American Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988): “It was a term on everyone’s lips, flowing from everyone’s pen, and appealed to by supporters of every political persuasion... both parties to the revolutionary controversy could use the word “liberty” in the same yet opposite ways - one invoking American liberty, the other British liberty - to support opposing causes” (11). But can one not detect here the universality of an idea precisely because of its ability to be adapted to diverse and even opposing political causes?

²⁷ Badiou, *Ethics*, 40.

²⁸ In his *l’Organisation politique* Badiou puts it this way: “Il s’agit en effet de découvrir dans la situation des possibilités inconnues, et d’en faire le mot d’ordre politique du moment. Et ce travail (découverte d’une possibilité, mise en forme de son contenu, action réfléchie pour sa réalisation) est le travail de tous ceux qui participent au processus, de tous ceux qui désirent se mêler de la situation.” *L’Organisation Politique*. Online, *Forum Marxiste-Léniniste*, available from <http://humaniterouge.alloforum.com/organisation-politique-t2605-1.html> (3 July 2010).

intellectuals, labour union leaders, human rights organizations, the Communist party, and the *Sans Papiers* themselves, to be decidable in that the *Sans Papiers* should be considered citizens of France and encouraged people to cease referring to them as “*clandestins*” (the slang form: *clandos*), or “illegal immigrants”.²⁹ In addition to this primary evental decision (which is properly speaking a fidelity to the *trace* of the evental statement or naming- see below), there is the further decision to relate to a situation from “the perspective of its evental [événementiel] supplement.”³⁰ In other words, one must decide how to live within the new situation of the evental supplement. Badiou also uses the example of Einstein’s physics: “After Einstein’s texts of 1905, if I am faithful to their radical novelty, I cannot continue to practise physics within its classical framework. An evental fidelity is a real break (both thought and practised) in the specific order within which the event took place.”³¹

It follows then that every fidelity follows an evental statement. In the case above, the evental statement was effectively “*Sans Papiers* are citizens of France” (as opposed to non-subjects worthy of deportation). Fidelity to this break with the previous situation will manifest itself in both thought and practice (“there no longer exists for me the term *clandestin*, only citizens of France who I will treat as such,” etc.). This is why Badiou’s fifth thesis is that the universal has an *implicative* form. That the universal is *univocal* is merely to say that it is the *act* which decides the evental statement, giving it valence, and

²⁹ See Craig R. Whitney, “Police in Paris Smash Immigrants’ Sit-In,” *The New York Times* (24 August 1996).

³⁰ Badiou *Ethics*, 41.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 42.

that this act is “subtracted from all interpretation” as act (thesis 6).³² From this act, initially local in nature, fidelity is made possible on a broader scope, with various implicate forms arising as the consequences of the act are worked out (thesis 7). The result is an infinite generic multiple, a subset of the initial situation which could not be known in advance (thesis 8). It is not determined by particular predicates, but cuts across them as in the case of “political gatherings, whose universality follows from their indifference to social, national, sexual or generational origin...”³³

I have previously noted that an appropriation of Badiou’s ontological thesis for an ecclesiology will run into a number of difficulties (note 21). Badiou makes it clear in, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, that Paul should be considered nothing more than a “theoretician” of universality, that it is because Paul is a theorist of the order of a fable (Christ’s resurrection), that Paul’s “truth” is an event which “repudiates its pretension to real truth.”³⁴ This is primarily because any contemporary notion of God lacks valence: “knowledge enjoins us not to decide about God: it is quite acceptable to maintain that perhaps ‘something’ exists, or perhaps it does not.”³⁵ Frederiek Depoortere has argued that an “all-too-quick theological appropriation of Badiou” should be avoided, on the basis that: 1) there is no room in Badiou’s ontology for a religious truth; 2) there is no room in Badiou’s conception of an event for the transcendent, and 3) Badiou rejects

³² Badiou and Žižek, *Philosophy in the Present*, 43.

³³ Ibid., 47.

³⁴ Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 108.

³⁵ Badiou and Žižek, *Philosophy in the Present*, 35.

contemporary hermeneutics as overly “conservative and reactionary.”³⁶ Depoortere makes the point, following Kenneth Reynhout,³⁷ that there are five ways a theologian can respond to Badiou, which he groups into two extreme responses and three moderate ones.³⁸ One can either: 1) completely ignore Badiou; 2) completely endorse his atheistic ontology; or more moderately 3) criticize his ontology; 4) accept his ontology but reject his atheism; or 5) accept Badiou’s ontology completely, but nuance Badiou’s atheist conclusion. In his *Badiou and Theology*, Depoortere gives an example of the fifth strategy but mainly opts for the fourth, drawing on Aristotle and Aquinas, as well as Cantor (the creator of set theory) to claim that the possibility of an absolute infinite implies the actual existence of one, i.e. God.³⁹ As commentators have rightly pointed out, Depoortere largely fails in his efforts.⁴⁰ What this thesis proposes is a sixth response to

³⁶ Frederiek Depoortere, “Alain Badiou and God” (paper presented at seminar for Theology & Ethics, University of Edinburgh, March 11, 2010) available online at <http://kuleuven.academia.edu/documents/0078/2395/Edinburgh.pdf>.

³⁷ Kenneth Reynhout, “Alain Badiou: Hidden Theologian of the Void?” *The Heythrop Journal* (2010 forthcoming). Available online at DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-2265.2008.00415.x.

³⁸ Depoortere (2010).

³⁹ Frederiek Depoortere, *Badiou and Theology* (London: Continuum, 2009). Creston Davis calls this work, “...theology’s first careful and sustained engagement with Badiou’s work by one of the brightest young and capable theologians in our time...” *Badiou and Theology*. Online, *Continuum Books* available from <http://www.continuumbooks.com/books/detail.aspx?BookId=131542> (12 August 2010).

⁴⁰ Clayton Crockett, “Badiou and Theology,” *Notredame Philosophical Reviews* (3 June 2010), available online <http://ndpr.nd.edu/review.cfm?id=19847>. “Depoortere is forced to equivocate in terms of this possibility of an absolute infinite, because he needs the absolute infinite to be possible in order to counter Badiou’s atheism, but he needs to overcome the limit of this possibility in order to achieve his purpose, which is to prove the actual existence of God, which is the only way to avoid the closed circle of faith.” Depoortere obviously was not aware of Badiou’s comments here: “This is certainly exact:

Badiou:⁴¹ that we should accept his ontology but *supplement* his atheism with a materialist theology, that is, a Christian atheism.

1.2 Subject

Having briefly explored Badiou's ontology, we must now examine his logic of appearing. Just as his ontology is the basis of his logic of appearing, so too his logic of appearing will be the basis of the construction of an ecclesiology, which here will involve the thinking through of a faithful collective using Christian symbol and Badiouan paradigms.

The starting point of this examination must be the Subject. The Subject, as we shall see, will be thought primarily in terms of the body (which presupposes appearance), and the event (which presupposes a truth). But as Badiou points out, the starting point of any theory of the Subject must not be a theory of the object.⁴² Nonetheless, in the world, the subject's form will be unfolded from the two following points of thought:⁴³

1) The evental trace: \in

Cantor has shown that the infinite exists. However, it is by no means required that this infinite be a God. Rather, it is 'like a Number.' Badiou, *Ethics*, 67.

⁴¹ It may be argued that this sixth response is already covered by Depoortere's fifth. It is true that my response results in a nuancing of Badiou's atheistic conclusions, but not in the way Depoortere intends (see especially Depoortere (2009), Chapter 3).

⁴² Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 49. Was this not the lesson of Descartes, who after questioning every body, extension, and place as illusion, was simultaneously able to posit an *ego* from a *cogito*?

⁴³ Ibid.

2) A body issued from the event (in the form of fidelity to it): C

Faithful Subject

Recent events in Egypt provide the opportunity to elucidate the example of a Badiouan political subject. The evental trace, to be named in the statement by Egyptian youth: “Bread, Freedom, Human Dignity,”⁴⁴ comparable to revolutionary slogans the world over, indicates the activation of an evental subjectivity, a subjectivity in which identitarian predicates do not play a role: “I don’t belong to any particular political party, I’m one of the people.”⁴⁵ At every point the new subjectivated body must choose to be faithful to the evental trace or to betray it, to defy curfews which deny it both freedom and dignity, or submit to the wishes of the errant superpower. These points always arise in the present, must always be decided in the present.

As such the formulation of the subject may be written thus:

$$\frac{\epsilon}{C} \Rightarrow \pi$$

Here, ϵ is the evental trace (“Bread, Freedom, Human Dignity”), – the sign of the subordination of C (the demonstrator’s faithful living out of the implications of ϵ), C the subjectivated body (the demonstrators, here homogenous), \Rightarrow the consequences of C’s

⁴⁴ Egypt: The youth perspective. Online, *Al Jazeera*, <http://english.aljazeera.net/programmes/insidestory/2011/01/2011129111336830896.html> 15:20 accessed February 10, 2011. This was also used as a slogan in the Tunisian revolutionary movement.

⁴⁵ Ibid 2:14 “The same thing occurred in Tunisia, there was no particular party or leader pushing these demonstrations.” 11:23-11:30.

fidelity to the ϵ (continued demonstrations, organization, defiance of tyranny), and π the Present (the Time in which a subjective fidelity to a truth is activated).

Badiou points out here that the Subject is not properly constituted by one of these elements, but by the equation as a whole.⁴⁶ He further adds another dimension to the element C in that he recognizes the ever present inward diversity of a body. He represents this diversity by barring the C: \emptyset . Strictly speaking there is no pristine body. For example, consider the Christian Church. It has traditionally been composed of the priesthood, with its various functions and duties, in distinction from the laypeople who also make up the body, and yet who ultimately live in fidelity to the same event:⁴⁷

$$\frac{\epsilon}{\emptyset} \Rightarrow \pi$$

A few additional comments should be made here. First, it should be noted that for Badiou a subject is always defined in relation to a truth. We shall see that there are differing kinds of subjects, defined by their relation (fidelity/infidelity) to a truth. Second, the subject is primarily understood in relation to a body and should therefore not be understood in terms of radical individuality, but rather in terms of a *communitas*. Third, and finally, a subject is always defined in the present, and is therefore not constituted by nostalgic remembrance, but present subjectivity. The body does not *mimic*

⁴⁶ Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 53.

⁴⁷ This is oversimplifying the point for the sake of elucidation. Badiou does not see the resurrection of Christ as evental *per se*. He does, however, believe that St. Paul is the faithful subject of a truth in the form of formulating a radical egalitarian community. See Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 4-5.

the form of a historical fidelity, but creates itself by being faithful in the present, in the present circumstances. In this sense it is always being made new.

As indicated above, there are multiple forms of subjects. This is due to the forms the relation to the evental trace may take. Badiou highlights three of these subjects, one of which (the faithful Political Subject) we have already examined. In addition to the faithful subject there is also the reactionary subject and the obscure subject.

Reactionary Subject

The reactionary subject is known by the dismissal of the evental trace as event. Badiou formulates this subject in its simple form thus:

$$\neg \epsilon \Rightarrow \#$$

Here, \neg is the negation of ϵ , the consequence of which \Rightarrow , the Present of the faithful subject is extinguished $\#$.⁴⁸

To turn once more to our present Egyptian example: The reactive subject declares that the “demonstrators” will eventually “drift away” ($\neg \epsilon$).⁴⁹ They do not represent the will of the people: “For all the west, starting with the United States, [Mubarak] has always been considered a wisest man and a point of reference. Compared to a population

⁴⁸ Badiou *Logics of Worlds*, 55.

⁴⁹ See *Egypt in crisis: the revolutionary parallels with Iran, China and Romania*. Online, *The Telegraph*, available from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/egypt/8305719/Egypt-in-crisis-the-revolutionary-parallels-with-Iran-China-and-Romania.html>, accessed February 10, 2011.

of 80 million, the number of people on the streets is really low.”⁵⁰ It further denies the ability of the activated body to carry out the consequences of its statements without a compromise of its original position, or further undermines its role in the unfolding of the process ($\#$).⁵¹ For example, Hilary Clinton’s statement: “... our assessment is that the Egyptian Government is stable and is looking for ways to respond to the legitimate needs and interests of the Egyptian people.”⁵² It should be clear that no formalization of the *reactionary* subject can be complete without reference to the faithful subject. The initial formulation is *talus qualis* incomplete, thus:

$$\frac{\neg \epsilon}{\begin{array}{l} \epsilon \\ \varnothing \end{array}} \Rightarrow \#$$

The reactionary subject cannot be constituted without reference to the faithful.

Obscure Subject

⁵⁰ A quote from Silvio Berlusconi. Egypt needs reform not repression, say EU leaders. Online, *The Guardian*, available from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/feb/04/egypt-reform-eu-leaders-summit>, accessed February 10, 2011.

⁵¹ “There have also been signs of compromise in the opposition movement, with leaders backing off their refusal to talk to the government until Mubarak, 82, and the old guard leave.” Egypt opposition says talks to end crisis not enough. Online, *Reuters Canada*, available from <http://ca.reuters.com/article/topNews/idCATRE7003UW20110206?pageNumber=2&virtualBrandChannel=0>, accessed February 15, 2011.

⁵² Remarks With Spanish Foreign Minister Trinidad Jimenez. Online, *U.S. Department of State*, available from <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2011/01/155280.htm>, accessed February 10, 2011.

The obscure subject wills the destruction of the politically subjectivated body.

Badiou's formulation follows:⁵³

$$\frac{C \Rightarrow (\neg E \Rightarrow \neg \mathcal{C})}{\pi}$$

The obscure subject must negate the legitimacy of fidelity to the evental trace through the hoisting of an immaculate configuration of the body (C), by the “invocation of a full and pure transcendent Body, an ahistorical or anti-evental body (City, God, Race).”⁵⁴ Our final example from Egypt: The *baltagea*, pro-Mubarak “thugs,” activate a fascist political component with the use of “clubs, machetes, swords and straight razors ... to try to crush Egypt's democracy movement.”⁵⁵ Evidence of this obscure subjectivity can also be found in its naming of an “atemporal fetish,”⁵⁶ in this case the designation “War Hero” (C).⁵⁷ Mubarak himself precisely designates the obscurantist's formulation of “the incorruptible and indivisible over-body”⁵⁸ in a televised address during the protests: “The nation remains. Visitors come and go but ancient Egypt will remain eternal, its banner and safekeeping will pass from one generation to the next. It is up to us to ensure this in

⁵³ Badiou *Logics of Worlds*, 60.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 59-60.

⁵⁵ Watching Thugs With Razors and Clubs at Tahrir Sq. Online, *The New York Times*, available from <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/03/opinion/03kristof.html?src=twrhp> accessed February 9, 2011.

⁵⁶ Badiou *Logics of Worlds*, 60.

⁵⁷ Hundreds injured after pro- and anti-government supporters clash in Egypt. Online, *The Toronto Star*, available from <http://www.thestar.com/news/world/article/931940--pro-mubarak-supporters-take-to-the-streets-of-egypt>, accessed February 14, 2011.

⁵⁸ Badiou *Logics of Worlds*, 60.

pride and dignity” (C).⁵⁹ Here the present (π) is denigrated, placed under the bar ($\bar{\pi}$) by that very hoisting of the atemporal fetish, a relation of the present’s servility to the phantasmatic over-body.

We will next need to examine Badiou’s conception of “change,” “points,” and “bodies.” These have been touched on already to varying degrees. Briefly, for example, the question of change has been raised by the present (π) of the faithful subject. What is this π in relation to that which came before it? Points, as I have already indicated (Faithful Subject), are moments of decision (and their implications) regarding fidelity, compromise, or complete betrayal. Finally, we have seen that bodies are those bearers of formal subjectivities.

1.3 Change, Point, and the Political

In order to treat the notion of “change” one must also treat the Badiouan concept of “point” at the same time. We are not primarily concerned here with Badiou’s explanation of how anything appears at all out of the pure multiplicity of being,⁶⁰ but how, once there is an appearing, there can be change within the order of this appearing. That objects appear in a world is fundamental. For Badiou, objects can have varying

⁵⁹ Full text of Mubarak’s speech. Online, *Ya Libnan*, available from <http://www.yalibnan.com/2011/02/02/full-text-of-mubaraks-speech/>, accessed February 10, 2011.

⁶⁰ Badiou’s treatment of this may be found in *Logics of Worlds*, 357.

degrees of intensity of appearing. This will be for him the beginning of the elucidation of the event in the field of appearance. Every event must have its proper site of appearing, its unfolding in the phenomenal. This is a key point to keep in mind as we later work out an evental or pointal ecclesiology. It means that the *site* of the Eternal will always be the Temporal. For Badiou there is *never* an exception to this rule, and for us too, it will be argued, the paradox of the God/man (eternal/temporal) Jesus is itself an evental manifestation in the order of appearing.⁶¹

Within the order of appearance a “site” is an object which manifests *itself*, which counts itself in its own field of appearing.⁶² For example, the object “month of December 2010” in the world “Tunisia” is one of a multiplicity of objects (elements) within the field “year.” What makes “December 2010” a site is its radical *break* within the order of this world, a simultaneous break and signification of the new. This new we will call (negatively) “Tunisia without tyranny,” or (positively) “Tunisian populism.” In this way “December 2010” is self-referencing, it is no longer one object among many within the field of appearance, but a self-determining object/site that will later be recalled by its designation “December 2010” and also *define itself* as “December 2010.” It is self-

⁶¹ It is not the Pauline teaching that *inaugurates* the order of an evental fidelity *within the order of the historical*, but the incarnational event within the temporal order of appearing. Badiou was right here that the first “event,” completely from the perspective of historical unfolding, ultimately failed (see below). Paul recognized this quite well. This is why he was so little interested in the Jesus before the resurrection. More particularly, we are speaking here of the appearance of the Palestinian Jew Jesus, his revolutionary teaching, his death, and *the inscription of the signification of his resurrection into the present of history*. While there may be truth in the Žižekian statement that “there is no Christ outside Saint Paul,” it is simultaneously true that without Jesus (the site of the Event) there is no Paul (the faithful subject to the evental trace). The man Jesus (his biography) only takes on significance *retroactively*.

⁶² Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 363.

supportive, so that people will one day ask, (and perhaps already ask) “were you there December 2010?” In a sense we are speaking here of the coincidence of the same, of the object and itself (now a site).⁶³

It is in the π that the subject body is always pressed to remain faithful to the evental trace, here in the form of a point. For Badiou a point is that which minimally confronts a faithful subject to make a decision which will have maximal consequences in the newly constituted π . This point always takes a binary form, a 0/1, a Yes/No, an Either/Or. Change can only take place *if these points are addressed faithfully*, not when these points are addressed. This is because the treatment of a point may have minimal consequences. This would mean of course that any π informed by such a treatment would remain the same, or result in minimal modification. A number of questions follow: What then is change? Is it only the consequence of a pointal decision in fidelity to a truth? Can a truly horrific decision be made, for example, to force the subjugation of a people (consequences, albeit dire), and still be named “change?” Further, does this understanding of “change” not elevate “novelty” to a sublime level (running perilously close to capital’s methods)? Finally, reflecting on the earlier question of change and fidelity: what is Evil?

It would be helpful here to take a step from Badiou’s *Logics of Worlds* to focus on his *Ethics*. It should be clear by now that what we are speaking of when we speak of “fidelity” and “change” is indeed ethics. Ethical considerations are the most important aspect of Badiou’s work. His ontological edifice, logic of appearing, his notion of the

⁶³ Did the ancients not redesignate the object precisely to signify the junction of this coincidence: thus Jacob becomes Israel.

event, are all fundamentally situated within the horizon of the question “what is the Good?” This is because, for Badiou, the very question of subjectivity hinges on the idea of the Good, or of the true. All progress is seen in terms of working out a truth that we have been seized by in a world. The opposite of the true or the Good, is not Evil, nor is Evil a lack or absence of Good. For Badiou, Evil is a distortion in the field of the Good itself. There are three fundamental distortions of the Good:

- 1) Simulacrum
- 2) Betrayal
- 3) Forced naming of the unnameable⁶⁴

To begin with, a fidelity to a simulacrum is just what the term suggests, fidelity to a representation of a faithful body, to that which represents itself as a body of a truth, but is not. Here, if I may use a Biblical example, one might turn to the instance in Acts 15 wherein a council is called to settle the matter of the relation between Jewish and Gentile Christians. One faction staunchly defends the practice of circumcision and Law (these we will call the Pharisaical faction), the other (whom we will refer to as the Pauline faction) represented to the council in the persons of St. Peter and St. James, defend the universality of the gospel, as St. Peter is reported to have said: “God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, and he made *no distinction* between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith.”⁶⁵ Here, in the manifestation of the gift of the Holy Spirit, St. Peter recognizes the universality and priority of the faithful subject over any ethnicity or nationalism, over any political

⁶⁴ Badiou, *Ethics*, 58.

⁶⁵ Acts 15:8-9 (ESV). Emphasis mine.

distinction. It is precisely this universality, not founded in any biological or national substance that recognizes the trace of a truth. Against this stands the Pharisaical faction and its prescription of the Law of Moses and circumcision, the signs of a particular people and creed, for ages associated with a particular national substance. Here a faction attempts to regulate a break with a situation by adherence to an “abstract set:”⁶⁶ i.e. “Jewish.” By doing this a condition is set on the universality of the event to which subjects are faithful. It substantially de-universalizes the gospel by attaching predicates to the definition of a faithful subject, i.e. “circumcised” (in this case a predicate leaving out half of humanity!). In this particularizing of the definition, there is indeed a form of a fidelity. There is still a faithful subject, for example, who makes sacrifices, who lives in a committed way, etc. But as we have seen, the two factions are in their essence completely opposed to one another, the one particularizing and exclusive, the other universalizing and inclusive.

It is to their profound credit that the early council remained faithful to the universalizing core of the gospel message. In their discussions we find the ideal characteristic of every true model of faithful dialogue: an avoidance of the *ad hominem* terror:

For however hostile to a truth he might be, in the ethic of truths every ‘some-one’ is always represented as capable of becoming the Immortal that he is. So we may fight against the judgments and opinions he exchanges with others for the purpose of corrupting every fidelity, but not against his *person* – which under the circumstances, is insignificant, and to which, in any case, every truth is

⁶⁶ Badiou, *Ethics*, 74.

addressed.⁶⁷

It would be some years before this terror against the Person is enacted by Christians upon one another, thereby becoming itself a simulacrum of a faithful body: “Evil is the process of a simulacrum of a truth. And in its essence, under a name of its invention (politics, science, love, etc) is terror directed at everyone.”⁶⁸ Here, years later, a simulacrum will come to imitate the faithful body under the name of its opposite: “Constantinian,”⁶⁹ or more ironically, “Catholic” Christianity.

Moreover, a betrayal is the failure of the faithful subject to choose, at the place of a crisis, to keep going. This crisis is marked by those subjective states experienced commonly by revolutionary subjects after the initial victories, i.e. discouragement, lack of creative energy etc. It is the faithful subject, who at exactly this critical point, will rouse herself:

⁶⁷ Ibid, 76.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 77.

⁶⁹ Making an impassioned appeal for restoration, Arius, who was in Libya, *felt the need to write the Emperor*, for all intense purposes the highest authority and strong arm of the Church. That the Emperor saw himself this way is plain, for example:

“I myself, then, was the instrument whose services He chose, and esteemed suited for the accomplishment of his will. Accordingly, beginning at the remote Britannic ocean, and the regions where, according to the law of nature, the sun sinks beneath the horizon, through the aid of divine power I banished and utterly removed every form of evil which prevailed, in the hope that the human race, enlightened through my instrumentality, might be recalled to a due observance of the holy laws of God, and at the same time our most blessed faith might prosper under the guidance of his almighty hand.” Eusebius Pamphilius, “The Life of Constantine,” Ernest Cushing Richardson trans. (New York: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1890), 766.

A crisis of fidelity is always what puts to the test, following the collapse of an image, the sole maxim of consistency (and thus of ethics): 'Keep going!' Keep going even when you have lost the thread, when you no longer feel 'caught up' in the process, when the event itself has become obscure, when its name is lost, or when it seems that it may have named a mistake, if not a simulacrum.⁷⁰

The subject of a betrayal, on the other hand, ultimately returns to the previous state before the eventual break. Using a biblical example we will attempt to discern, using the category of betrayal, at what point the constitution of a faithful body appeared in the early Christian narratives.

It seems obvious that the Biblical subject of a betrayal *par excellence* is Judas Iscariot. This seems obvious today too, when the term "Judas" is synonymous with all types of infidelities and disloyalties. Against this, it must be stated from the start that Judas is not the subject of betrayal we are primarily interested in. This is not because, like the writer of the gospel of Judas, Judas should be seen as a hero, as the one disciple of Jesus willing to go all the way in his obedience to his master, betraying him to the authorities in order that prophecy might be fulfilled etc. The view of Judas here is much less exalted. Contrary to Judas the hero (or even Judas the "Judas") one should see "Judas the Idealist," a disciple who saw his Master in a far different light than the Master himself understood. This should be clear by a reading of the gospels Matthew and Mark, in which Judas decides to part company with Jesus only after the incident with Mary and the anointing. Here is Mark's version of it:

And while he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he was reclining at table, a woman came with an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly, and she broke the flask and poured it over his head. There were some who said to themselves indignantly, "Why was the ointment wasted like that? For this

⁷⁰ Badiou, *Ethics*, 79.

ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor." And they scolded her. But Jesus said, "Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you want, you can do good for them. But you will not always have me. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burial. And truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her." Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them.⁷¹

The Matthew version makes it clear that it was the "μαθηται" (disciples) who objected to the woman using her perfume thus.⁷² In both gospels it is immediately after this incident that Judas goes to the officials to make a deal with them. Is this not a clear case of disillusionment? Judas, along with some other disciples, who had once heard the Saviour say: "go sell all that you have and give the money to the poor" (Mark 10:21) here cannot stand to see what appeared to them as wasteful, and a complete contradiction to his Master's previous answer to the question: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" It is Judas and these disciples who, contrary to the way John portrays him (John tells us only Judas spoke up at this event, and that he did so only because he was a thief, John 12:4-6), *were acting consistently with the teachings of Jesus*. Whereas John and Luke demonize Judas (both saying "Satan entered him" at this point; John 13:2, Luke 22:3), the gospels of Matthew and Mark merely state the facts: Judas left.⁷³ If Judas was guilty of anything

⁷¹ Mark 14:3-10.

⁷² Matthew 26:8.

⁷³ There are other inconsistencies here in John's account. For example, John tells us that Jesus, growing troubled, revealed to his disciples that one of them would betray him. Concerned, one of the disciples asked Jesus who of them it would be. Jesus told him it would be the one who he gives a piece of bread to after dipping it into the bowl. Oddly, at this point, though it should have been obvious to at least one of the disciples, no one confronted or tried to restrain Judas, even though John tells us Jesus had passed him the bread. Jesus further tells Judas to carry out his work of betrayal, but John tells us: "Now

at this point, it was surely over-zealousness. Surely his expectations of the Messiah, and the man who was proclaimed to be the Messiah, did not match up.⁷⁴ Does the timing not indicate the unforgiving idealism of the man? Judas does not betray Jesus after a great defeat, or waning public acclaim, but at the high tide of his popularity, at the very moment all others were clamoring to be near him, when just previously authorities did not dare arrest him because of the riot it would provoke among the people (Mark 14:1-2; Matt. 26:5). No, Judas is not the “Judas” one should find here. Here is merely an idealist acting consistently with his ideals. For Judas, Jesus could not be said to do the same, and as such, was not giving up a Messiah, but a pretender. This is something quite different than betrayal. To locate betrayal, one must look to another of Jesus’ disciples: Peter.

It was Peter who, rapidly seeing his dream of glory vanish away, and because he lacked courage, denied knowing Jesus, three times. At the point generated by the accusation in the courtyard “You are one of them” Peter has two choices. In fidelity to his comrades and to the earlier affirmation of an event in his statement “You are the Christ,” Peter can once again affirm his allegiance, can acknowledge his devotion to the man he once declared he would never betray. Or at this point of a crisis, Peter can erase any trace of his fidelity and revert to an earlier situation in which he “does not know the man” (Mark 14:71). It is the latter that he chooses. It should be said, however, that Peter here has a representative function, standing in for the once faithful body. It is clear that they who said with Peter “If I must die with you, I will not deny you” (Mark 14: 31) *all*

no one at the table knew why he said this to him” (13:28), an obvious contradiction of the earlier account.

⁷⁴ That Jesus was seen as the Messiah by his disciples was revealed some time earlier (Mark 8:27-30).

fled at the decisive moment, (with or without their clothing!). It would not be until a much more radical break, turning on its head the previous situation in which the event “Christ” had been inscribed, and thereby releasing retroactively the disciples from their infidelity, that Peter and his comrades would be reinstated into the faithful body, this time, (not without its own crises) to become the Immortals they became.⁷⁵ The former event in which “Christ” meant not only non-hierarchical co-existence, but a kind of ethnic/nationalism, was to become seen retroactively as a simulacrum of a truth process, as too particular in its consequences. It should be pointed out that it was not this particularist version of the Christ event that Judas was betraying, as if he foresaw the later more universal event-implications that would take place. The evental character of the second Christ-event retroactively designates the previous one inadequate (though necessary), what Badiou might call a false-event. One sees in the fleeing of the disciples and in the outright betrayal of any association with the Nazarene, that the consequences of this initial evental sequence (his Christological determination) were minimal, i.e. zero. The death and what led up to it cannot be named “event.” Badiou makes a similar point in his Saint Paul, in that it is not the *death* of Jesus that should be seen as the event, but the resurrection-event:

Death, which is the thought of (=according to) the flesh cannot be constitutive of the Christ-event. Death is, moreover, an Adamic phenomenon. It was, properly speaking, *invented* by Adam, the first man. 1 Corinthians 15.22 is perfectly clear on this point: “For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.” Death is as ancient as the first man’s choice of a rebellious freedom. What constitutes an event in Christ is exclusively the Resurrection, that *anastasis*

⁷⁵ See discussion concerning “disinterested-interest” above for Badiou’s notion of “Immortal.”

nekron that should be translated as the raising up of the dead, their uprising, which is the uprising of life.⁷⁶

For the reason that his life was only a continuation of Adamic mortality, that death was already an “invention” of the first man (i.e. it was not a form of creative novelty), for the reason also that his life and death had minimal consequences, that they failed to produce a revolutionary community or body living in fidelity to his teachings, one should indeed find here in his life and death a false-event.

The third distortion of the Good, or Evil, is the forced naming of an unnameable. What does Badiou mean by this? This concerns a truth’s ability to transform a language world, to challenge opinion, to reconstitute it. Within the biblical context, perhaps a perfect example of this ability of a truth to transform opinion is the encounter between Thomas and the risen Jesus. Thomas is of the opinion that dead men do not come out of their graves and live again.⁷⁷ It is only after meeting the once dead Jesus that within the field of Thomas’ experience a radical change of opinion must come about. This is not yet the forcing of an unnameable, but is the proper functioning of a truth within the field of opinion. Like the faithful subject, an opinion is not truth, but is changed in response to a truth:

Not that these opinions become ‘true’ (or false). They are not capable of truth, and a truth, in its eternal multiple-being, remains indifferent to opinions. But they

⁷⁶ Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 68.

⁷⁷ Is this not another contradictory situation in that Thomas must have surely seen Lazarus raised from the dead (John tells us specifically that Thomas was there, John 11:16, 44)? Is the Nazarene’s resurrection from the dead *that* miraculous in the context of this series of resurrections? Why Thomas’ refusal to believe before being presented with the evidence?

become *other*. This means that formerly obvious judgements are no longer defensible, that others become necessary, that the means of communication change, and so on. I have called this reorganization of opinions the *power [puissance]* of truths.⁷⁸

It is the desire to force an opinion, at the cost of the absolute elimination of all other opinion, that is an Evil. This should not be confused with a relativistic reading that conflates the notion of truth with opinion and therefore particularizes truth to “cultural truths,” “ethnic truths,” “truths of personal taste,” etc. As we have seen, for Badiou, no opinion *is* truth. What an opinion reorganized under the *puissance* of a truth recognizes is the possibility of another break, the possibility of an-*other* of an opinion. What a forced naming of an unnameable concerns is the elimination of the human animal in the form of its opinion, the very thing that composes this subjective animal.⁷⁹ But what is this “unnameable” that is being forced to be named? Forcing an opinion absolutely is one thing, but in what way is this related to the unnameable? For Badiou, the unnameable of a situation is that element which resists naming by a truth, and so is indicative of the limited power of truth within any given situation. It is the element of the situation that may be discussed or debated, but resists being commandeered by the subject of a truth. It is an element that cannot be Immortalized.⁸⁰ In fact, any attempt to do so would result in disaster.

This is precisely why Connor Cunningham’s critique of Badiou falls short of the mark. In his rush to ascribe to nihilistic thinkers (not undeservedly) the reduction of all

⁷⁸ Badiou, *Ethics*, 80.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 86.

being to monochromatic “pure reality, absolute shit, devoid of shape and distinction,”⁸¹ he misses Badiou’s contribution to the discussion here. For example, Cunningham, drawing on these conclusions, states:

...this ‘truth’ [of the indifference of the Void of Being] can be ‘witnessed’ – the Real of eros is seen – as it erupts, striking out from underneath the settled hen in the form of rape; but rape is no more or less dramatic than other manifestations of univocal desire. Was this not what the great masters of suspicion had begun to tell us, for each in his own way pointed us beyond the facade of the name, to the pulsating reality that lay behind the accepted account?⁸²

But it is Badiou who in his *Ethics* enables one to think the very difference Cunningham accuses the nihilists of not allowing, while simultaneously affirming an ultimate univocity of multiple-being. A Badiouan response would therefore be that rape is that Evil which forces the naming of ‘sexual pleasure’ (an unnameable), a naming which cannot be forced without disastrous consequences, precisely because sexual pleasure is not a category of a truth. In a similar way it was the Nazi designation of a community as “German/Germany,” of assigning truth to the synthesis German/community (of privileging this identification), that a disaster befell the world.⁸³ So at the same time there is non-monochromatic difference (the Evil of naming/the unnameable), there is also an order of the Same (rape as a distortion of the *field* “sexual pleasure,” of eros). Rape is this absolutization of sexual pleasure, a distortion of a truth concerning the Two. Its

⁸¹ Connor Cunningham, *Genealogy of Nihilism: Philosophies of nothing and the difference of theology* (London: Routledge, 2002), 257. John Milbank draws heavily on Cunningham for his critique of Badiou. See, for example, John Milbank, “Materialism and Transcendence” in *Theology and the Political: The New Debate* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

⁸² *Ibid.*, 256.

⁸³ Badiou, *Ethics*, 86.

naming completely ignores the dual nature of the subject: that between its basic animal interests, its animality, which as Nietzsche pointed out involves a completely different category than Good or Evil; and that of its composition as a subject-to-truths.⁸⁴ Could this have been the root of Judas' idealism? In his desire to force the naming of a particular form of Messiah, to inflexibly designate it as *the* form, he ultimately defeated himself, a literal disaster befalling him.

In the three distortions of the Good, or Evil: the simulacrum, betrayal, forced naming, one now observes the three negative possibilities open to the faithful subject-to-a-truth. Having answered the previous question, "what is Evil?" we are now in a position to answer the earlier question regarding change. For Badiou, change is indeed the result of (and results in) a faithful pointal decision. "Change" should be equated with "novelty" insofar as one thinks of a break in a situation. This break occurs not just at the level of language and knowledge, by introducing a new name in a situation, a discontinuation in the order of a situation's linguistic or encyclopaedic regime, but also *in a subject*, actualizing the "disinterested-interested"⁸⁵ constituent of the human animal, a process realizing the potential all have to be Immortal. This is why Badiou predicates his notion of novelty with "creative." Within the establishment of capital "novelty" is never "creative" in that it is little more than self-perpetuating production punctuated by varying material commodification. There is no *break* in the established process in other words, but rather a powerful (perhaps unstoppable) *re*-production. The evental break, on the other hand, is not of the same order of a situation. It is a hole "punched" *in* the

⁸⁴ Ibid., Chapter 5.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 49.

situation,⁸⁶ manifested by the appearance of what was not there before. Change is therefore associated with the “after” of an appearance, *in* this appearance itself, founded within the order of the name and the subject: within its languages and bodies, and within the order of a truth.

Let us take, for example, the situation “France 1791.” Here we may locate a break within the situation which we will identify with the names “*Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne*” or “Politics of Equality.” It was common, before this break, for “woman” to be reduced in the following ways:

Les hommes, par la prérogative de leur sexe & par la force de leur tempérament, sont naturellement capables de toutes sortes d'emplois & d'engagemens; au lieu que les *femmes*, soit à cause de la fragilité de leur sexe & de leur délicatesse naturelle, sont exclues de plusieurs fonctions, & incapables de certains engagemens.⁸⁷

[Men, by right of their sex and by the strength of their temperament, are naturally capable of a variety of jobs and engagements; while women, either because of the fragility of their sex and natural sensitivity, are excluded from several duties, and incapable of certain engagements.]⁸⁸

Or again:

On dit vulgairement qu'il faut deux femmes pour faire un témoin: ce n'est pas néanmoins que les dépositions des femmes se comptent dans cette proportion arithmétique, relativement aux dépositions des hommes, cela est seulement fondé sur ce que le témoignage des femmes en général est léger & sujet à variation; c'est pourquoi l'on y a moins d'égard qu'aux dépositions des hommes.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Ibid., 43.

⁸⁷ Antoine-Gaspard Boucher d'Argis, "Femme," *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, 6:475–476.

⁸⁸ All translations are my own unless otherwise credited.

⁸⁹ Antoine-Gaspard Boucher d'Argis, "Femme," *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, 6:475–476.

[It is commonly said that it takes two women to testify: it is not, however, that the testimony of women is counted in this arithmetical proportion relative to the testimony of men; it is merely based on the fact that the testimony of women in general is light and subject to change; this is why it is held in less respect than statements of men.]

And finally:

La nature semble avoir conféré aux hommes le droit de gouverner. Les *femmes* ont eu recours à l'art pour s'affranchir.⁹⁰

[Nature seems to have given men the right to govern. Women have had recourse to art for emancipation.]

Within the situations duty, voice, and governance, one finds a view of women that ascribes a hierarchy within nature itself. In the situation named “duty” a woman is by nature not just unequal to men, but so fragile as to exclude her from it altogether. In the situation named “voice” a woman may be included but on the condition her testimony is supplemented by another. Despite Boucher’s assurance that this is not because $1+1=1$, is his justification not fundamentally a mathematical formulation, as if supplementing the voice of one woman with another’s somehow does “add up” to a man’s testimony? Finally, in the situation named “governance” it is declared a matter of natural right that a man should govern, while on the other hand, a woman is not given recourse to the political i.e. she is denied the right not only to govern, but to free herself from oppression by political means. The negation of woman in each of these situations (duty, voice, governance) is the negation of participation in the political sphere. This is the situation “France 1791” in which the break “*Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne*” will take place. Even after the previous break named “*Déclaration des droits de l'Homme*”

⁹⁰ Joseph-François-Édouard de Corsembleu de Desmahis, "Femme," *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, 6:473 (Paris, 1756).

et du citoyen” of 1789, which declared that “Les hommes naissent et demeurent libres et égaux en droits” [Men are born and remain free and equal in rights], there arose the question of the place of “femme” within the designation “hommes.” That the declaration of 1789 did not provide an answer in the positive was so clearly pointed out by the Marquis de Condorcet:

Il est même quelques-unes de ces violations qui ont échappé aux philosophes et aux législateurs, lorsqu’ils s’occupaient avec le plus de zèle d’établir les droits communs des individus de l’espèce humaine, et d’en faire le fondement unique des institutions politiques.

Par exemple, tous n’ont-ils pas violé le principe de l’égalité des droits, en privant tranquillement la moitié du genre humain de celui de concourir à la formation des lois, en excluant les femmes du droit de cité ? Est-il une plus forte preuve du pouvoir de l’habitude, même sur les hommes éclairés, que de voir invoquer le principe de l’égalité des droits en faveur de trois ou quatre cents hommes qu’un préjugé absurde en avait privés, et l’oublier à l’égard de douze millions de femmes?⁹¹

[There is even some of these violations (of their *droits naturels*) that have escaped the philosophers and legislators, even when they were zealously involved with establishing the common rights of individuals of the human species, and in this way making a unique foundation of political institutions.

For example, have they not all violated the principle of equal rights, quietly depriving half the human race from contributing to the formation of laws, by excluding women from the rights of citizenship? Is there any stronger proof of the power of habit, even in regard to enlightened men, than to see the invocation of the principle of equal rights for three or four hundred men who had been deprived for an absurd private prejudice, and yet fail to take into consideration twelve million women?]

So at this first sign of a break in the old order one can detect the shift in language, bodies, and a truth, i.e. the first sign of Change, or more correctly, the first Change. This came

⁹¹ Jean-Antoine-Nicolas de Caritat, marquis de Condorcet, 1790. Available online Sur l’admission des femmes au droit de cite. Online, *L’université du Québec à Chicoutimi*, http://classiques.uqac.ca/classiques/condorcet/admission_femmes_droit_de_cite/admission_femmes_droit_de_cite.html accessed January 05, 2011.

about at the place of a point: the point where a faithful subject must decide in favour of fidelity to the spirit of the revolutionary maxim: “Les hommes naissent et demeurent libres et égaux en droits” or to betray it. The situation “France 1791” will see the deployment of a new language, body, and a truth:

A language: for the first time in the name “femme” or “woman.”

A body: in the feminine as non-supplement, as value-autonomous.

A truth: the subjective equality of both woman and man, not just by nature, but by right.

A break finally comes with the Declaration of September 1791. In it Olympe de Gouges, in complete fidelity to the Revolution, will declare:

Article I: “La Femme naît libre et demeure égale à l’homme en droits.”⁹²

[Woman is born free and remains equal to man in rights.]

Article X: Nul ne doit être inquiété pour ses opinions mêmes fondamentales, la femme a le droit de monter sur l'échafaud; elle doit avoir également celui de monter à la Tribune; pourvu que ses manifestations ne troublent pas l'ordre public établi par la Loi.

[No person shall be molested for his most basic opinions, the woman has the right to mount the scaffold, she must equally have the right to mount the rostrum, provided that her public activities do not disturb the public order established by the Law.]

Article VI: “La Loi doit être l'expression de la volonté générale; toutes les Citoyennes et Citoyens doivent concourir personnellement ou par leurs représentants, à sa formation; elle doit être la même pour tous: toutes les Citoyennes et tous les Citoyens, étant égaux à ses yeux, doivent être également admissibles à toutes dignités, places et emplois publics, selon leurs capacités, et sans autres distinctions que celles de leurs vertus et de leurs talents.”

[The Law must be an expression of the general will, and all citizens must participate personally or through their representatives in its

⁹² Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne de 1791 Olympe de Gouges. Online, *In Libro Veritas*, available from <http://www.inlibroveritas.net/lire/oeuvre1465.html>.

formation; it must be the same for everyone: all female and male citizens, being equal in its eyes, should be equally eligible to all dignities, public places and employments, according to their capabilities, and without other distinctions than those of their virtues and talents.]

In these three declarative articles, de Gouges names the inexistent of the three previous situations duty, voice, and governance: that is “woman”:

Duty: Against the natural absence of woman in the order of rights and her inability to perform a duty: The affirmation of her existence and equality in right and liberty (Article I).

Voice: Against the necessary supplementation of her testimony: Woman’s voice must be heard without hierarchical prejudice, from equally high places as any man, and with equal weight (Article X).

Governance: Against the claim that woman is by nature not suited to govern, that she is by nature not political: Woman, by nature and by right must not be excluded from politically participating in all “*dignités*” or public employment.

It should now be understood what Badiou means by a break in a situation, a hole punched in the presented order. The rupture in the situation “France 1791” named a previously inexistent, the appearance of a previously unnamed political subject, the consequences of which extend to this day. That this subject would not return to its former inexistence (as the disciples of the Nazarene) is made clear in the statement: “*la femme a le droit de monter sur l'échafaud,*” and its author certainly did, on November 3, 1793, rather than betray her fidelity.

1.4 Political Praxis

In a 2007 interview entitled “We Need a Popular Discipline: Contemporary Politics and the Crisis of the Negative,” Alain Badiou outlines what he sees as the form of

any future eventual politics. It quickly becomes apparent that he has cut ties with any notion of state politics, of the traditional Leninist model of a proletariat seizure of state mechanisms, in favour of something many Christians would recognize as an autonomous, yet cooperative ecclesiological structure. What is his issue with the state model? Simply put, it has no staying power. It tends to become bureaucratized, or to compromise its initial values and goals. “It’s clear that the Party-State was a failure. From the point of view of taking power, the Party was victorious. But not from the perspective of exercising power.”⁹³ In addition to this failure, Badiou is also critical of any application of political terror to accomplish one’s goals today, at least in any offensive manner. This form of political violence is a negation, what Badiou refers to as the “negative part of negation”⁹⁴ its properly destructive element. “Contrary to Hegel, for whom the negation of the negation produces a new affirmation, I think we must assert that today negativity, properly speaking, does not create anything new. It destroys the old, of course, but does not give rise to a new creation.”⁹⁵ Here is the crux of the matter, while it is possible to remove the old regime, its replacement soon becomes almost indistinguishable from it. Destruction in itself is futile without the proper fidelity to create something new. This is why, for Badiou, violence remains a necessarily defensive gesture. He makes his position clear in recent comments on the events in Egypt and Tunisia:

⁹³ Alain Badiou, “We Need a Popular Discipline: Contemporary Politics and the Crisis of the Negative,” *Critical Inquiry* 34 (Summer 2008), interview by Filippo del Lucchesse and Jason Smith, Los Angeles, 02/07/07.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

Dans la foulée d'un événement, le peuple se compose de ceux qui savent résoudre les problèmes que l'événement leur pose. Ainsi de l'occupation d'une place : nourriture, couchage, garde, banderoles, prières, combats défensifs, de telle sorte que le lieu où tout se passe, le lieu qui fait symbole, soit gardé à son peuple, à tout prix...

Nous ne voulons pas la guerre, mais nous n'en avons pas peur. On a partout parlé du calme pacifique des manifestations gigantesques, et on a lié ce calme à l'idéal de démocratie électorale qu'on prêtait au mouvement. Constatons cependant qu'il y a eu des morts par centaines, et qu'il y en a encore chaque jour. Dans bien des cas, ces morts ont été des combattants et des martyrs de l'initiative, puis de la protection du mouvement lui-même. Les lieux politiques et symboliques du soulèvement ont dû être gardés au prix de combats féroces contre les miliciens et les policiers des régimes menacés. Et là, qui a payé de sa personne, sinon les jeunes issus des populations les plus pauvres ? Que les "classes moyennes", dont notre inespérée Michèle Alliot-Marie a dit que l'aboutissement démocratique de la séquence en cours dépendait d'elles et d'elles seules, se souviennent qu'au moment crucial, la durée du soulèvement n'a été garantie que par l'engagement sans restriction de détachements populaires. La violence défensive est inévitable. Elle se poursuit du reste, dans des conditions difficiles, en Tunisie, après qu'on ait renvoyé à leur misère les jeunes activistes provinciaux.⁹⁶

[In the wake of an event, "the people" is composed of those who know how to resolve the problems the event presents to them. And so the occupation of a place: food, sleeping space, protection, pennants, prayers, defensive battles, all so that the place where everything takes place, the place which has become a symbol, will be kept by its people, at all costs...

We do not want war, but we have no fear of it. Everywhere the pacifist calm of the huge demonstrations has been talked of, and that calm has been linked to the ideal of elective democracy that we have lent to the movement. We should, however, note that there have been deaths by the hundreds, and each day there are more. In many cases the dead have been fighters and martyrs of the initiative, then later, of the protection of the movement itself. Political and symbolic places of the uprising had to be held at the cost of fierce fighting against the militias and police of the threatened regimes. And there, who has paid with their lives if not the youths from the poorest of the population? The "middle classes," of whom our inspired Michèle Alliot-Marie has said that the democratic outcome of the sequence depended on them and them alone, should remember that at the crucial moment, the duration of the movement was only guaranteed by the unfettered commitment of the people's militia. Defensive violence is inevitable. It

⁹⁶ Tunisie, Egypte : quand un vent d'est balaie l'arrogance de l'Occident. Online, *Le Monde*, available from http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2011/02/18/tunisie-egypte-quand-un-vent-d-est-balaie-l-arrogance-de-l-occident_1481712_3232.html. accessed February 13, 2011.

continues, in difficult conditions, in Tunisia, after the young provincial activists have been returned to their wretched poverty.]

That political violence is seen as a defensive measure indicates the separatist nature of his political endeavour. In Badiou's terms, any eventual political body today must "subtract" itself from the State and its mechanisms, it takes the form of "a politics without party."⁹⁷ This body autonomously creates itself, makes its own designations concerning itself, carrying on as if the State's injunctions have no sway:

At a distance from the State" signifies that a politics is not structured or polarized along the agenda and timelines fixed by the State. Those dates, for example, when the State decides to call an election, or to intervene in some conflict, declare war on another state. Or when the State claims that an economic crisis makes this or that course of action impossible. These are all examples of what I call "convocations by the State," where the State sets the agenda and controls the timing of political events. Distance from the State means you act with a sufficient independence from the State and what it deems to be important or not, who it decides should be addressed or not. This distance protects political practices from being oriented, structured and polarized by the State.⁹⁸

This kind of "in the world but not of the world" politics is necessarily subtractive, a negation of the State apparatus, *but not a destruction of the State and its laws*. This is why Badiou makes the distinction between a negative negation (utter destruction) and subtractive negation (a non-dependence on State law and political mechanisms) within the regime of an autonomous eventual politics. One is reminded here of an early Christianity in which religious fidelity carried on regardless of State suppression or directive to the contrary, this without a concerted effort to destroy that which went to great effort to do the opposite. Here the Christian notion of a separate Kingdom, a

⁹⁷ Badiou, *Popular Discipline*, 95.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

separate space of fidelity and political actualization, is to the point. The difference, of course, is that early Christians prayed for the wellbeing of the State and its administrators, it abstained from physical violence even in the arena, even while praying “Thy Kingdom come.” There was no use of “defensive violence” per se.⁹⁹ More contemporary examples of self-identifying Christian sects along these lines are the Jehovah Witnesses or Anabaptist groups (Hutterites, Mennonites, etc). Though they have diverging theologies, their insistence on subtraction from the political are similar. The Witnesses, for example, share that attitude described (accurate or not of 1st century Christians) by Augustus Neander in his classic *The History of the Christian Religion and Church, During the Three First Centuries:*”

“The Christians stood aloof and distinct from the state, as a priestly and spiritual race, and Christianity seemed able to influence civil life only in that manner which, it must be confessed, is the purest, by practically endeavouring to instil more and more of holy feeling into the citizens of the state.”¹⁰⁰

This “aloofness” also translated into pacifism on both sides of the World Wars and conflicts ever since. Those Witnesses who did participate would simply “fire their weapons into the air” or attempt to “knock their opponents weapons from their hands” rather than actually harm anyone.¹⁰¹ Within the Christian Anabaptist tradition a similar

⁹⁹ I say, “per se” because it seems obvious that even if early Christians refused to physically harm those who attacked them, the event of Christianity itself soon caused a violent rupture in the fabric of the ancient world.

¹⁰⁰ Augustus Neander, *The History of the Christian Religion and Church, During the Three First Centuries* (Philadelphia: James M Campbell, 1844), 168.

¹⁰¹ *Jehovah’s Witnesses: Proclaimers of God’s Kingdom* (New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc, 1993), 191. Which begs the question, why participate at all? The response from the Witnesses is that Christians are also commanded

pacifism due to its conception of a separation between Church and State, was demonstrated well in the Schleithem Confession of 1527:

Lastly, one can see in the following points that it does not befit a Christian to be a magistrate: the rule of the government is according to the flesh, that of the Christians according to the Spirit. Their houses and dwelling remain in this world, that of the Christians is in heaven. Their citizenship is in this world, that of the Christians is in heaven. The weapons of their battle and warfare are carnal and only against the flesh, but the weapons of Christians are spiritual, against the fortification of the devil. The worldly are armed with steel and iron, but Christians are armed with the armor of God, with truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, and with the Word of God. In sum: as Christ our Head is minded, so also must be minded the members of the body of Christ through Him, so that there be no division in the body, through which it would be destroyed.¹⁰²

Certainly these Christian sects qualify as a subtractive form of the political, complete with their own internal organization and means of resolving internal problems. These are merely the predominantly Western forms. In the vast slums of Nigeria, for example, Pentecostal Christianity provides an organizational framework in which basic needs are met at all levels aside from any State support (in many cases completely absent). Within the modern Western context however, is it not fair to say these groups are almost altogether marginalized? Is not their subtractive stance isolationist, resulting in the exact opposite of what Neander characterized as an endeavour to “to instil more and more of holy feeling into the citizens of the state,” instead limiting themselves to the particularity of their own religious communities? Here the critique might spill over on to Badiou’s own subtractive politics. Does “distance from the State” not simply equate with

to “obey the powers that be” (Ibid). Does this not lead to a kind of Batesonian “double-bind,” in which a person is caught between two conflicting injunctions that demand equal satisfaction?

¹⁰² Schleithem Confession. Online, *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia*, available from <http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/S345.html#ART6>.

“alternative community,” in his case one that, unlike interest groups which can form powerful voting blocs, does not even participate in State forms of the democratic process, and as such risk becoming as marginalized as Mennonite or Hutterite groups (regardless of their many positive features)?

Badiou’s notion of “distance from the state” is no doubt a consequence of his ontology, of his understanding of the event. In what way? One must keep in mind that the event is unpredictable, as we have discussed earlier in his third thesis: “Every universal originates in an event, and the event is intransitive to the particularity of the situation.” No one can “see it coming.” It breaks with all particular predicates at the very moment it cuts across them. Because it cannot be tethered to a specific identity or culture, it cannot be registered ahead of time at the level of the historical-particular:¹⁰³

“An event is never the concentration of a vital continuity, or the immanent intensification of a becoming. It is never coextensive with becoming. It is, on the contrary, on the side of a pure break with the becoming of an object of the world, through the auto-appearance of this object. Correlatively, it is the supplementation of appearance [*l’apparaître*] by the emergence [*surgissement*] of a trace: what formerly inexistence becomes intense existence.”¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Here one might find some similarity between Badiou’s notion of an Event and Jürgen Moltmann’s idea of *nova creatio*. In order to allow for the possibility of the Resurrection, Moltmann must ground it in the *contingentia mundi*, a result of God’s free creative act. Theology may find some support in modern quantum theories of the universes’ origins (spontaneous quantum creation of the universe from quantum fluctuations), themselves a product of physical laws (and thus no need for divine directive, unless of course these laws are seen as divinely created). In the end, however, Moltmann’s *intellectus fidei resurrectionis* is still a *fides quaerens intellectum*, taking the Resurrection *a priori* as a starting point of all theo-historical constructions. In addition, one must question Moltmann’s identification of divine freedom with contingency: *Is something truly contingent that has necessarily been willed?* See Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (London: SCM Press, 1967), 177-180.

¹⁰⁴ Alain Badiou, “The Event in Deleuze,” *Parrhesia*, 2 (2007), 39.

One must simply be watchful and wait for the event to take place,

“The philosopher is useful, because he or she has the task of observing the morning of a truth, and of interpreting this new truth over against old opinions... When we feel that a truth-event interrupts the continuity of ordinary life, we have to say to others: "Wake up! The time of new thinking and acting is here!" But for that, we ourselves must be awake. We, philosophers, are not allowed to sleep. A philosopher is a poor night watchman.”¹⁰⁵

Here Badiou also connects the notion of “acting” and “confession.” The former proceeds from the latter. It is only in light of an event and the subsequent recognition that such an event has taken place that faithful action can take place. Adrian Johnston has called this form of waiting “communist patience,” the “calm contemplation of the details of situations, states, and worlds with an eye to the discerning of ideologically veiled weak points in the structural architecture of the statist system.”¹⁰⁶ Does this characterization not sound startlingly familiar to a kind of Christian eschatological waiting, a Badiouan version of watching for the “signs of the end,” awaiting what Johnston calls the “unpredictable arrival of a not-to-be-actively-precipitated ‘x’ sparking genuine change”?¹⁰⁷ This could equally be applied to the resurrection (we have already determined the Death of Jesus was a non-event) or to the future “x” of the parousial consummation awaited by not just Anabaptist and Jehovah Witnesses, but a great number of Christians in general.¹⁰⁸ Saint Paul’s advice to the Thessalonians does not sound out of

¹⁰⁵ Alain Badiou, http://www.lacan.com/symptom8_articles/badiou18.html Philosophy as Creative Repetition

¹⁰⁶ Adrian Johnston, “The Quick and the Dead: Alain Badiou and the Split Speeds of Transformation,” *International Journal of Žižek Studies*, 1:2 (2007), 81-82.

¹⁰⁷ Johnston, 82.

¹⁰⁸ There are of course exceptions to this “not-to-be-actively” designation. For example, for 50USD Benny Hinn ministries will plant a tree for you in Israel in a gesture to prepare

place here: “You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.”¹⁰⁹ It is no wonder that Slavoj Žižek has criticized Badiou here, referring to the latter’s position as an “active quietism” that forever postpones the eventual act, taking part in “small interventions with the secret hope that somehow, inexplicably, by means of a magic ‘leap from quality to quantity,’ they will lead to global radical change.”¹¹⁰ There is, however, a critical difference here between a Christian waiting and Badiou’s communist one. While Badiou risks slipping into quietism by subtracting himself from the dominant forms of political participation and waiting for the right moment to strike, to arouse the masses by testifying to the event that has just taken place, his justification can only ever be this-worldly, i.e. *there is, ipso facto, no guarantee that an event will take place*. It is completely contingent on the actualizing process of a truth in a situation of the world (here understood in its global sense). Badiou explicitly acknowledges that:

“It is always possible that no event actually occur. Strictly speaking, a site is only ‘evental’ insofar as it is retroactively qualified as such by the occurrence of an

the way for the return of Christ: “Yet the truly exciting part of all this is that tree planting and widespread vegetation in the Land of the Bible is not only tied to biblical prophecy concerning the nation of Israel, but it has a direct connection to the prophecy about the soon return of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

http://www.bennyhinn.org/products/product_detail.cfm?itemid=718. What Hinn ministries does not tell you is that in order to prepare the land for planting, hundreds or perhaps even (eventually) thousands of Bedouin people have had their homes demolished and forced to move, see for example, Bedouin tribes' land fears over God-TV's tree planting. Online, *The National*, <http://www.thenational.ae/news/worldwide/middle-east/bedouin-tribes-land-fears-over-god-tvs-tree-planting> accessed December 28, 2010.

¹⁰⁹ 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 (New International Version 2011).

¹¹⁰ Žižek, *Defense of Lost Causes*, 391.

event... Therefore, there is no event save relative to a historical situation, even if a historical situation does not *necessarily* produce events.”¹¹¹

But precisely because of this *is this waiting not fundamentally irrational*, since as we have seen an event is never the “concentration of a vital continuity, or the immanent intensification of a becoming?” Can a charge not be laid, therefore, that *an evental subject is necessarily a fideistic subject*? The Christian form of waiting, however, is founded on an unshakeable conviction that the parousial event *will* take place. It is not a question of “if” but “when.” As such, Christian waiting is guaranteed by a divine Other, a definitely presumed to exist “X,” mediated through the form of a “promise” and in this strict sense, is a rational waiting. “In this strict sense” is here applied to the situation “Christian hope,” a situation predicated with a religious designation. Within this circularity, hope in this promise has an internal rationality, like the rules of a game by which a participant’s subjective disposition is mediated, always with a specific goal in mind. Characterized this way, Badiou’s position is more akin to a game in which no matter how many times the dice are rolled, there is not only no specific goal, there is not even a guarantee that the roll of the die itself has any substantial meaning. This is the case because for Badiou an event is only ever recognized as such *retroactively*. This is a Pascalian wager if there ever was one.

Here both Žižek and Johnston suggest an alternative to not only a strict Badiouan post-evental recognition of the event, but the possibility that actors may even be able to precipitate the event itself.

¹¹¹ Badiou, *Being and Event*, 179. Italics are Badiou’s.

One cannot ever be sure in advance if what appears (within the register and the space of the visibility of the ruling ideology) as “minor” measures will not set in motion a process that will lead to the radical (evental) transformation of the whole field. There are situations in which a minimal measure of social reform can have a much stronger large-scale consequences than self-professed “radical” changes...¹¹²

For Johnston this translates into a kind of pre-evental subjectivity, an idea Badiou is strictly opposed to:¹¹³

Given the theoretical validity of assuming that these camouflaged Achilles’ heels (as hidden evental sites) can and do exist in one’s worldly context, one should be patiently hopeful that one’s apparently minor gestures, carried out under the guidance of a pre-evental surveillance of the situation in search of its concealed kernels of real transformation, might come to unleash major repercussions for the state-of-the-situation and/or transcendental regime of the world. In other words, it’s reasonable to anticipate that seemingly circumscribed and constrained regional projects, if carefully targeted under the guidance of the proper sort of ideology critique, might actually result in fundamental reality-altering reverberations...¹¹⁴

Prior to the subject-recognized occurrence of an event, individuals practicing a certain variety of subtractive politics are quite justified in hoping to find, through a careful examination of their situation, figures and sites that are both specific-but-not-specified (Hallward) as well as capable of shifting from appearing to be not-quite-evental loci in the eyes of pre-evental present anticipation to becoming powerful disruptions in post-evental future hindsight (Eagleton). In other words, subtractive politics could productively be thought of as deploying a pre-evental subjective inquiry or investigation...¹¹⁵

In Christian terms the difference between Badiou and Žižek/Johnston may be likened to the difference between Saint Paul’s Thessalonians (leading quiet lives and working with their hands, ever watchful, etc) and the patient activity of contemporary missionary Christians who earnestly believe that once the gospel is “preached in the whole world as a

¹¹² Žižek, *Defense of Lost Causes*, 390.

¹¹³ Remember that a “subject” is only inaugurated by fidelity to the event.

¹¹⁴ Johnston, 29.

¹¹⁵ Johnston, 25.

testimony to all nations” the “end will come,”¹¹⁶ generally indicative of a certain sort of Protestant Evangelical approach to the matter.

For example, some time ago I was the group leader of a Bible translation team based in Fort Worth Texas. Our work group travelled to Guinea, West Africa a number of times to render assistance to Bible translators in the field, provide medical care for local communities, and collect various cultural data for later dissemination among future missionaries (this to increase efficiency and cultural sensitivity). It was a commonly held sentiment among the translators that their missionary activity was part of the Great Commission of Matthew 28,¹¹⁷ and made an implicit connection here to the immanent return of Christ. There was therefore a sense of immediacy in everything they did. They continually had to surmount what one missionary referred to as a “generational obstacle.” It was not enough that the gospel was preached in every nation and place, it also had to reach every individual. Because people naturally (sometimes not so naturally) age and pass away, there was no guarantee that younger generations would hear of Jesus and have the opportunity to make a personal and informed decision. The translated Bibles were a way to overcome this obstacle. Ironically this held true even with the group of people I lived with, who as it turns out, belonged to an oral culture. The missionaries therefore had not only to translate the Bible in the local language (*Yalunka* as it happened to be), they had to literally invent an alphabet and teach the people how to read in their own

¹¹⁶ Matthew 24:14 (New International Version 2011). Of course not supplemented with the big Other’s guarantee of meaning.

¹¹⁷ “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” Matthew 28:19-20. Also Matthew 24:14: “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”

language. Incredibly these missionaries were ushering in a cultural shift from an oral society to a “literate” one!

Unlike the Christian examples above, both Žižek/Johnston and Badiou do not speak in terms of an eventual *guarantee*. Both are the active and passive sides of the same coin it would seem. This is especially the case when one observes that neither Žižek nor Johnston speak of one’s activity *necessitating* an event. They are purposively ambiguous here, saying one’s activity “might” or “can” result in an eventual upheaval. For this reason they are merely more optimistic types of Badiouan actors.

In this Chapter I have briefly outlined Badiou’s basic understanding of “being” and some implications for what Badiou has named an “event.” I have argued for the importance of understanding an event as a “break” in a situation, as calling for a new regime in thought and action within a situation. To fail in this is to lack fidelity to the event itself, ultimately to the truth of a situation and composition of a subject. One cannot simply go on living “as if” an event never took place. Olympe de Gouges is an excellent example of a faithful subject of a truth, one who fully lived the consequences of the statement “Men are born and remain free and equal in rights” even when others opposed the fundamental universality of the designation “men” by failing to admit women and Jewish citizens into the political process. I argued that this fidelity constitutes an ethic, one that is able to recognize three distortions of the Good: simulacrum, betrayal, and forced naming. This ethic is manifested within political praxis, whether it be subtractive Badiouan politics, or a Žižekian supplement. What emerges from this discussion is a discourse on fidelity, a way of talking about fidelity to a truth that unfolds point by point in a world. Badiou challenges us to think about what it means

to be a subject of a truth, what constitutes this subject, and what is required of her. In the next Chapter, we turn to the philosophy of Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek and the implications he draws from Jesus' crucifixion for death of God theology and community, both notions, in turn, informed by Žižek's understanding of Spirit.

Chapter Two

Slavoj Žižek: A Crucified God

2.1 The Death of God

Christian universality is the universality which emerges at the symptomal point of those who are "part of no-part" of the global order - this is where the reproach of exclusion gets it wrong: the Christian universality, far from excluding some subjects, is formulated from the position of those excluded, of those for whom there is no specific place within the existing order, although they belong to it; universality is strictly co-dependent with this lack of specific place/determination.¹¹⁸

"The Parallax View II," Slavoj

Žižek

It is clear that, like his atheist Marxist predecessor Ernst Bloch, Slavoj Žižek finds the Jewish book of Job to be fascinating.¹¹⁹ Though Žižek follows G.K. Chesterton's interpretation, the interpretations of Bloch and Žižek are complementary. Bloch, for example, sees Job taking a step away from God, in "an 'exodus from Jehovah,' a step toward freeing humanity."¹²⁰ For him the most logical response to the theodicy presented by Job's situation is the French enlightenment's *dieu n'existe pas*.¹²¹ Žižek too feels that the story of Job involves an emancipatory kernel leading one to atheism, but he takes a

¹¹⁸ Slavoj Žižek, "Parallax View II: The Birth of (the Hegelian) Concrete Universality Out of the Spirit of (Kantian) Antinomies," *Lacan.com* (2006): <http://www.lacan.com/zizparallax2.htm> (accessed March 25, 2010).

¹¹⁹ Ernst Bloch, *Atheism in Christianity* (London: Verso, 2009).

¹²⁰ Hans-Robert Jauss, "Job's Questions and Their Distant Reply: Goethe, Nietzsche, Heidegger" in *Comparative Literature* (Summer 1982), 202.

¹²¹ James Bentley, "The Christian Significance of Atheist Ernst Bloch" in *The Expository Times* (1976), 53.

much more radical position, following Chesterton: *it is God himself who becomes for a moment an atheist*. To see how he comes to this conclusion one must start with a brief examination of the story itself.

Job finds himself in a horrible state. He has lost his servants and the animals they were tending (Job 1:15). His sheep were burned up by fire from heaven, along with the servants who were tending them (1:16). The Chaldeans came and stole his camels, killing once again the servants who were tending them with the edge of the sword (1:17). His children were then crushed under a roof that collapsed under high winds (1:18). Upon hearing of these tragedies Job, surprisingly, worships (1:20). As if this was not enough tragedy, Job is also struck with a skin disease (2:7). It is only after this that Job's three friends come and present themselves before him. Žižek rightly points out that despite the text's own comments that "they made an appointment together to come show him sympathy and comfort," what they offered instead was interpretation:

[...] his theological friends come, offering interpretations which render these calamities meaningful, and the greatness of Job is not so much to protest his innocence as to insist on the meaninglessness of his calamities (when God appears afterward, he sides with Job against the theological defenders of the faith).¹²²

That something more than a comforting interpretative gloss is called for, Žižek makes the point that the story of Job and the story of Jesus are interconnected in the biblical narrative and in Christian thought. Something momentous is thus afoot, as, in a move of double kenosis, there is implicit in both accounts an "overlapping of God's self-

¹²² Slavoj Žižek and John Milbank, *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009), 53.

alienation with the alienation of the human individual abandoned by God.”¹²³ The first symptom of God’s self-alienation is wonder:

God says, in effect, that if there is one fine thing about the world, as far as men are concerned, it is that it cannot be explained. He insists on the inexplicableness of everything. “Hath the rain a father?... Out of whose womb came the ice?” He goes farther and insists on the positive and palpable unreason of things; “Hast thou sent the rain upon the desert where no man is, and upon the wilderness wherein there is no man?” (38.26). To startle man, God becomes for a moment a blasphemer; one might almost say that God becomes for an instant an atheist. He unrolls before Job a long panorama of created things, the horse, the eagle, the raven, the wild ass, the peacock, the ostrich, the crocodile. He so describes each of them that it sounds like a monster walking around in the sun. The whole is a sort of psalm or rhapsody of the sense of wonder. The maker of all things is astonished at the things he has Himself made.¹²⁴

God, in the book of Job, has taken one step away as the guarantor of meaning in the face of catastrophe. For Žižek this very thing happens once again at the crucifixion. In Jesus’ cry, “Why have you forsaken me?” Christ’s address to the God-Father is a confrontation concerning the meaninglessness of it all. Here at the crucifixion there is also no guarantor of meaning (there is no response from heaven as at Christ’s baptism). Here in Jesus crucified, rather, “man’s alienation from God coincides with God’s alienation from himself.”¹²⁵

When the world shook and the sun was wiped out of heaven, it was not at the crucifixion, but at the cry from the cross: the cry which confessed that God was forsaken of God. And now let the revolutionists choose a creed from all the creeds and a god from all the gods of the world, carefully weighing all the gods of inevitable recurrence and of unalterable power. They will not find another god

¹²³ Ibid, 57.

¹²⁴ G.K. Chesterton, *The Book of Job with an Introduction* (London: C. Palmer and Hayward, 1916), xxiii.

¹²⁵ Žižek and Milbank, 60.

who himself has been in revolt. Nay (the matter grows too difficult for human speech), but let the atheists themselves choose a god. They will find only one divinity who ever uttered their isolation; only one religion in which God seemed for an instant to be an atheist.¹²⁶

For Žižek, this is a radical departure from standard forms of atheism in which God ceases to exist for the one who no longer believes in God. In Christianity, God dies for Himself.¹²⁷

This, then, would be the outlines of the Žižekian response to my earlier statement that the disciples were acting more consistently in regard to Christ's teachings than Christ himself: Of course the disciples would act this way, by definition, they are still acting as followers without autonomy. *Only Christ himself as the incarnation of God has the autonomy to act how he pleases, even if his actions are not consistent with his teaching.*

Žižek is right here to recognize this as a consequence of the incarnation:

Back to great Teachers like the Buddha: they did not *reveal* their Truth in the strict Christian sense; they merely *exemplified* by their model life the universal teaching they were spreading. In this precise sense, *the Buddha was a Buddhist, even an exemplary one, while Christ was not a Christian* – he was Christ himself in his absolute singularity. Christ does not “demonstrate with his acts his fidelity to his own teaching” – there simply is no gap between his individuality and his teaching, a gap to be filled in by the fidelity of his acts to his teaching; *Christ's ultimate “teaching” – lesson – immediately is his very existence as an individual*

¹²⁶ G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), 135. Karl Barth also attributes a kind of “unbelief” to Jesus’ cry from the cross: “In the peace of God there is room also for what the world calls unbelief: *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*” Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 155.

¹²⁷ Slavoj, Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), 15.

who is, in absolute simultaneity, man and God.¹²⁸

This absolute identification of God and man should be recognized as the “monstrosity” that it is, not simply in the two-fold sense Žižek envisions in his *Monstrosity of Christ* — first as the monstrosity of the infinite God in finite human flesh, secondly as the monstrous notion that the human should “stand” for God¹²⁹ — but also in a third sense drawn from Žižek’s own oeuvre in another place: the monstrosity of the human subject itself.¹³⁰ Here Christ becomes a monstrosity by association, for by becoming human he too must endure the gaze of the animal who sees in the human an alien creature, a horrible perversion of nature, capable not only of destroying the environment on which it depends, but even destroying itself and every living thing. This is the (self) alienation experienced by God in man, reaching its ultimate expression in the words of forsakenness from the cross. The process inaugurated in the book of Job as a self-wondering God is thus completed in the gospels in the account of a self-sacrificing God, a God who finds himself forsaken not just by created beings, but by the now empty heavens themselves.

This is why Žižek, *a propos* of Christian universalism, maintains that the usual form of universalism does not go far enough in recognizing Jesus’ own place among the excluded:

To follow Saint Paul... Christian universality, far from excluding some subjects, is formulated from the position of those excluded, of those for whom there is no

¹²⁸ Žižek, *Parallax View*, 98.

¹²⁹ Žižek and Milbank, 74.

¹³⁰ God Without the Sacred, Žižek, Lecture NYPL. Available online from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZQP31DdbP4A>.

specific place within the existing order, although they belong to it.¹³¹

Is not the Biblical example of this excluded position *par excellence*, indeed, Jesus himself, and specifically the Jesus of the cross?¹³² For Žižek, the very character of Christianity is such that it functions as a religion that prepares humanity for the “exit from the religious,” precisely in its treatment of the incarnation and death of the God-man Jesus.¹³³

With Christ’s incarnation; the externalization/self-alienation of divinity, the passage from the transcendent God to finite/mortal individuals, is *fait accompli*, there is no way back, all there is, all that “really exists,” from now on are individuals.¹³⁴

The point is not simply that Jesus was mortal, but rather, that Jesus “had no specific place,” nowhere to “lay his head,” and was finally excluded from life itself. Not only does God remove himself from the situation, but his final act in Jesus is to completely identify himself with those who are a “part of no-part,” those who are, for Žižek,

¹³¹ Žižek, *Parallax View*, 35.

¹³² Interestingly, this conclusion flies in the face of a Badiouan position regarding Christ, which as we have seen locates Christ’s importance not in his life and death (which are ultimately non-Events) but in the resurrection (and the subsequent fidelities to its implications). The couplet, Badiou: Resurrection/ Žižek: Death, reflects the two general subjective orientations of the thinkers in their respective Idealism and Pessimism. In our present context, a combination of the two would seem to fit nicely with the statement, “No Resurrection Sunday without Holy Friday.”

¹³³ Thierry de Duve, “Come on Humans, One More Effort if You Want to be Post-Christian” in Hent de Vries and Lawrence E. Sullivan, eds, *Political Theologies: Public Religions*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 652.

¹³⁴ Žižek and Milbank, 61.

exemplified by the world's burgeoning slum inhabitants,¹³⁵ which UN estimates place at 828 million inhabitants and climbing.¹³⁶ The person of Jesus is universal here precisely because of his detachment from those institutions and guarantees of social status, without any particular identity within a recognized social order. In his identification with the part of no-part, Jesus in a sense foretold his own universality, not in the sense of a particular human rising from the dead thereby representing the promise for all of resurrection, but in the sense of his standing for the poor, that part of society which is "out of place" with the social totality and therefore de-particularized.¹³⁷

If we were to stop here, this view could perhaps be criticised for making a virtue out of poverty, as if poverty as-such had universal value or positive meaning. It is not that the part of no-part is inherently virtue-laden, as many charitable organizations seem to portray.¹³⁸ What concerns us here, by contrast, is the part of no-part as a *site* of emancipatory activity, or in Badiouan terms, a site out of which a Subject arises. What makes the apostles *subjects*, on such terms, is their fidelity to the Christ-event, a fidelity that simultaneously separated them from their former status as indiscernible. Their

¹³⁵ Žižek, *End Times*, 124.

¹³⁶ Global Action Needed to Tackle Urban Squalor as Number of Slum-dwellers Continues Rising Worldwide, Second Committee Told. Online, *United Nations*, <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2010/gaef3294.doc.htm>, accessed December 2010.

¹³⁷ Žižek, *End Times*, 124.

¹³⁸ A favourite is the face of an African woman who is poverty-stricken and has contracted HIV. As Kylie Thomas rightly notes: "To take such representations as points of access to the truth of the subjects they represent is to disavow the relations of power that continue to determine how such images appear and how they can be read." Thomas, "Selling sorrow: testimony, representation and images of HIV-positive South African women," *Social Dynamics* (Sept 2008) 223.

humble beginning was the presupposition of their later subjectivization, the ground from which their subjectivity was made possible — not as a guarantee of that subjectivity, but a site in which that subjectivity became possible. For Žižek such subjectivity is composed not just of an individual's fidelity, but by the fidelity of a community of the faithful, which he speaks of as the community of the Spirit.

That this Spirit community exists depends, however, on the death of God. Or, as Žižek puts it: “There is no Holy Spirit without the squashed body of a bird (Christ's mutilated corpse).”¹³⁹ What does Žižek mean by this? Again, we will have to consider the incarnation and death of God in Christ, but understood in quasi-Hegelian terms. What happens in the incarnation, for Žižek, is correlative to the phenomenological¹⁴⁰ move observable in the development of philosophy between Kant and Hegel. This is a difficult and no doubt controversial point, and we have scope here only to touch upon it lightly, but simply put, pre-incarnational thinking about God may be represented as thoroughly Kantian, in that God can be seen as the “Thing-in-itself” which cannot be “phenomenalized” properly, and thus cannot be fully represented. It is only the incarnation that moves from the unphenomenizable “Thing” to something that has full presence in bone and flesh. This is quite a radical thought. The gap between the “thing-as-such” and one's representations, either filtered through a person's nervous system and sensory apparatuses, or represented through the medium of language and culture, is a given limit of the human ability to know and see. It is a presupposition of all worlds of appearing, the ground of all phenomenal things, but impenetrable in and of itself. This is

¹³⁹ Žižek and Milbank, 76.

¹⁴⁰ The word as used in this sense owes much to Hegel.

why the incarnation is such a radical notion. For the first time in thought, the two are brought into radical identification with one another: The “thing-in-itself” is now what might be called a “thing-for-us.”¹⁴¹ Žižek writes:

The gap of representation is thus closed, exactly as in the case of Christ who, in contrast to previous pagan divinities, does not “represent” some universal power or principle (as in Hinduism, in which Krishna, Vishna [sic.], Shiva, and so on, all “stand for” certain spiritual principles or powers – love, hatred, reason): as this miserable human, Christ directly *is* God. Christ is not *also* human, apart from being God; he is a man precisely *insofar as he is God*; that is, the *ecce homo* is the highest mark of his divinity. There is thus an objective irony in Pontius Pilate’s “*Ecce homo!*”, when he presents Christ to the enraged mob: its meaning is *not* “Look at this miserable tortured creature! Do you see in it a simple vulnerable man? Have you no compassion for it?” but, rather, “Here is God himself!”¹⁴²

For Žižek, then, the death of the God-man Jesus is in effect the death of the “thing-in-itself.” There is no longer an infinite “beyond,” beyond appearance. The very obscurity of the “thing-in-itself” is a sign that there is nothing beyond the world of phenomenality. It is now only in the world of appearances, in subjective experience that the Thing can be encountered. Christ’s incarnation and death was necessary so that God would no longer remain a distant self-contained entity.

The incarnation, furthermore, was the necessary condition of Christian subjectivity, of Spirit’s identification with human activity. This community of the Spirit fills in the gap, the void, of where God once dwelt. It “stands” in for God.

¹⁴¹ I am not sure if this expression has ever been used before. A cursory search has failed to come up with a similar usage. This is not an expression Žižek himself uses.

¹⁴² Žižek, *Parallax View*, 105-106.

2.2 Spirit/Collective

For Žižek the next move follows from the crucifixion: the Spirit is now “the virtual presupposition of the activity of finite individuals.”¹⁴³ Against those who think the Hegelian “Spirit” is a kind of meta-spirit substance existing in some way apart from human subjects, controlling human history, Žižek maintains a typically “young Hegelian” approach, and cites Hegel’s own famous words to this effect:

[...] it is in the finite consciousness that the process of knowing spirit’s essence takes place and that the divine self-consciousness thus arises. Out of the foaming ferment of finitude, spirit rises up fragrantly.¹⁴⁴

Finite human beings are, in short, the site of the Spirit which, as Hegel himself says, can only be experienced sensually:

Since it is, on the one hand, a need, a feeling, the subject must, on the other hand, distinguish itself from it, must make a distinction between this presence of God and itself, but in such a way that this presence of God will be something certain, and this certainty can actually exist here only in the form of sensuous manifestation.¹⁴⁵

But Žižek goes a step further. It has been fashionable in some parts of the Church to emphasize the inner experience of Christ over against the institutional framework or external ordering of the church body, a practice that no doubt often leads to a kind of

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion: The Consummate Religion*, trans. Peter C. Hodgson (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), 233.

¹⁴⁵ G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (London: Paternoster House, 1895), 88. Hodgson translates it “sensible appearance.” See Hodgson, 464.

“spiritual elitism” among Christians (a problem also in St. Paul’s Corinth).¹⁴⁶ What, asks Žižek, if the Holy Spirit is itself pure performativity? What if it is that meaning independent of one’s actual words, located purely within the act?¹⁴⁷ is the Spirit would then be something similar to the social gesture of saying “*Gesundheit*” after your friend sneezes, or even after a perfect stranger sneezes. It is not so much the words themselves that are important, for one could just as easily say “God bless you” (often even to an atheist!), or “*à tes souhaits*” after a sneeze, depending on the linguistic context. The point, rather, is the performative function of the response within the social field. In the same way, the Holy Spirit on such terms could be seen not so much as a “person” subsisting within the divine substance, but as an act, an act which is in the specifically Christian case, the actual activity of the Christian community.

Such is, of course, Žižek’s view of the Spirit, and that is why, for Žižek, those early Christians who awaited Christ’s return soon drew the inevitable and proper conclusion: they were waiting for the wrong thing. The originally apocalyptic collective soon self-organized with the understanding that “Christ had already returned as the Holy

¹⁴⁶ See for example, Ronald M. Enroth, *Churches that Abuse* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992). “Quite clearly, the excesses at Community Chapel demonstrate what can happen when spiritual experience dictates theology and then necessitates a re-interpretation of Scripture. Subjective experience takes care of the theological loopholes that the Bible seems not to address. The leadership of Community Chapel promoted the view that one could accept certain doctrines and practices if they could not be disproved from Scripture... [I]t has been said that commitment without careful reflection is fanaticism in action, and that certainly was the case at Community Chapel” (26). See also 1 Corinthians 14 where Paul repeatedly emphasizes the importance of “order” in worship, a plea propped up by reminder to the Corinthian church of his apostolic leadership.

¹⁴⁷ Žižek, *Parallax View*, 117.

Spirit of their community.”¹⁴⁸ For Žižek, then, the Holy Spirit *is the activity of the* apocalyptic emancipatory collective. Through the actions of the community the Holy Spirit is manifested in its members.

What dies with Jesus on the cross, therefore, is the hope that there is a “Father” who is there to hear the cry, “Father, why have you forsaken me?” The new community of the Spirit that follows from his death cannot rely on any such notion of a big Other, a Master-Signifier. But the implication of this extends well beyond the sphere of the Church itself:

The point of Christianity as the religion of atheism is not the vulgar humanist one that the becoming-man-of-God reveals that man is the secret of God (Feuerbach et al.); rather, it attacks the religious hard core that survives even in humanism, even up to Stalinism, with its belief in History as the “big Other” that decides on the “objective meaning” of our deeds.¹⁴⁹

All such Others are dead. Here, then, in the Spirit community one may locate a fourth monstrosity, not just the scandal of a God-man, the idea that in some way a man could stand for God, or that man the destroyer and perversion of nature should be the site of the incarnation, but now also the notion that each individual has an immediate access to universality (the Holy Spirit), *regardless of social standing or gender*.¹⁵⁰

Like Badiou, Žižek sees St. Paul as providing the real formulation for this universalization: “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there

¹⁴⁸ Žižek and Milbank, 283.

¹⁴⁹ Žižek, *Puppet and the Dwarf*, 171.

¹⁵⁰ Žižek, *End Times*, 105.

male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28).¹⁵¹ No longer is one’s status determined by biological considerations, so that against established practice, and even Aristotle, there is no longer such a thing as a slave by nature. St. Paul demonstrates this conviction in a diplomatic fashion in regard to Onesimus, Philemon’s runaway *δοῦλος*, who in his fidelity to Christ should no longer be considered a slave but an *ἀδελφός*. Žižek is correct to recognize in Jesus’ logion, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26), the prototype of this Pauline universalism. Fidelity to the Christ-event trumps all natural relations, cutting across all identities grounded in biological-cultural designations. According to Žižek:

“Holy Spirit” designates a new collective held together not by a Master-Signifier, but by fidelity to a Cause, by the effort to draw a new line of separation that runs “beyond Good and Evil,” that is to say, that runs across and suspends the distinctions of the existing social body.¹⁵²

As Thierry de Duve pointed out (see note 133), Christianity prepares the way out of the religious for the first time in the history of religions. Žižek believes it is possible

¹⁵¹ Although this is not unproblematic. See, for example Alain de Benoist’s criticism of John Milbank, equally applicable here: “Let us note Milbank’s extravagant assertion that the “equality of women . . . stems from St. Paul.” Has Milbank really read the first Epistle to the Corinthians: “The wife doesn’t have authority over her own body, but the husband” (1 Cor. 7:4); “The head of the woman is the man” (1 Cor. 11:3); “For neither was man created for the woman, but woman for the man” (1 Cor. 11:10–11)? Or the Epistle to the Ephesians: “For the husband is the head of the wife, and Christ also is the head of the assembly” (Eph. 5:23). And in the First Epistle to Timothy: “Let the woman learn in silence in all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence” (1 Tim. 2:11–12).” Alain de Benoist, “Reply to Milbank,” *Telos*, (Summer 2006) 25.

¹⁵² Žižek, *Puppet and the Dwarf*, 130.

today to redeem this core of the Christian tradition, but it will come at a cost. It must abandon:

[...] the shell of its institutional organization. The gap here is irreducible: either one drops the religious form, or one maintains the form, but loses the essence. That is the ultimate heroic gesture that awaits Christianity: in order to save its treasure, it has to sacrifice itself- like Christ, who had to die so that Christianity could emerge.¹⁵³

In the appropriation of Spirit as the locus of its activity (an activity belonging uniquely to it), the Church committed a great crime against Jesus and humanity. It committed what Thomas Altizer calls the original heresy: the identification of the Church as the body of Christ.¹⁵⁴ It is only by sacrificing itself as its founding figure did that Christianity will truly be living out the kenotic movement of God's will. It is this Christianity that Žižek sees following in the long history of the emancipatory Idea (beginning with Spartacus, a favourite of leftists like Žižek¹⁵⁵).

One is left wondering at this juncture whether Žižek is offering anything other than a "death of God" theology akin to those of the 1960s? In fact, none other than Thomas Altizer, one of the leaders of the death of God movement a generation ago, is one of two people to endorse Žižek's work *The Monstrosity of Christ* on the rear cover.¹⁵⁶ In

¹⁵³ Ibid, 171.

¹⁵⁴ Thomas Altizer, *The Gospel of Christian Atheism* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), 132.

¹⁵⁵ See Marx's "Confession" where Spartacus is described as his hero, along with Kepler. Badiou too treats Spartacus in his *Logics of Worlds*, 69.

¹⁵⁶ "The contemporary return to the theological most dramatically occurs in this book, as Žižek fully realizes his earlier Hegelian and Lacanian theological work, a work that Milbank can essentially know as a unique modern expression of nihilism. Nonetheless,

one of the few places Žižek references Altizer, his relationship to Altizer's ideas is clear: "The only way to redeem the subversive core of Christianity is therefore to return to death-of-God theology, especially Thomas Altizer: to *repeat* its gesture today."¹⁵⁷ What Žižek hopes to do, however, goes beyond Altizer in that he aims specifically to recapture the very traumatic core of Christian apocalypticism, the death of God as the "darkness at noon," the apocalypse of God.¹⁵⁸

The death of God debate is, as has been suggested, an old one, and Altizer is certainly among the best known of the theologians to elaborate on a death of God theology in recent memory. His work, however, is currently regaining some of the popularity it once had and is being engaged by a number of diverse thinkers (Žižek is a case in point).¹⁵⁹ Altizer and Žižek share a very similar understanding of the implications of the idea of God's kenotic nature in Christian theology, but where Altizer is left wrestling with the significance of God's *continual* self-emptying, Žižek busily outlines a post-Christian collective where the locus of the Spirit is the new universal community. At this point, the importance of Badiou for Žižek comes into particular focus, for the Spirit (for Žižek the meaning of the "resurrected God") is literally the collective's fidelity to the event.

Milbank enters into a genuine theological dialogue with this nihilism, and a truly new theological discourse occurs. This effects a paradoxical union between orthodoxy and heterodoxy, which is perhaps the deepest motif of the contemporary return to the theological." The other reviewer is Catherine Malabou.

¹⁵⁷ Žižek and Milbank, 260.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 260-261.

¹⁵⁹ Christopher Rodkey, "Thinking Through the Death of God" in *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* (Fall 2005), 109-115.

The possibilities inherent in this community are really Žižek's main focus. In a move paralleling the early Christian emergence in the context of imperial Rome, this community functions to "undermine the global empire of capital, not by asserting particular identities, but through the assertion of a new universality."¹⁶⁰ How this process actually plays out seems to take on a Qohelet¹⁶¹ style ethic. There is a time for violent resistance and a time for non-violent positivity, a time for quiet subversive activity and a time for open railing against the enemy. Here one should counter Žižek and Johnston's earlier critique of Badiou's "quietism" with Žižek's own understanding of the nature of violence. Žižek points out the properly "violent" nature of refusing to act within a given political context, a kind of "Bartleby politics", named after Melville's character in his classic, *Bartleby the Scrivener*, who after being asked by his employer to perform some duty would either remain silent or respond with the sentiment, "I would prefer not to," completely disorienting his employer. According to Žižek:

The "Bartleby act" is violent precisely insofar as it entails refusing this obsessive activity – in it, not only do violence and non-violence overlap (non-violence appears as the highest violence), so too do act and inactivity (here the most radical act is to do nothing).¹⁶²

Here too, it might be possible to understand Žižek's approach as, at times at least, similar to Badiou's refusal to engage in state politics, in order to do more violence by inactivity and withdrawal than by activist commitment, so that by "preferring not to" participate,

¹⁶⁰ Slavoj Žižek, "A Leftist Plea for Eurocentrism" in *Critical Inquiry* (Summer 1998), 1008.

¹⁶¹ The Hebrew name for the biblical book more usually called *Ecclesiastes*.

¹⁶² Žižek, *End Times*, 401.

the state apparatus and its mechanisms are undermined at the level of their very presupposition, i.e. in their assumed democratic justification.

John Milbank has referred to Žižek's theology as a "heterodox version of Christian belief."¹⁶³ To be sure, Žižek is not interested in engaging a philosophy or theology that has not been informed by the Enlightenment or modern science.¹⁶⁴ In fact, Žižek does not hesitate to integrate the findings of modern science, quantum physics for example, into his philosophic-theological construction of reality.¹⁶⁵ There is something powerful about a position that is willing to go all the way, allowing various fields of human learning to inform its content, somewhat reminiscent of E.O. Wilson's project of "Ionian Enchantment" in *Consilience*.¹⁶⁶ Nevertheless, here is a theology which takes as its basic premise that its Object is dead. More accurately, it takes for granted that the Master-Signifier of traditional theology is empty. For Žižek, there never was a "God" behind the curtain of reality, there was only ever the sign embedded in the presentation of reality itself.

This is certainly a heterodox position, but it falls within and engages that stream of theology which is interested in how the early Church interpreted Jesus, and so, is part

¹⁶³ Žižek and Milbank, 111.

¹⁶⁴ With the exception of Meister Eckhart. But it is Eckhart's apophatic theology which lends itself well to philosophical appropriation. Hegel, who has a considerable influence on Žižek's thinking, uses language strikingly similar to Eckhart. That Hegel read and was influenced by Eckhart is well known. See Glen Alexander Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2001), 24-26.

¹⁶⁵ Slavoj Žižek, "Towards a Materialist Theology" in *Angelaki: Journal of Theoretical Humanities* (April 2007); 19-26. For more on science see page 77ff, and note 103.

¹⁶⁶ E.O. Wilson, *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999).

of the legitimate wrestling with the significance of Christ's incarnation and crucifixion. Admittedly Žižek does not see himself as correcting a theological error *per se*. He is more interested in how the truth of the Christ-event might be (re) deployed for the "articulation of universality as founded on the exceptional event,"¹⁶⁷ a concept which is, as we have seen, another materialist appropriation of the theological vis-à-vis Badiou. This allows him to rest relatively outside of orthodox critique. But might one not challenge the atheist Žižek himself as a theologian in the death of God stream? This may be overstating the case, but Žižek's engagement of Christian theological language and thought occasionally seems to reveal surprising sympathies as well as contradictions in the thought of the "big man from Slovenia." For example, in his *In Defense of Lost Causes*, Žižek speaks about the courage needed to accept the idea that the "big Other" no longer exists: "The true courage of an act is always the courage to accept the inexistence of the big Other, that is, to attack the existing order at the point of its symptomal knot."¹⁶⁸ Does this not, however, legitimate the very thing it seeks to renounce? If one truly accepts the nonexistence of the big Other *it is a matter of indifference, not courage*. In addition, if the big Other in the case of Christianity was only ever a sign imbedded in worldly presentation, what one needs is re-education, not bravery. If on the other hand we believe in the existence of a big Other, it would take courage to deny it, by very virtue of our belief in it. One wonders what it is that Žižek feels he must overcome here?

¹⁶⁷ Ward Blanton, "Apocalyptic Materiality: Return(s) of Early Christian Motifs in Slavoj Žižek's Depiction of the Materialist Subject" in *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* (December 2004), 10.

¹⁶⁸ Žižek, *Defense of Lost Causes*, 152.

In this Chapter, then, we have seen that for Žižek God must first die in order for humans to have true autonomy and responsibility for their life situation. He finds in the Christian story of the crucified Christ a valuable resource, one in which God does indeed die on a cross, resulting in the resurrection of an idea: the Spirit, the emancipatory activity of the faithful collective. The limits of this position from a Christian perspective ought not to blind us to its potential constructive importance. One aspect of this I wish to develop is in relation to the question with which we began, the re-invigoration of the Church. In the final Chapter, I will argue that not only do Žižek and Badiou deal with Christian themes more effectively than their materialist counterparts, but also that their emphasis on the “this-worldly” implications of theology results in powerful motivators for political and ethical praxis, so that point by point within the world a truth must be faithfully addressed by a subject and a faithful body.

Chapter Three

Towards a Pointal Ecclesiology

"Yessir, I am! I'm retiring from the world. I'm going to become an ascetic. That's what. There is no love left in this world my friend. No love left. They have even made pills out of Jesus, they have. And you know something? I don't give a damn anymore. Not a pinch of shit. Up with libido power! If God doesn't want to wipe us out we are going to wipe out God. Serves Him right too, all this peek-a-boo-stuff is a fraud. I guess He can't do anything about it anymore than I can. So I'm cutting out. Everybody for himself I think." Claudio Ianora, *Boobieland Express*

3.1 Materialists and Subversives

It should now be clear that both Žižek and Badiou offer important insights into the nature of community and fidelity. Žižek engages with Christian theology and in particular elaborates on a Christology that leads him to the extreme theological conclusion of a death of God theology where God truly is dead, having committed suicide, or more appropriately "deicide." On the one hand, this may be seen as following in a one-sided way a certain logic inherent in the New Testament writings and early Church itself (Paul's kenotic Christ and the Church's identification of Jesus with Deity, for example). On the other side, however, the lengths to which Žižek goes, actually emptying out the heavens and declaring that God is no more, or that the resurrection should be understood not in terms of Jesus bodily coming forth from the grave but in terms of community Spirit, with no promise of a future resurrection of believers and eternal life in its traditional Christian sense, is simply too much for most theologians. While disagreement between theologians is commonplace, the existence of God and the

historical reality of the resurrection have traditionally been fundamental tenets of Christian faith.¹⁶⁹ Thus, simply appropriating Badiou or Žižek’s work is not unproblematic.¹⁷⁰

As we move through this Chapter we will slowly outline some key concepts towards a pointal ecclesiology. It will be shown that any ecclesiology drawing on Badiou and Žižek will be communal. Against the rampant individualism in our society, a pointal ecclesiology will highlight the transformative and ethical force a community can bring to bear in a situation or world. It will locate “truth” in a number of places, not just the private property of a select few. It will emphasize fidelity to these truths, without losing sight of the truth in its own principles. It will further circumscribe one’s fidelity within the spheres of political praxis and experimentation. While direct appropriations of these two philosophers’ work might be problematic for theology, it will be shown that there are still valuable resources to be drawn from Žižek and Badiou, and that in the end, their engagement with Christianity indicates a willingness on their own part to move beyond facile dismissals to a considered interaction with theological thought.

¹⁶⁹ There are always exceptions of course, but these do not lie within generally accepted tradition. For example, Rudolph Bultmann, who I refer to as a “Resurrection reactionary” (page 75) denied historical status to the Resurrection, interpreting it instead within the horizon of the Church’s kerygmatic discourse and faith. “The real Easter faith is faith in the word of preaching which brings illumination. If the event of Easter Day is in any sense an historical event additional to the event of the cross, it is nothing else than the risen of faith in the risen Lord, since it was this faith which led to the apostolic preaching. The resurrection itself is not an event of past history.” Rudolph Bultmann, *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate* (London: SPCK, 1971), 42.

¹⁷⁰ See more below on this, page 84.

As we have seen, at various points Badiou and Žižek demonstrate an atheist “turn to the religious,” drawing on sources of religious history and thought to demonstrate and even revive thinking about universality and the collective, both ethico-political endeavours. This is in remarkable contrast to the agendas of critics like Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and Daniel Dennett, collectively known as the “Four Horsemen.”¹⁷¹ Whereas the “Horsemen” would prefer to extinguish religion altogether, however, and replace it with a kind of scientific humanism dedicated to the god Reason, thinkers like Badiou and Žižek are much more subversive, appropriating the very language and symbol of religion, reinterpreting it from within, working with a Reason inherent in its traditions.

The tension between the two critical approaches, as such, is instructive. In response to the first, Hans Albert has said:

Since the middle of our century, in philosophy and in some of the sciences, there has been a growing tendency toward a kind of antirealism, inspired by the philosophies of Martin Heidegger and Ludwig Wittgenstein. More than in previous times, philosophers take pains to undermine realism and the idea of objective truth and to rehabilitate mythical thinking. To say it with Wittgenstein, the religious language game cannot be affected by the results of the sciences, which are language games incommensurable with religion.¹⁷²

This, of course, is a position completely at variance with the one held by the “Horsemen,” which is, after all, that there is only one sort of reason, and which therefore resists the very possibility of which Albert speaks. Here one should recognize just how subversive

¹⁷¹ A designation created in reference to a discussion with the four men present. See the entry and relevant link at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Atheism.

¹⁷² Hans Albert, *Between Social Science, Religion, and Politics: Essays in Critical Rationalism* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999), 61.

Badiou and Žižek’s approach has been. Have they not approached religion from the standpoint (broadly speaking) of the Wittgensteinian “language game,” in order to undermine it internally, but in so doing, supporting a more scientific (materialist) position regarding the Spirit and universalism, hatched out of the religious language game itself?¹⁷³ On the second point concerning Christian reason, who can deny the systems of fundamentally *rational* structures in Christian theology, inherited no doubt in large measure from the Greeks and Romans, reinvigorated during the Middle Ages with the rediscovery of Aristotle’s writings, and finally reinforced by Enlightenment thinkers who were themselves more often than not believers?

The difference between Badiou and Žižek (especially Badiou) and most theologians is a disagreement not only over the real status of the resurrection, but over the existence of God. It is here that we should return to our earlier discussion concerning Badiou. In Chapter One, I suggested that a sixth response to Badiou was to accept his ontology but to seek to *supplement* his atheism with a materialist theology – a Christian atheism. This was necessary because Badiou’s ontology does not account for a divine Subject; in the words of the physicist Laplace, Badiou has “no need of that hypothesis.” For Badiou, as we have seen, the “event” to which St. Paul was faithful was not of the order of a truth event, but a fable:

¹⁷³ This is also, no doubt, why many missionaries feel Bible translation is so necessary: the power of reading or hearing a message in one’s own language is obvious to anyone who has tried to communicate some important point in another language. Or perhaps in a more paranoid frame one might see Badiou and Žižek’s work as an example of Robert Greene’s “Inner Front” strategy (itself borrowed from the Chinese *36 Strategies*): “To take something you want, do not fight those who have it, but rather join them – then either slowly make it your own or wait for the moment to stage a coup d’état. No structure can stand for long when it rots from within.” See Robert Greene, *The 33 Strategies of War* (New York: Viking Press, 2006), 407.

The Resurrection, after all, is just a mythological assertion. The claim “there is a limitless succession of prime numbers” expresses an indubitable universality. The claim that “Christ is resurrected” is as though subtracted from the opposition between the universal and the particular, because it is a narrative statement that we cannot assume to be historical.¹⁷⁴

But the question remains: How does Žižek’s materialist theology provide room for a “divine Subject?” Is it not still an “atheistic theology” with no place for God? The answer is both yes and no. Whereas Badiou views all talk of God within a mythical framework, Žižek truly leaves the question open. For him, God is dead. All that matters now is the Spirit of the collective.¹⁷⁵

On a broader level, Žižek’s and Badiou’s engagement of theological material raises another question. What is the status of theological thought? Who “owns” it, i.e. who has the right to engage in and utilize it? Is it the special possession of faith traditions, somewhat like the specialist knowledge and apparatuses of various scientific disciplines, or can non-faith participants legitimately do theology? To put this another way, does it have the same status as communist egalitarianism, as pointed out by Rancière in connection with failed communist communities:

They did not fail, as the opinion goes, because individuals could not submit to the common discipline. On the contrary, they failed because the communist capacity could not be privatized. The sharing of the capacity of anybody could not be

¹⁷⁴ Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 107.

¹⁷⁵ For Žižek, the big Other designated “God” was once thought of in terms of divine subjectivity, but now post-crucifixion should be thought only in terms of activity, here inextricable from human praxis. “God” as a noun is a mystification and deeply misleading. Not only does it justify all kinds of injustices for the sake of serving or impressing this big Other, it actually justifies inactivity, shirking responsibility for the woes of society, leading us to believe that somehow or other things will be all right because Divine agency guarantees it.

turned into the virtue of the private communist man.¹⁷⁶

Ranciere's point is that so many categories of communist discipline, whether it be emancipation from oppression or the communal sharing of labour, do not belong to the particular predicate "communism" as if *only* a communist could properly assume their practice. They belong precisely to the "capacity of anybody" by virtue of their universality, and therefore cannot be privatized or held pretentiously as particular communist virtues.

Insofar as egalitarianism, ethics, and the event (in the sense of creative novelty) are concerned, can the Church not admit that in the past it has likewise "privatized the capacity of anybody," has made these categories virtues of the religious community as if without the Church everyone would only do "what was right in his/her own eyes," as if there could be no new subjective creation without faith in Christ? Such a suggestion can only be said to be preposterous in view of the empirical evidence. It was Alan Watts, that once Anglican minister turned Zen Buddhist, who summed up the state of homily during his time in the Church: "So much preaching we hear on Sunday morning comes down to this: 'My dear people, be good!'" So much should be admitted. The real problem, however, is that such actual homiletic practice is a reflection of an underlying theology that has become little more than the repetition of the everyday humanistic parlance of modernity. Obsessed with seeming relevant, much contemporary theology is found in the position of having given up on the deeper core of Christian thought, in, for instance, the historical status and meaning of the resurrection (what Badiou refers to as a "fabulation").

¹⁷⁶ Jacques Rancière, "Communists Without Communism?" in *The Idea of Communism* (New York: Verso, 2010), 169.

Nor is the problem merely implicit or subterranean in the life of the Church, for the Church itself has its own resurrection “reactionaries” with positions openly akin to Badiou’s. For them, the resurrection is not theologically meaningful as an historical event, but as for Badiou, merely provides a hermeneutical substrate for what is truly important: theory and practice regarding the human subject/community. This sort of theology is so obviously a compromise with modernity that it is difficult to take it seriously *as theology*. It would surely cause the one who said, “...if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain,” to roll over in his grave (1 Cor. 15:14). Perhaps it is best seen as a reflection of the consciousness of a certain cultural type, or – because our dialogue concerns two Marxists – a certain “class.” As a result of the life of relative comfort lived by this class, it can no longer identify with the words that follow those just quoted: “If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied” (v.15). In short, it reflects a decadent class theology.

One should not, however, make the mistake of dismissing Badiou and Žižek as philosophers of decadence along with such contemporary theologians. For one thing, they do not belong to a tradition in which the resurrection as an historical event is debated, or one in which it is seen as the source of hope both in this life and in the life of the world to come. In effect, they set themselves apart from all of this by a reformulation or inversion of the Pauline principle: “We can have hope in Christ in this life only, *so let’s get to work!*” Whereas for St. Paul, human destitution seems only to be made bearable by hope in a future resurrection, for Žižek and Badiou any talk of bodily resurrection or of a hope beyond this life or this world is absurd. We are ultimately alone, and therefore we must create the conditions by which evil is overcome. If one is to hope

in anything, it is in one's work, in the Idea that such a project is not only necessary, but possible. The word "Christ" in the formulation, "We can have hope in Christ in this life only," would then have to be taken to mean something closer to "egalitarian love" for these thinkers. Nor is all of this sheer invention. Žižek, for instance, is fond of quoting Matthew 18:20: "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them." This, for Žižek, is something akin to the idea that wherever there are workers engaged in fighting for their cause, there lies the spirit of those workers who have sacrificed themselves for the revolutionary idea. There is in their struggle, and between the workers, a common egalitarian love rising up out of their very activity.

3.2 Experimentation

The problems in using philosophers such as Badiou and Žižek for theological purposes have, of course, to be acknowledged. However, there are also possibilities latent in their thinking upon which much may be built. While no full discussion of this question is possible within the limits of this thesis, I wish to draw in what follows on the concept of the event, in order to develop what I wish to call a "pointal" ecclesiology, in an attempt to sketch the outlines of an answer to the question with which this thesis began: "What can be done to reinvigorate the Church in the West?"

We might begin by posing a pertinent question arising from the philosophy of Badiou. Is it necessary, after all, to admit that today there is no proper Christian subject? It would appear that this does not have to be the case for the simple reason that one can certainly think of oneself as a Christian, and yet not deny the "evental" status of any

worldly event, or fail to live in fidelity to it. Probing a little more deeply, we might further ask what such fidelity might mean. For example, what has the Church had to say about the prospect of nuclear war, or how did it respond to the latest financial crisis? How has it actualized its members to deal with these issues? Let us begin with modern scientific developments. Has the Church, for instance, truly made an effort to come to grips with quantum reality and evolutionary theory?¹⁷⁷ Has it “lived the consequences” of scientific progress, or has its failure to do so undermined its role in matters of greater import than simply that of moral teaching or reconciliation (vital in their own right)?¹⁷⁸ What has the Church had to say, for example, about the prospect of nuclear war? The truth of the matter ought to make the theologian uncomfortable at this point. Ever since the advent of modern science the rational foundation for faith set up by the Fathers and Scholastics and the whole “rational edifice” of belief that followed has been, as Badiou puts it, “ruined.”¹⁷⁹

[...] at the very moment in which science finally legislated upon nature via demonstration, the Christian God could only remain at the centre of subjective experience if it belonged to an entirely different logic, if the ‘proofs of the existence of God’ were abandoned, and if the pure evental force of faith were

¹⁷⁷ Though one should not forget that Richard Feynman once famously quipped “I think I can safely say that nobody understands quantum mechanics.” See also note 103.

¹⁷⁸ Ironically does it not involve a reconciliation the Church itself had a hand in producing a need for? Let us not forget its role in colonial oppression and the resulting political and social unrest. See Bengt Sundkler and Christopher Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Klaus Koschorke, Frieder Ludwig, Mariano Delgado, and Roland Spliesgart eds., *A History of Christianity in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, 1450-1990: A Documentary Sourcebook* (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007). Though it should also be pointed out that the story these accounts relate is highly complex, involving both a corrupting and a reforming Church, a Church that is complicit in oppression, and a Church that simultaneously opposes it.

¹⁷⁹ Badiou (2007), 214.

restituted. It would have been possible, indeed, to believe that with an advent of a mathematics of infinity and a rational mechanics, the question imposed upon Christians was that of either renovating their proofs by nourishing them on the expansion of science; or, of completely separating the genres, and establishing that the religious sphere is beyond the reach of, or indifferent to, the deployment of scientific thought.¹⁸⁰

Badiou continues, indirectly providing a searing critique of that form of Christian apologetics which is all too willing to compromise with science and inadvertently leads to “an abstract God, a sort of ultra-mechanic, like Descartes’ God (‘useless and uncertain’) which will become Voltaire’s clockmaker-God, and is entirely compatible with hatred of Christianity.”¹⁸¹

Christian apologists like Alister McGrath and Arthur Peacocke often engage the field of scientific discovery in an effort to engage in dialogue and to affirm their theistic position.¹⁸² The end result, however, often looks nothing like traditional Christian belief. While some of these models *might* satisfy scientifically informed people, they do not necessarily lend support to the traditional or popular understanding of God. They rather provide, at most, a basic framework in which it is possible to say that some “Other” *may* exist in *some* fashion. Biologist Richard Dawkins, perhaps one of the most vocal atheists

¹⁸⁰ Ibid. Pascal also recognized this dilemma: “Si on soumet tout à la raison notre religion n'aura rien de mystérieux et de surnaturel. Si on choque les principes de la raison notre religion sera absurde et ridicule” [If we submit everything to reason, our religion will no longer be mysterious or supernatural. If we offend the principles of reason, our religion will be absurd and ridiculous]. (*Pensées*, 273).

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² See for example: Alister E. McGrath, *The Foundations of Dialogue in Science & Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998); Arthur Peacocke, *Creation and the World of Science: The Re-Shaping of Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

today, came to a very similar conclusion in a *Time* magazine debate (provocatively named: “God vs. Science”) with geneticist Francis Collins, a Christian and former director of the Human Genome Research Institute: “If there is a God, it’s going to be a whole lot bigger and a whole lot more incomprehensible than anything that any theologian of religion has ever proposed.”¹⁸³ This supports what Žižek says all along: the New Atheists and Christian apologists are merely two sides of the same coin. As Creston Davis pointedly summarizes in the Introduction to Žižek and Milbank’s *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic*, in their arguments, both sides merely unfold the implications of the same premises. While on the surface they appear to be different, at a deeper level they “share the exact same version of that which underlies their very thinking, viz. secular reason.”¹⁸⁴ A more radical departure for the field of theology would appear, therefore, to be needed.

The eventual nature of science was clear to that great physicist and Nobel Peace prize winner for his work in quantum electrodynamics, Richard Feynman. The transcript of a 1973 interview originally broadcast on Yorkshire Television in the U.K. is illuminating:

[F]araday described electricity by inventing a model (field lines). Maxwell formulated the equations mathematically with some model in his head, and Dirac got his answer by just writing and guessing an equation. Other people, like in relativity, got their ideas by looking at the principles of symmetry – and Heisenberg got his quantum mechanics by only thinking and talking about the things he could measure. Now take all these ideas: Try to define things only in terms of what we can measure. Let’s formulate the equation mathematically, or let’s guess the equation – all these things are tried all the time. All that stuff –

¹⁸³ David van Biema, “God vs. Science” in *Time* (13 November 2006), 39.

¹⁸⁴ Žižek and Milbank, 8.

when we are going against the problem, we do all that. It is very useful, but we all know that. That is what we learn in physics classes – how to do that.

But the *new* problem is where we are stuck. We are stuck because all those methods don't work. If any of those methods would work, we would have gone through them. So when we get stuck in a certain place, it is a place where history will not repeat itself. And that even makes it more exciting. Because whatever we are going to look at – the method, the trick, and the way it's going to look – it's going to be very different from the way we have seen before, because we have used all the methods from before. So therefore a thing like the history of the idea is an accident of how things actually happen. And if I want to turn history around to try to get a new way of looking at it, it doesn't make any difference...I don't care; the only real test in physics is experiment, and history is fundamentally irrelevant.¹⁸⁵

That creative novelty in the sciences was a break in the fabric of the situation, that his only prescription was “experimentation,” and that his fundamental orientation was not determined by “history,” all qualify Feynman as an eventual character within the sciences.

Badiou, for his part, has always acknowledged the importance of an experimental commitment in relation to the question of fidelity to an event.¹⁸⁶ Like Feynman, Badiou does not understand experimentation as mere repetition, but as that which opens up the possibility of something new:

For the process of a truth to begin, something must happen. What there already is, the situation of knowledge as such, only gives us repetition. For a truth to affirm its newness, there must be a *supplement*. This supplement is committed to chance. It is unpredictable, uncalculable. It is beyond what is. I call it an event.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁵ Abridged transcript available at: <http://calteches.library.caltech.edu/35/2/PointofView.htm>. For the full interview see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PsgBtOVzHKI>, 6:57-8:42.

¹⁸⁶ For example: “A Truth is a concrete process that starts by an upheaval (an encounter, a general revolt, a surprising new invention), and develops as fidelity to the novelty thus experimented.” On Evil: An Interview with Alain Badiou, by Christopher Cox and Molly Whalen, Cabinet Magazine Online, Issue 5, Winter 2001/02. Available online, <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/alain-badiou/articles/on-evil/>.

¹⁸⁷ Badiou, “The Ethic of Truths: Construction and Potency,” *Pli* 12 (2001), 250.

To illustrate the importance of this idea, albeit in a somewhat unconventional way, I wish to refer to the 2010 Hollywood blockbuster *Inception*, directed by Christopher Nolan, which I believe captures the sense of this “break in the situation” extremely well. The movie concerns a group of futuristic agents who are capable of entering into the dreams of whomever they wish to extract information from. A contractor hires them not only to extract information, but to plant false memory as well. This involves going deeper into the target’s psyche than ever before, potentially causing even the most experienced dream agent to lose himself in the dreams of another, to confuse the virtual reality of the dream with the reality of waking life. In order to prevent this from happening, dream agents must carry a “totem,” an object whose exact behaviour and characteristics only the carrier knows. This totem allows the agent to know whether or not she is working within dreamlike virtual reality, or actually participating in the real world. The main character carries a small spinning top which, when spun in virtual reality, will continue to spin indefinitely, allowing the agent to realize that he is still immersed in dreamtime.

The movie ends at the moment that the main character is finally reunited with his estranged children. In the final scene, as he is running towards his children, the audience sees the top as it continues to spin where he left it, and then the screen goes blank and we do not find out whether it topples or not. Many reviewers of the movie completely miss the point, suggesting that the meaning of the final scene is that it “keeps us guessing whether we’re dreaming or not.”¹⁸⁸ From a Badiouan perspective, however, we might say

¹⁸⁸ For example see Mike Bruno’s review where he says: “What’s more, Cobb didn’t even wait around to see for himself if his totem would fall. He rushed off to be with the kids. It

instead that the point is precisely that it no longer matters. The subjective truths conveyed by the main character finally meeting his children subsumes all other concerns, and so constitutes the “break” in the situation. This is the ultimate truth of the scene. The spinning top represents the Whole of the situation (the possibility of Wakefulness or Fantasy) which is abruptly cut off (cinematographically) because it no longer represents the Real of the situation (the – subjective – localization of the truth of the power of Love). We could add that ultimately we too are indifferent to the top. Its being (and representative function) cease to exist from the point of view of the subject, and hence its banishment from sight without further consideration. Whether the top stands or falls, it is no longer considered a site of truth for the subject.

In a similar way, in the life of the Church, I wish to suggest, one must take advantage of the “gap” that a break in the situation creates. Here we need to recognize the abundance of experimental communities and patterns of thought that exist, rising repeatedly within the Church itself. The various theologies, Christian identities and new communities, the almost endless array of published material available, testifies to the existence and centrality of this experimentation in this story of Christianity. There is no doubt that the diversity that results is not always seen as experimentation, but more pejoratively as evidence of a kind of schismatic disunity, or even as downright heretical. Within a Badiouan paradigm, however, and from the point of view of a pointal ecclesiology, such diversity is rather the reflection of an exercise of *fidelity*. This is an important insight, and is one that I wish to defend.

was as if he didn't care-” Entertainment Weekly, “Inception': Let's talk about that ending,” Summer Entertainment Guide, <http://popwatch.ew.com/2010/07/17/%E2%80%98inception-ending/> (accessed April 2, 2011). This is precisely the point!

A pointal ecclesiology must, therefore, in addition to the egalitarian component discussed earlier, include within its own self-definition the necessity of experimentation. As we have seen, this experimentation must include engagement with science. What, for example, are the implications of evolution by natural selection for human self-understanding? What about one's conception of God's creative act, including a scriptural hermeneutic which sees this act literally unfolding in Genesis 1 and 2? This, however, will only be a secondary consideration. The emphasis is not on critique (though there must be a critical component), but on a new creation. In other words, the real question becomes this: how, in faithfulness to the event, will I live from this day on? Will the decisions I make and the things I build, my labour, reflect my fidelity? From a Žižekian point of view my actions are not even a reflection of this fidelity, they *are* my fidelity. Experimentation *is* fidelity, in short, insofar as it is the faithful subject's response to the event.

We are speaking fundamentally here of a pointal or evental ethic, and the basic assumption, drawing constructively on the work of Badiou and Žižek, is that it is possible for a Christian subject to be seized by the event, and to work out the implications of the event through experimentation within a given world, point by point. So far, however, the most important question still has not been answered: What is specifically "Christian" about the "Christian subject?" By what right does one still maintain the predicate? Is it merely a self-designation signifying personal interest? These are important questions which can no longer be neglected.

3.3 From “Christian” Subject to Collective

We have already seen that, for Badiou, it is unnecessary to include with the subject a particular qualification. Is this simply an impasse that one inevitably meets when developing a Badiouan theology? This must be admitted. As we have seen, it is not possible to draw a one-to-one correspondence between Badiou’s work and theology, not without contradicting in the end his treatment of the development of the subject – or, on the Christian side, without compromise to Christian self-understanding in the broadest sense. His work is, however, still full of riches for the theologian, even though mining them entails that we can seem to be ignoring his fundamental premises and distorting the whole — or, to put the point more positively, even though employing them presupposes a certain “baptism” of the work of an unwilling convert.

It must be admitted, for example, that simply transferring his notion of “fidelity to the event” into a Christian framework, so that this fidelity comes to signify increased devotion to God, some new insight into the Creed, or some “practical” or “spiritual” re-examination of one’s life in light of the world’s distractions, and so on, would represent a profound perversion of Badiou’s original conception. Fidelity to the event in Badiou is emphatically not an expression of any particular religious devotion, and it is not a quickening of a specifically Christian piety. For Badiou, rather, an event explodes *all* particularities (even though it necessarily arises from them). It has universal implications (defined without theological content), and a faithful subject is defined precisely within the ambit of this universality. Badiou’s philosophy is not simply a new hermeneutical tool that we can place in the toolbox, ready to be pushed by those marketers of shiny new

Christian self-help products that fill the shelves of so many bookstores, sold to enable people to keep their particular faith allegiances. Badiou proposes, rather, a fundamental reorientation of outlook and of practice that changes everything.

How, then, can all this be thought within a theological framework? It can certainly not happen without some experimentation of our own, and that in a properly Badiouan sense: experimentation leading to supplementation. Then, however, we need to reckon with the implication that what results may stretch the limits of what was formerly known, in all its vast signification, as something “Christian.” At this point, it would be useful to refer to our earlier discussion concerning Badiou. In Chapter One, I suggested a sixth possible response to Badiou, which was to accept his ontology, but to *supplement* his atheism with a materialist theology, by which was meant Žižek’s “Christian atheism.” It is now time to sketch the contours of what this kind of supplementation might involve for a “pointal” ecclesiology.

First, I think that there is indeed something valuable to glean from Žižek’s understanding of the emancipatory collective. What Žižek challenges the Christian to confront is nothing less than the actualization of what we might call “Holy Spirit community.” Perhaps it is even possible to go so far to claim that Žižek is primarily writing pneumatologically, concerning himself with the sanctification of humanity through the power of the Holy Spirit. This may sound absurd in the face of Žižek’s atheism, but it is not an absurdity, of course, if one also appropriates Žižek’s meaning of the term “Spirit.” Such an approach would also have other implications. It would entail, for instance, a reinterpretation of the idea that Badiou finds so difficult: “Christ is resurrected.” This now might mean that, “Christ is resurrected (only) in the body of

‘Christians,’ those people who faithfully live out the implications of the Christ event, who actualize Spirit through the work of the emancipatory community.”

There is nothing here that contradicts Badiou’s theory of the event, no narrative fable that subtracts itself from the opposition between the universal and the particular. The subject/Spirit is as concrete as the one that participated in the French Revolution or in the movements represented by May ’68, and continues to live in fidelity to the event. “Christian” designates merely the particular world in which the event has arisen, but cannot, by nature of its evental status, ever be anything other than universal in nature unless used with reactionary or obscurantist connotations.

Žižek slips between those who insist on a purely historical view of the resurrection, and those who see it as purely metaphorical or mythological in the pejorative sense. For Žižek, the resurrection is neither pure history, in the sense of an actually occurring material event (a dead man getting up and walking around, later ascending to the sky), nor is it a metaphor for something else, like an existential experience (in which a person receives “new life” through faith in the risen Christ). It is rather, both an historical occurrence (in the life of the collective) and a truth (precisely because it is organically related to the Spirit of the emancipatory/ egalitarian collective as such). In the Christian religion, and above all in its celebration of the death and resurrection of Jesus, in short, there is first an evacuation of the heavens so that there are no longer any gods overseeing and affirming our actions, and there is secondly a movement or transference of the oversight and power of affirmation from the heavens to the collective. To speak of the death and resurrection of Jesus is in Žižek, then, to speak of something real – even if the referent is only obliquely referenced in its original religious representation, which

therefore requires a certain hermeneutical skill to grasp directly. The “*aeternae veritates*” of Christian theology, therefore, remain truths, though they are ultimately translated in Žižek’s thought into the death of God and the actualization of Spirit in community.

This, however, is also in perfect agreement with something basic to Badiou’s reading of dialectical materialism:

The universality of truths rests on subjective forms that cannot be either individual or communitarian.

Or:

*To the extent that it is the subject of a truth, a subject subtracts itself from every community and destroys every individuation.*¹⁸⁹

One needs to recall here Badiou’s notion of fidelity to an event. It is this fidelity that precisely constitutes a subject (the worker, the Christian, etc.) It further leads us to ask the question: What today constitutes a Christian subject? In light of Badiou’s work, it must be recognized that for Badiou terms like “worker” or “Christian” are in the end merely identitarian predicates of a subject. The subject proper is one who is faithful to a truth, a truth that is indifferent to all particular designations. The terms in question are ultimately irrelevant, and it is for this reason that Badiou can appropriate St. Paul (known formally as a Christian) as an example of a subject who is faithful. The Christ-event for Badiou, remember, did not have *particular* significance, but universal, and as such cuts across all historical identities and particular worlds. It would be a mistake, therefore, to think in terms of a “Christian subject” that is somehow qualitatively different than any other Badiouan subject. There are only two exceptions to this rule which we have seen above:

¹⁸⁹ Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 9. Italics in original.

the reactionary subject, and the obscure subject. The Christian subject would be a reactionary/obscure subject only insofar as this subject denies eventual status to an event in a non-religious (Christian) world. The predicate “Christian” here merely goes along for the ride, designating, perhaps, the *content* of a subject’s reactionist or obscurantist behaviour.

3.4 *Communitas*

This, I would suggest, touches directly upon an important area concerning which the Church has traditionally been mistaken. For sheer membership of the Church has too often been viewed as the goal: participation in its life through attendance at worship and sharing in the sacraments, in a word, has tended to be identified as the life of faith. The reality, however, is that inclusion in this institution, this particular community, is no guarantee of one’s subjective status in Badiou’s and Žižek’s sense, and is incapable of constituting human subjectivity.¹⁹⁰ Rather, it is by virtue of one’s fidelity to a truth, a fidelity setting one apart from one’s particular world, and even perhaps at times a fidelity that is indifferent to identitarian designations, that both true human subjects and a true human community – one that stands in the truth – are constituted. This is precisely why St. Paul can say:

¹⁹⁰ For more about what Badiou means by “subject” see the brief quote from Badiou and following comments on pages 14-15, as well as the comments on page 36 concerning “disinterested-interest.” For Badiou, a human subject is constituted when, rising above simple self-interest, a person sacrifices herself for the interests of others, or for a greater Idea which may conflict even with self-preservation, see Badiou, *Ethics*, 49.

If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee;

But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage that I may gain Christ.¹⁹¹

Or in another place:

What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.

So then, no more boasting about human leaders! All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours.¹⁹²

In the same way we should recognize the error in assigning any significance to one's particular ecclesial belonging or leadership, as if these things were somehow a guarantee of meaning. For Paul, all identitarian predicates (to use Badiou's term) were considered refuse, and all particular guarantees were as nothing. Taking this logic to its end, we might go so far as to rephrase St. Paul's words as follows:

What, after all, is the Church? And what is Communism? Only servants through whom you came to believe – as the Idea has assigned to each a task. One planted the seed, the other watered it, but the Spirit has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only the Spirit, who makes things grow. So then no more boasting about human leaders or particular institutions! All things are yours, whether the Party or the Church, or the world or life or death or the present or the future – all are yours by virtue of the death of God and the Spirit of the collective.

¹⁹¹ Philippians 3:4b-5, 7-8.

¹⁹² 1 Corinthians 3:5-7, 21.

Žižek makes a similar point concerning contemporary social movements, emphasising their failure properly to address the issue of universality:

Today's blockade is that there are two ways open for the socio-political engagement: either play the game of the system, engage in the "long march through the institutions," or get active in new social movements, from feminism through ecology to anti-racism. And, again, the limit of these movements is that they are not *political* in the sense of the Universal Singular: they are "one issue movements" which lack the dimension of the universality, i.e. they do not relate to the social *totality*.¹⁹³

One does not have to look far to see the same error in the Church today. For has the contemporary Church not taken exactly these two routes, either the institutional one, or the turn to new social expressions of the gospel in various theologies and communities, both of which have the defect of ignoring what Žižek calls the "Universal Singular" understanding of the Church in its universalizing address?

At this point, however, Žižek can also be critiqued by Badiou. We have already seen the importance of experimentation within the field of fidelity. Is the institutional Church, along with its varied social movement expressions, not itself a series of different kinds of experimentation in their own right, a working out of the gospel in diverse forms? Where Žižek's critique remains pertinent is precisely at the points where these forms fail to recognize themselves as addressing the totality of the community, or do not recognize the "Thy Kingdom come" aspect of faith as a radical promise and command encapsulating all aspects of life, including the political. But for this to happen requires

¹⁹³ Žižek, "Lenins Full Subjective Engagement," *The Symptom*, available at http://www.lacan.com/thesymptom/?page_id=1012.

that there be genuine criticism, experimentation, spontaneity, and fidelity in a variety of particular circumstances.

The challenge, then, for a pointal ecclesiology is to maintain both that an ecclesial community is made up spontaneously of those who are faithful subjects of the truth event, while at the same time maintaining a proper dimension of universality insofar as the Church is a *political community*. It is not that an aggregate of self-interested individuals somehow equals the collective, but that the subject's activity, which is by nature primarily concerned with *communitas*, reveals her as a member of the collective. Her Spirit-activity is oriented precisely to generating, sustaining, and living *communitas*.

One is reminded here of Jesus' reinstatement of Peter, when Jesus asked Peter three questions regarding whether Peter loved Jesus or not, which were then quickly followed by the statement "feed my sheep/lambs (John 21:16-18)." Here, love worked out responsibly in concrete community is inseparable from the call to discipleship, to "come follow me." It is perhaps no accident that when Peter was about to follow Jesus and asked about one of his comrades who lingered behind, Jesus responded with the question, "What is that to you?" This is somewhat reminiscent of his response in the incident with the man who wanted to bury his dead relative but was quickly told by Jesus that the "dead can bury their own dead." It is as if he were saying, "Do not forget your task. Your subjectivity does not consist in worrying about another's status, but in your fidelity to the mission."

Here, then, is the proper way to understand *communitas*, for it is not (as is often superficially thought in the Churches of the West) merely an intimate community in which we get to find out each other's deepest feelings and personal life stories, eliminating perceived distances between each another, and "including" each other.

Communitas must include Jesus' crucial, "What is that to you?" element. Žižek has spoken of this in terms of the need for *less* understanding and more discretion in the context of a comment on globalization, which it would be worth quoting in full:

This is what those who see globalization as the chance for the entire earth as a unified space of communication, bringing together all humanity, fail to notice: since a Neighbor is (as Freud suspected long ago) primarily a Thing, a traumatic intruder, someone whose different way of life (or, rather, way of *jouissance* materialized in its social practices and rituals) disturb us, throw off the rails the balance of our way of life, when the Neighbor comes too close, this can also give rise to aggressive reaction aimed at getting rid of this disturbing intruder – or, as Peter Sloterdijk put it: "More communication means at first above all more conflict." This is why the attitude of "understanding-each-other" has to be supplemented by the attitude of "getting-out-of-each-other's-way," by maintaining an appropriate distance, by a new "code of discretion." European civilization finds it easier to tolerate different ways of life precisely on account of what its critics usually denounce as its weakness and failure, namely the "alienation" of social life." Alienation means (also) that distance is included into the very social texture: even if I live side by side with others, the normal state is to ignore them. I am allowed not to get too close to others; I move in a social space where I interact with others obeying certain external "mechanical" rules, without sharing their "inner world" – and, perhaps, the lesson to be learned is that, sometimes, a dose of alienation is indispensable for the peaceful coexistence of ways of life. Sometimes, alienation is not a problem but a solution: globalization will turn explosive not if we remain isolated from each other, but, on the opposite, if we get too close to each other.¹⁹⁴

Unfortunately, what Žižek here critiques is something that many Churches and communist totalitarianisms alike often appear to have in common: a drive to know all private thoughts, a refusal to grant any private "inner" space, making every personal idiosyncrasy or desire part of the commons – and then, in principle, something subject to being collectively punished in some way. The Christian subject's proper response to the injunction to confess or share some inner part of the self might well be, by contrast, to pose the more pointed question, "What is that to you?" The greater truth here recognized

¹⁹⁴ Žižek, "Antinomies of Tolerant Reason" in *lacan.com* available at <http://www.lacan.com/zizantinomies.htm>

is that it is not our little interior sins and foibles that matter, but the wider task of the Church, i.e. the task set before the emancipatory collective. Are we faithful to it?

Is it possible to avoid or evade at this point the tension between the notion of a kind of outward objective truth and a more inward subjective one? In other words, is the striving for “understanding-each-other” not a reflection of the recognition of the truth of subjective inner experience, versus another understanding of truth not located primarily in subjective experience, but in action and in an Idea? I wonder how much the former is a reflection of a kind of Schleiermacherian influence on religious subjectivity, and indeed of post-modern culture, forced no doubt by the Enlightenment and modernity, and as such more of a symptom of our ecclesiological problem than its cure. When the conception of an objective yet personal God was being severely called into question by science and modern reason, the move inward was (arguably) a logical one. In one sense, the move made had already been anticipated long before. As Wilhelm Dilthey has suggested, the inward move has been present in Christianity from the beginning, and stands against what he saw as the objectification of truth by the ancient Greeks:

For the Greek mind, knowing was mirroring an objective thing in the intelligence. Now [i.e., in Christianity], experience becomes the focal point of all the interests of the new communities; but this is just simple awareness of what is given in personality and in consciousness of the self.... With the enormous interest they generate, experiences of the will and of the heart swallow up every other object of knowledge.... If this community faith had immediately developed a science perfectly appropriate to it, that science would have to rest on the foundation ultimately resting on inner experience.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁵ From Wilhelm Dilthey, *Introduction to the Human Sciences. An Attempt to Lay the Foundation for the Study of Society and History*, trans. Ramon J. Betanzos (Detroit: Wayne State University Press), 229. Quoted in Gianni Vattimo, *After Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 106-107.

The later institutionalization of the Church occurred, on such terms, as a sort of lapse from the original ideal, and became necessary for the sake of administering a fallen Roman Empire and preventing ensuing anarchy. Such factors, it might be thought, led to the suppression of the original Christian impulse in making the move inwards, as “the remnants of the ancient social institutions, and the culture they expressed rested on the shoulders of the Church.”¹⁹⁶

The convictions represented here by Dilthey’s views are themselves, however, in large measure a product of modernity and of the tradition of Schleiermacher as it found root and flourished in Protestant Liberalism. But what if one were to read the situation from a very different, Žižekian perspective? What if the much-maligned outward rigidity of the Church as it emerged in the late Empire and through the medieval period was instead to be seen as an inevitable implication of the political impulse that lies at the core of its faith? The implication would then not be that the early Church in its institutional-political development, had betrayed its true inward character, exchanging rich inward experience for cold institutional control, but rather that the institutional Church was the direct expression of true Christian self-understanding. For here the Church made precisely the move from “social movement” to “Universal Singular,” seizing the opportunity given in the moment to relate to the social *totality*. For this reason the Church could never make the “Cincinnatus” move, eschewing the Empire and its public responsibilities after the Empire fell.¹⁹⁷ Its program was rightly total and all-

¹⁹⁶ Vattimo, 108.

¹⁹⁷ Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus was called on by the Roman Senate to serve as dictator in the face of attack upon Rome. He was, by Livy’s account, a farmer, found by the ambassadors to be “digging a ditch” on his three-acre farm. After donning a toga and the

encompassing. It could only really be forced out of the picture, in fact, by other political players, and indeed this is what happened. It slowly lost its influence, until finally succumbing at the political level at the very moment that its objective foundations were so massively undermined: i.e., in the Enlightenment and in the death of the objective God – and indeed, in the very response seen in the Schleiermacherian move towards inward authenticating religious experience as opposed to a public role in the life of the *polis*.¹⁹⁸

It should be obvious by now that within a Žižekian paradigm, the opposites of “outward” and “inward” are overcome through a notion of Spirit that can only be understood in terms of the collective’s political engagement. Like the *Epistle of James*, a Church characterized by a pointal theology will say: “Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds” (James 2:18). At each point the Church manifests and in a certain sense realizes its fidelity in the public decisions it makes. This fidelity in action does not downplay inner experience; it rather actualizes it. This

office of dictator, repelling the attack on Rome, he returned to his farm some sixteen days later, even though he had been invested with his dictatorship for six months. Livy, *The Early History of Rome* (London: Penguin Books, 2002), 226. Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, 3.26ff.

¹⁹⁸ Theology is not the only casualty of modernity it seems. In Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow’s latest project *The Grand Design*, they also take aim at philosophy: “Where did we all come from? Did the universe need a creator? [...] Traditionally these are questions for philosophy, but philosophy is dead. Philosophy has not kept up with modern developments in science, particularly physics. Scientists have become the bearers of the torch of discovery in our quest for knowledge.” Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow, *The Grand Design* (New York: Bantam Books, 2010), 5. It must be said that this seems rather naive and hubristic. It reveals the rather simplistic view these writers have of philosophy. One wonders what fellow scientists who work in the field of the philosophy of science must think of statements like this, who no doubt, would immediately recognize the blatant ideological assumptions involved in taking such a position. It is no wonder that philosophy too has been tempted to take the “inward turn” with the manifestation of various New Age philosophies concerned with holism and meditation.

approach would be strictly opposed to any kind of merely individual religious sensibility or “sensuousness,” but with Marx, it would instead recognise religious experience as inherently bound up with questions of social relations.¹⁹⁹ Rather than apologize for “secularizing” this experience, a pointal theology following Badiou and Žižek would embrace this view, recognizing in the faithful collective its new expression, one which (also following Marx) recognizes the need to combine “interpretation” with action. For the point is indeed not (only) to interpret the world, but to change it.

Here too mention might be made again of an earlier claim made in this thesis, to the effect that Žižek is understandable as an optimistic type of Badiouan actor. Why, after all, does Badiou advocate a subtractive form of politics, whereas Žižek advocates integration with existing structures? I suggested earlier that this has to do with Badiou’s ontology and understanding of the event. What if, however, the two positions should be seen in light of their respective treatment of the resurrection? Badiou’s subtractive politics might then be seen in light of his notion that the resurrection is pure “fabulation,” whereas Žižek’s participatory politics stems from his notion of integrative Spirit. In the latter, it is resurrection theology that drives emancipatory praxis. Or, to put the point another way, within the ambit of a pointal ecclesiology, engagement in politics can be seen as a reflection of Spirit’s totalizing claim on the social field. But though (as at so many points in the reading of Badiou and Žižek) the theological point is pregnant with implication, there is insufficient scope to develop the claim more fully in this thesis.

¹⁹⁹ Karl Marx, *Karl Marx: Selected Writings* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994), 98.

By Way of Conclusion

It was John Milbank who said of Žižek: “In an important sense, he bears a theological witness.”²⁰⁰ I would like to amend Milbank’s judgment slightly to say that Badiou and Žižek together bear what is potentially an important theological witness. This is not to say that the Church should or could adopt their positions without remainder, but it is clear to me that the Church should and could do worse than to learn from them. Such an approach is entirely consistent with Charles Taylor’s claim that today the Church “might better listen for a voice which we could never have assumed ourselves, whose tone might have been forever unknown to us if we hadn’t strained to understand it.”²⁰¹ Even if, in the end, we disagree with Žižek’s appropriation of the Christian story, and with his alternative interpretation of “Spirit,” or take exception to Žižek’s and Badiou’s politicizing of what they perceive to be the core of Christian theology,²⁰² we nevertheless have to admit that they do something many Christians have singularly failed to do – which is, to take Christianity seriously. But surely this is the primary function of a Christian theology.

If, on the other hand, the Christian thinker is able truly to draw on Badiou and Žižek to answer the question: “What does it mean to be a faithful subject?” then he or she too will be able to echo the closing words of Badiou’s second manifesto for philosophy:

²⁰⁰ Žižek and Milbank, 111.

²⁰¹ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 754.

²⁰² But as Daniel M. Bell Jr. has poignantly said: “Theology is always-already political.” Daniel M. Bell Jr., “State and Civil Society” in *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 434.

[I]f we are armed with this conviction, if we understand that to participate, point by point, in the process of creation of subjectivizable bodies is what renders life more powerful than survival, we will possess what Rimbaud, at the end of *A Season in Hell*, desired above all else: 'Truth, in a soul and a body.' Then shall we be stronger than Time.²⁰³

²⁰³ Alain Badiou, *Second Manifesto for Philosophy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), 130.

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