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THE END OF THEOLOGY AND THE EVENT OF TRUTH:  
AN INTRODUCTION

As I myself first opined in an article entitled "The End of Theology" all the way back in 1978, the genealogy of what we now dub "radical theology" (or what during a certain era came to be known as "postmodern" theology) must be traced back to Nietzsche through Heidegger.<sup>1</sup> But, as is the case with all genealogical research, the historical trajectory through which an ancestry, including the ancestry of an idea, can be traced runs through multiple thick layers of elaborate re-interpretation and discursive innovation. This genealogy is also in many ways one shared by Alain Badiou, who in his introduction to *Being and Event*, characterizes Heidegger as "the last universally recognizable philosopher."<sup>2</sup> Despite this startling declaration by Badiou, the Heideggerian axis on which so much of his theories of "subject" and "event" turn is largely unappreciated by the vast majority of his followers. Like Heidegger, Badiou is highly critical of the turn of Western philosophy in the late nineteenth century to the kinds of mathematical formalism and "scientism" pioneered by Bertrand Russell and overwhelmingly *catechized* by Anglo-American, or so-called "analytic," approaches.

Again, as is the case with Heidegger, he views such a trend, which has revived with a fury in less than a decade because of the advances in what we have come to denominate as "artificial intelligence," not as the fulfillment somehow of the historical philosophical enterprise, but as the *end* of philosophy itself. The end of philosophy, for Heidegger, corresponds to the exhaustion of the internal possibilities of the "metaphysical turn" in Western thought itself, which was first tendered by Parmenides, routinized by the Pythagoreans, and institutionalized by Plato. For Heidegger, the metaphysical moment was equivalent to the sedimentation of presence as re-presentation, to *Seinsvergessenheit*, or the "amnesia of Being." It was the inauguration of the era of "onto-theology" where the "representation" (today, we would talk instead about the "signifier") could no longer be distinguished from that which it supposedly *re-presented*. Thus, in the eerie twilight of the modern, metaphysical age, we are beset by what Michel Foucault has suggested is a "crisis of

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<sup>1</sup> Carl Raschke, "The End of Theology," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 46 (June 1978): 159-79. The thesis of that article was expanded and first published as the monograph *The Alchemy of the Word: Language and the End of Theology* (Missoula MT: Scholars Press, 1979) and republished as *The End of Theology* (Aurora CO: The Davies Group, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (New York: Continuum, 2006), 1.

representation," which is the same as what Nietzsche termed "nihilism."

But the end of philosophy, at the same time, compels us to recognize that we are at the "end of theology," and it was this flickering, only half-conscious recognition within our culture now more than a generation ago that launched what came to be known as the "postmodern" epoch. The postmodern epoch has been the era of the "end of theology," and it is far more than a felicitous coincidence that Badiou, toward the "end of the end" of that peculiar periodization, has emerged as its leading luminary. But Badiou, unlike Heidegger, does not sing a haunting keen of the philosophical *eschaton*. "We are contemporaries of a *new departure* in the doctrine of truth," Badiou writes.<sup>3</sup> The closure of the eon of metaphysics only means, as far as Badiou is concerned, something that we have all implicitly acknowledged, at least since Kant - namely, that all we can really "say" about Being is what we can *enumerate*. In other words, mathematics *is* ontology, pure and simple. But the reduction of the ontological to the propositional (or the functional) in such a manner that both philosophy and theology are brought to their "end" opens up at the same time a kind of implosive space whereby the incalculable can occur, where what Badiou calls the "event" can be singled out. "There is no acceptable ontological matrix of the event," Badiou proclaims.<sup>4</sup>

The theory of the event in Badiou is intimately intertwined with the theory of the subject, which is no longer the "reflexive" subject first announced to Socrates by the oracle at Delphi and is gradually refined throughout the odyssey of modern philosophy from the Cartesian *cogito* to Hegel's Absolute Spirit. Badiou's subject is the one that both inaugurates with the evental singularity, and carries out in a number of distinct but interstitched modalities, truth as *procedural*. Truth is procedural insofar as it belongs to a set of "theoretical" operations that derive from the premise that there can be no distinction between the existent and the pure *matheme*. Both the existent and the *matheme* signify in an important sense the *void*. Badiou essentially turns the dictum of his teacher, Gilles Deleuze, concerning the "univocity of being" on its head. "For if being is one, then one must posit that what is not one, the multiple, is not."<sup>5</sup> At the same time, the close correlation between Western ontology and "nihilism" - first advanced by Nietzsche in his *Nachlass* and scrutinized at length by Heidegger in his four-volume study of the former<sup>6</sup> - becomes the occasion in Badiou to introduce an entirely unprecedented notion of philosophical truth as an active intervention within a situation. As Badiou writes in *Manifesto for Philosophy*, "a truth is the infinite result of a risky supplementation. Every truth is post-

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 190.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>6</sup> See Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe, Nietzsche 1 & II*, Vols. 6.1, 2, Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Vittorio Klostermann, 1997-2004.

eventful. In particular, there is no 'structural' or objective truth."<sup>7</sup> Truth, which philosophy "seizes" (*saisir*) from a given situation is made manifest through the performance of what is "miraculously" made possible for the subject in one's *fidelity* to the event. The act of seizure (*saisie*) "roots out truths from gangue of sense. It separates them from the law of the world."<sup>8</sup> Badiou argues that truth has no predicative status, because it does not belong to the order of things, only to the realm of immanent possibility. On that account is philosophy as not additive, but "subtractive," to the degree that "it makes a hole in sense, or makes an interruption in the circulation of sense."<sup>9</sup> As it was for Marx, philosophy no longer "interprets" the world but participates in its transformation.

How does philosophy accomplish such a task? In a certain respect, Badiou incorporates into his "militant" philosophy – in a roundabout, though ingenious, way – Foucault's insight that, politically speaking, truth is something that must be "manifested" through a certain strategy of enactment, what the latter calls *aletheurgy*.<sup>10</sup> For Foucault, *aletheurgy* is a "fictive" word, but it underscores the transitive nature of truth in philosophy. Heidegger's effort to "overcome" metaphysics by thinking the "unthought" conceptual and historical layers of the philosophical tradition led him to the "evental" character of Being as well, i.e., Being as *Er-eignis*, as its "en-ownment," or coming to what is most "proper" in the field of ontological discernment. Yet, for Badiou, this *revelatory* occasion for the event is incidental – and hence largely inconsequential – to the production of truth as a whole. The instant of unconcealing is but the spark of innovation that alights on the charge of the philosopher to initiate new *truth-procedures* that open up a trajectory of history for theoretical concepts. The "life" of the concept is indistinguishable from the immanent agency that imagines, tests, and historicizes it. The end of philosophy is merely the beginning of the epoch of *truth in action*.

But that prompts a more specific, if not even a much more basic question: what are the inherent ramifications for what we would understand as *theological thinking* after the "end of theology"? Although Badiou refuses to address theological questions either straightforwardly or directly, his foundational formulation of a philosophy of *militant truth* has tremendous implications for a revived theological enterprise. Whereas it is undeniable from the application of his own methodology devised in the book on Saint

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<sup>7</sup> Alain Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, trans. Norman Madarasz (Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 1999), 106-7.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> See Michel Foucault, *On the Government of the Living: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1979-1980*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), secs. 1-2.

Paul to conclude that Badiou indeed has the outline of a “theological” project before him, his suggestion that the transformative and revolutionary undercurrents of history derive from the “event” of the resurrection needs to be elaborated far more vigorously.<sup>11</sup> If what Nietzsche assailed as the “Christian moral view of the world” on which conventional theology so much depends is now dissolving like luminous shards into a shoreless sea of glass, then some kind of eventual *theological procedure* from which even Badiou shies away remains plausible, if not yet conceivable. As I myself have argued elsewhere, the “singularity” of such an inaugural incidence, of that primordial site from which all theological operations must inevitably emanate, cannot be confined to a dogmatic framing of an event. In the case of Christianity, naming the event in the form of the “resurrection” itself is commensurate with what Badiou himself regards as the concoction of a “fable.” It must probe beyond the pre-theoretical “event horizon” of the theological mission overall that draws us into the vast, unnamable realm of the *religious*.<sup>12</sup> Badiou has his own similar intimation in *Manifesto for Philosophy*. “Philosophy is never an interpretation of experience: it is the act of Truth with respect to truths.”<sup>13</sup> But such a *truth-act* requires us, he insists in those sentences immediately following, to take into account the “religious” kind of apprehension that necessarily accompanies the seizure of those truths from the vacuity of sense data. “Let us call ‘religion’ everything that presupposes continuity between truths and the circulation of sense.” And he adds: “It will then be said: against the religious law of sense, philosophy disposes compossible truths with the void as background.”<sup>14</sup>

But how does philosophy generate these truth-procedures that make the compossibles possible in their own right? Badiou explores this line of inquiry in *Logics of Worlds*, or what he designates as the second volume of *Being and Event*. If the first volume concentrated through the use of Cantor’s set theory on the irreducible “inconsistency” of the multiplicity of *all that is* (what Badiou terms “count as one”), and hence the impossibility of deriving truth from being, *Logics of Worlds* aims to lay out how we may view the subject as the cipher for bringing forth *all that is true*. The subject “as the localization of truth” is what produces through its fidelity to the event “the new present which welcomes...the new truth.”<sup>15</sup> But such new presents are not simply the outcomes

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<sup>11</sup> See Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2003).

<sup>12</sup> I make these kinds of arguments specifically in two relatively recent books: *Postmodernism and the Revolution in Religious Theory: Toward A Semiotics of the Event* (Charlottesville VA: University of Virginia Press, 2012) and *Critical Theology: An Agenda for an Age of Global Crisis* (Downers Grove IL: IVP Academic Press, 2016).

<sup>13</sup> *Manifesto for Philosophy*, op. cit.

<sup>14</sup> Op. cit., 143.

<sup>15</sup> Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, trans. Alberto Toscano (New York: Continuum, 2009). 53.

of faithful truth-procedures. They are the result of an immanent ordering that relies exclusively on the persistence as well as a series of engagements and enactments on the part of the subject. Furthermore, the subject itself undertakes what Jacques Lacan calls its “subjectification” – and therefore the *appearance* of truth – within a sequence of venues that may be theoretically linked from one historical era to another.

In other words, any “transcendental” philosophy, which Badiou asserts is the overriding theme of his second volume, cannot be concerned merely with the reflexive nature of thought itself, the Cartesian conundrum that modern philosophy tortuously works out all along the way through Hegel, Freud, and even Sartrean existentialism. The transcendental is not *contra Kant* the *undeciphered* conditions of general knowledge. The transcendental is the hidden catalyst responsible for the alchemy of truth amid the chaos of bodies that provisionally and precariously continue to inhabit the world from one generation to the next. It is perhaps the deeper meaning of Nietzsche’s famous trope of the “will to power” that he could not, no matter how hard he tried, fit into the piecemeal frame of his own insurrectionary version of German “critical philosophy.” The question of the transcendental can only be pursued by unpacking the militancy of truth-production through its intricate ensemble of truth-procedures which philosophy, which prefers to take care of its own alone, ignores whenever they seem to be situated outside the canonical “history of philosophy” *tout court*.

Such a new kind of “transcendentalism” (if it, as Badiou remarks, cannot be confined within the *logos* of the history of Western philosophy) can only perhaps be mapped out, therefore, along a “theological” flight path. If the “resurrection” is not simply the fossilized name for a now spent event in these crepuscular times that have been impassively named somehow “post-Christian,” perhaps it refers to the deep “religiosity” of all events themselves, events which have their own unique circulating *semiotics*, including the semiotics of philosophy as a transdisciplinary field. Badiou in *Logics of Worlds*, in effect, offers that kind of declaration. The logics of events not **only** circulate within themselves, they give us new presents that have evental properties all their own. Badiou offers the case of the Spartacus rebellion in the first century BCE that resonated as an emancipatory truth-pronouncement down through the centuries. “Political truth,” he says,

fragmentarily borne by Spartacus and interminably occulted by the bloody triumph of Crassus and Pompey, is here dragged under the bar only to be re-exposed in the appearing of the modern communist convictions and their denial; just as it was in Santo Domingo, in the global exhilaration provoked by the application, during the French Revolution, of universal egalitarian principles.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 65.

The “truth” of Spartacus carries over and resurfaces in not only successive historical, but also semiotic registers. That truth is contained in the “transcendental” proposition that “slavery is not natural.” Thus, the Spartacus revolt in ancient times serves as an evental site for projects of emancipation in countless, diversified contexts. “The subject whose name is ‘Spartacus’ travels from world to world through the centuries.”<sup>17</sup> Badiou concludes that “we will call this destination, which activates a subject in another logic of its appearing-in-truth, *resurrection*.”<sup>18</sup>

What this seemingly cryptic comment of Badiou signifies for theology is something far more elliptical (yet also promising) than anyone might adduce from the inescapably dogmatic terminology. There is something tantalizingly similar here to how one might re-read in our late, post-structuralist twilight Hegel’s dictum that religion is invariably “taken up” speculatively into philosophy. The “continuity” between truth and sense that religion (if we are to employ one of Badiou’s own favorite words) *sutures* demands the theological imagination in the same way it did for Hegel in both the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and in his lectures on the philosophy of religion. If religion and philosophy share the same “content,” as Hegel argues, even while they differ on the mode of “representation” (*Vorstellung*), then the theological project must anticipate without hesitation the consummation of all those interpenetrating momenta of reflection which constitute the absolute self-knowledge to which we assign the name of *history*. Likewise, for Badiou, the “theological” intuition that foreshadows the evental arc for the appearance of truth under the sign of philosophy in its ongoing scission from sense-awareness along with its movement toward the development of rigorous procedures that make “changing the world” feasible from their very inception turns out to be far more “primordial” than we are perhaps willing to allow. We should at the same time make no mistake – Badiou cannot be regarded even in the remotest fashion of speaking as a *theologian*. But Badiou has, in point of fact, crafted the vital infrastructure for a post-theological *theology of the future*, one that seeks to remake the theological task as something that is no longer separate from the truth-procedures congruent with philosophy, namely, art, love, politics, and science. Slavoj Žižek, of course, suggested early on that religion was for Badiou a fifth kind of truth procedure.<sup>19</sup> But Badiou himself in an interview has refuted that insinuation that religion is a “generic procedure,” only that it is a “new experience of truth” that differs from philosophy.<sup>20</sup> Badiou attributes Žižek’s claim to the fact that his book on Saint Paul preceded in English translation his more

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. Emphasis mine.

<sup>19</sup> See Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Center of Political Ontology* (London: Verso Books, 1999), 143ff.

<sup>20</sup> Adam S. Miller, “An Interview with Alain Badiou: ‘Universal Truths and the Question of Religion’,” *Journal of Philosophy and Scripture* 3 (Fall 2005): 40.

substantive works on the theory of the subject and of the event. But he acknowledges at one point in the interview that the “religious” dimension of the truth-event cannot be factored away.

There is something in truth that is beyond our immediate capacities. In a new truth, there is something that is beyond the established differences between languages and facts. This is what the example of Galileo shows us. So, there is always somebody with religious convictions who is saying, ‘I am interested in your work because of your correlation of something like a radical event, a newness of life, with truth.’<sup>21</sup>

Is the truth-event, therefore, sufficiently theological that Badiou’s work can be characterized as a form of “theology” in any cogent sense? It is noteworthy that in the following collection of essays we have selected the title *Badiou and Theology* rather than *The Theology of Badiou*. What each of the essays accomplishes at different levels is to demonstrate, as Badiou himself admits, that something that is loosely denominated as “theology” can reasonably be considered to unfold *alongside*, if not as part of the content of, philosophy. It is not that *ad minimum* Badiou, for the majority of our authors, even poses identifiable theological questions. But a certain *theo-logic* appears to be definitely functioning with Badiou’s extensive – and now more than haphazardly translated – body of writings. What such a *theo-logic* amounts to is something a reader can easily pick out, or will have struggle with when it comes to the particular topics each author has chosen. How, then, do the various authors in this issue confront the question of the “theological” in the writings of Badiou?

Benjamin Davis in his article, “A/theologies of the Impossible: Antigone, Weil, Badiou and the Strange,” explores ways in which Badiou’s distinctive form of “transcendental” philosophy illumines in a radical new fashion the political category, introduced by Derrida in his *Specters of Marx*, of the “impossible.” Badiou’s treatment of the event as setting in motion wholly novel and incalculable orbits of historical action from within a set of immanent *compossibles* needs to be reconfigured as the problem of making the “impossible” manifest. Davis suggests that such a “turn” to the impossible must be situated within a materialist interpretation. Thus, a different reading of Badiou might very well yield something beyond Deleuze’s own *transcendental empiricism*, that is to say, a “transcendental materialism.” Davis proposes that Badiou’s concept of “fidelity to the event” is itself an “immanent ‘impossible.’” It offers “material interruptions to the narrative of the possible,” thus confounding the easy assumption that the political, at least within the sphere of the material, must always amount in some way to some sort of pragmatic framing of what is achievable and what is not. Davis discusses two figures who push us beyond the “logic of the

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 41.

possible" – the Greek tragic heroine Antigone and the twentieth century religious philosopher and political activist Simone Weil. Both these authors inhabit a thought world within which there can germinate an outline for a new logic of the "impossible" that is not merely premised on the miraculous, or the supernatural.

In his article, "'See What is Coming to Pass and Not Only What Is': Alan Badiou and the Possibility of a Postmetaphysical Theology," David Congdon shifts to the deeper aporia that faces us in not just a post-Christian, but increasingly materialist age. In light of Badiou's well-known leveraging of "theological" examples to make points that he contends are strictly philosophical, Badiou presents us with a difficult puzzle. "Is it still possible," Congdon asks in citing Badiou himself, "to speak of God after 'the disappearance of the gods'?" The familiar theme, concocted almost a century and a half ago, of the "death of God," Congdon implies, has worn out its welcome. Even if God is dead both theoretically and metaphorically, religiosity still flourishes in innumerable guises. Congdon hints that any "theological" use of Badiou is truly taking any sense of theology to its outer limits, but that of course is the nub of Badiou's own question about how one might still "speak of God." Congdon proposes that if we indeed are to be "faithful" to Badiou's own contemporary *evental-ness*, a proper theological gesture would indeed be "to make God disappear." Congdon calls on Rudolf Bultmann to help him make such a case. Theology should consist in trying "to find a new way of fitting God within the general structure of being," but rather conceiving it "as a contingent transontological event whose kerygmatic trace becomes the occasion" for the moment of subjectivation.

Hollis Phelps, who has already published an important book on the subject,<sup>22</sup> refuses to dance around the issue of how "theological" Badiou actually might be. Noting that it may be correct, albeit somewhat problematical, to characterize theology à la Žižek as some kind of "fifth" truth-procedure, he prefers to focus "on how theology as a form of fabulation constitutes a vital form for the construction of truths." He stresses that the "religious" factor is not at all latent in Badiou's corpus, but "an essential ingredient for the construction of truths in the form of theology." Badiou's position that truth is not something ready-made for observation or inspection, but what must be activated in a concrete situation makes no sense without some sort of implicit "theological conceptuality." Phelps emphasizes that the Badiouian project overall cannot function without a variety of belletristic or fictive strategies. It is this "fabulous" texture of Badiou's work that makes it "theological" in a key fashion from the outset. Badiou's curious synthesis of mathematical formalism with a vast range of trope-rich styles of argumentation is more theological in its marrow than Badiou, despite all his demurrals

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<sup>22</sup> Hollis Phelps, *Badiou: Between Theology and Anti-Theology* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

and objections, is wont to admit. Even Badiou's distinctive "anti-theology" that valorizes the pure matheme as his own unique program for overcoming metaphysics can be considered theological in a certain way, as a gambit for "rationalizing the infinite." The "other side" of this passage of "overcoming" (German = *Überwindung*), for Heidegger, turns out to be a return to "poetizing." But, so far as Badiou is concerned, "poetry" is plainly a fallback into a pre-theological idiom of superstition. Contra Heidegger, only a mathematical sign rather than a god can "save us."

In "Univocity for Militants: Set-Theoretical Ontology and the Death of the One," King-Ho Leung takes us back to Badiou's criticism of Deleuze's take on the univocity of being. Although it can be found in part in *Being and Event*, Badiou's most sustained assault can be found in *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*.<sup>23</sup> Leung asks the question of what precisely does Badiou mean by "univocity" and how it does not amount merely to a customized riff on Deleuze's methodology. Leung poses the question: "Is there fundamentally an ontological structure of 'oneness' in Badiou's immanentist ontology of the multiple developed under the ontological axiom that 'the One is not'?" Leung explores some of the ways in which Badiou, in spite of his efforts to differentiate himself from Deleuze, resembles his teacher. He notes how Badiou and Deleuze both set their face against Kant's thought in returning to a "classical" philosophy that makes no distinction between representation and thing, being and signifier, thus reversing the general *critical-philosophical* approach which Quentin Meillassoux has termed "correlationism." Leung references the well-known quotation from Deleuze in *The Logic of Sense*:

Philosophy merges with ontology, but ontology merges with the univocity of being (*analogy* has always been a *theological* vision, not a philosophical one, adapted to the forms of God, the world, and the self). The univocity of being does not mean that there is one and the same being; on the contrary, beings are multiple and different.<sup>24</sup>

According to Badiou, *radical multiplicity* is the name of the game. Theology is the discourse of the One, and the realization that the One is multiple denotes the "atheism" of our time. But do we have, perhaps, here in Badiou, a kind of *a/theological* take on the being of the multiple? In contrast with Duns Scotus and Spinoza, "Badiou's understanding of univocity is firmly rooted in the 'modern' atheistic premise that 'God is dead.'" Thus, Badiou perhaps offers up to us the most sublime form of

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<sup>23</sup> Alain Badiou, *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*, trans. Louise Burchill (Minneapolis MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

<sup>24</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester and Charles Stivale (London; New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 205.

“thanatotheology,” or theology of the death of God, we have ever encountered.

Taylor Weaver’s article, “Badiou and Pauline Theology: Detecting a Theology of Death,” demonstrates how the book *Saint Paul* does not simply illustrate through a familiar “religious” figure what it means to sustain a faithfulness to the event, but simultaneously assembles the scaffolding for a broader critique of political economy in the era of neoliberalism. Paul, Weaver insists, serves as “a militant figure for strategizing against capitalist hegemony,” especially if we bear in mind Badiou’s elucidation of him. The “theological” dimensions of Badiou’s appropriation of Paul supply us with vital tools for a new kind of *political theology*. And it is this political-theological cast for Badiou’s reading of Paul that is not only the most relevant, but the most essential, when we take on the matter of any theological rendering of his work. The “community” of Paulinist Christians, Weaver seeks to persuade us, “is a political form which exists in a politically antagonistic way, challenging...hegemony.” And it is on this score, Weaver contends, that “Badiou opens up Paul, and it is here where Paul completes Badiou.” Moreover, it is the figure of death as much as the “event” of the resurrection that grounds such a challenge to capitalist hegemony. Badiou’s reinvigoration of the Pauline – as well as the Lutheran – *theologia crucis* signifies that any true, emancipatory political theology is no longer an ethical abstraction, but is rooted, even more so than Gutierrez’ “preferential option for the poor,” in the passions and aspirations of the “wretched of the earth.”

Jordon Osserman’s “‘Real Circumcision is a Matter of the Heart’: On Badiou’s Paul and Boyarin’s Jewish Question” does not seek to mine some concealed, theologized nuggets of radical philosophy from the book *Saint Paul*. Instead, it reads Daniel Boyarin’s *A Radical Jew: St. Paul and the Politics of Identity*, published in the same year as *Saint Paul*, over against Badiou’s “universalistic” take of the founder of Christianity. What makes Paul interesting, according to Osserman, is not so much the revolutionary type of radical inclusivity Badiou discovers in his writings – all the while commending it as the evental occasion for militant movements, religious as well as non-religious, down through the ages – but his problematizing of the practice of circumcision. The Jewish custom of circumcising males becomes the *locus criticus* for the current struggle between the enunciation of universalized *grand narratives* and identity politics, focusing on particularism. Osserman appears to side with Boyarin’s critique of Pauline universalist theology. Such a theology, so far as Boyarin is concerned, has served as the *locus criticus* for the elaboration of “logocentric” as well as phallogocentric interpretations of Christianity over the centuries. There are certain questions Badiou does not answer, according to Osserman. The first question is: “what place is left for the particular, historical circumstances from which a universal truth emerges?” The second unanswered question remains whether the Jews

who “said no” to Paul, the so-called “Judaizers,” might have a certain value (and therefore must be reread with a certain appreciation nowadays), inasmuch as they challenge the Badiouian postulate that any theology worth its salt might be universalistic in the first place.

In his “The Truth of Paul According to Alain Badiou,” Mads Peter Karlsen maintains that it is neither a concern with universalism versus particularism nor any occult theological undercurrents that should be of interest to religious thinkers, but first and foremost “the question of how we should conceptualize truth.” Badiou should not be typified in any serious manner as a “religious thinker,” Karlsen says, or one who, like Gadamer, takes a hermeneutical tack and seeks a plenitude of possible interpretations for an historical event, or events, which might under the best of circumstances be assigned some kind of theological meaning. The key lies in Badiou’s *method of formalization*. Following his teacher Lacan, Badiou invokes the formalist method with its emblematic arcana not because of an “indifference to content” or “a distance to reality,” but in order to release the stranglehold of the symbolic register, “making it possible to break with its ideological representations and thereby encounter the real.” Such an approach does not aim to separate form from content or proffer “a representation of the real in terms of pure form.” Such a separation allows for the content for it to emerge under the auspices of what it actually is, that is, the militant, the political. Badiou’s formalism, so far as it pertains to his use of religion, therefore betrays its own special agenda. “Badiou does not use the word ‘formalizing’ a single time in *Saint Paul*, but he comes close,” Karlsen insists. He appears to be carrying out his own signature form of “bracketing” (as Husserl would say) the theological in order to make it obvious what the truth of the theological genuinely turns out to be – *the political*.

Finally, Ryne Beddard gives us some indication of how this works through an exploration of the movement launched by the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter. “#BlackLivesMatter can be understood as a subjective body, producing a genuinely new truth that is incompatible with the old world (insofar as black lives and bodies have not historically mattered in the United States).” Beddard contrasts “the subject of the event” as witness to a new present with the “reactionary” subject (e.g., #BlueLivesMatter), or the “obscure” subject (e.g., #AllLivesMatter). #BlackLivesMatter thus is genuinely “evental” by Badiou’s reckoning because it affirms the truth militant of African chattel slavery against the pseudo-formalism of Enlightenment “humanism,” especially Kantian ethical universalism. #BlackLivesMatter reconfigures the significance of the universalism in ways Badiou claimed for early Christianity. It “militantly affirms that particular expressions of life matter outside of the narrow confines of the ‘human.’”

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