

## Faith, Hope, and Love The Inducement of the Subject in Badiou

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No matter where we place the ‘break’ that marks the conclusion of or the shift within the modern period – whether with Nietzsche, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, or whoever – the question of the subject has remained as crucial for us as it was for Descartes. More than epistemology, axiology, or even the content or status of metaphysics, the question of the subject is at the very heart of contemporary philosophy. I raise this issue here because, while philosophy in general has not ignored the question of the subject, it has also largely avoided the project of an answer or a resolution – and particularly in the case of what is coming to be called the Continental philosophy of religion.

Recent religious appropriations of Continental European philosophy have focused mostly on questions about God: God’s being or being otherwise than being, God’s non-temporal advent, God’s impossible hiddenness, and so on. Work that derives primarily from post-Heideggerian sources such as Derrida or Levinas takes its primary task to be the “decentering” of the subject, such that if the subject has an explicit function at all, it is to exhibit some kind of “radical passivity” or unlimited hospitality: in short, the subject as receptor or even receptacle. Removed of its capacity for creation, construction, and agency, the subject naturally becomes far less interesting than concerns about the divine excess, the absolute Other, and the aporias that they entail.

In contrast to the disciples of Derrida and Levinas, the Radical Orthodoxy movement has engaged in some form or another every relevant thinker in history from Avicenna to Deleuze. As far as anyone can tell, however, the impetus of the movement is to establish dominance over every contemporary thought in order to enable a return to premodern theological and political foundations. In its most intensive forms, Radical Orthodoxy is the studied assertion that Christian theology is the necessary foundation of any cogent philosophy. Working toward a philosophy of subjectivity that is informed by religion is impossible when one’s religion explicitly annuls the independence of philosophy.

In contrast to these factions within the philosophy of religion, Alain Badiou has emerged as a strikingly relevant, if unlikely, figure. Trained in mathematics and adept in psychoanalysis, his highly original and inherently polemical theory of the subject marks a divergence from every major theoretical school at work in contemporary philosophy. The arguments we will consider a broad approach to the field “philosophy of religion”: rather than employing philosophical techniques to address the content or possibility of religious concepts, Badiou assigns religion a paradigmatic or archetypal role in relation to the rest of his work, and thereby expounds a philosophy of religion *as such*.

In this essay, I will narrate Badiou’s account of the emergence of subjectivity as he explains it in the context of the Pauline epistles. First, I’ll briefly describe Badiou’s theory of being and of the event that induces the subject. Then I will examine his rereading of the theological virtues – faith, hope, and love – as crucial modalities of the subject. Finally, by situating the Pauline subject within Badiou’s theory of discourses, I suggest that Badiou has envisioned a subjectivity which is responsive to both the deconstructive and Radical Orthodox philosophies of religion. In contrast to deconstruction, the Pauline

figure is a subjectivity which is not “totalizing” or totalitarian yet emerges precisely as the generic militant agent of a universal truth. And against the premodern reactionaries, it is a subjectivity which can be expressed in Christian concepts without being determined by them.

## I

To enable a discussion of the subject, I must address very briefly a few other key concepts from Badiou’s philosophy. Among these are: being and event; knowledge and truth; multiplicity and void. “Being” and “event” are philosophical terms that correspond to what axiomatic set theory identifies as “multiplicity” and “void”. For Badiou, being is the established order of what is, and what “is” is not a unified one but an unending multiplicity. Multiplicities are organized in sets, which in turn compose a “situation”. A situation can be anything from the type of cloud cover in Beijing last Friday to the state of affairs immediately preceding the French Revolution. An event is an unexpected occurrence that exposes an element of a given situation that that situation had previously refused to consider. More specifically, by exposing the void on which every situation (and indeed all of being) is founded, the event reasserts those elements which being had previously consigned to the void. Badiou also uses the language of counting: if the situation is the aggregate of elements that each count as one, the event is supernumerary – it exceeds the count.<sup>1</sup>

Likewise knowledge is opposed to truth. The term “knowledge” really functions in a commonsensical manner: it is the collection of facts and opinions that obtain in reference to the various elements of a given situation. Truth, on the other hand, is reserved for a wholly different function. If the event reveals the void of the situation, a truth “proceeds as the collecting together of all those elements... that respond or ‘connect’ positively to this revelation.”<sup>2</sup> This procedural, accruing aspect means that truth

is not a matter of denying all existing knowledge as false, but of showing the uncounted, unacknowledged void on which every situation depends. As Badiou says: “a truth is not in a simple regime of opposition to knowledge; as a generic subset, it’s really a gap or break in the encyclopedic organization of knowledge. It constitutes the void specific to this encyclopedia....[A] truth is a truth about the whole situation, not simply a truth about this or that.”<sup>3</sup>

The subject, which is our primary concern, is related to the truth-event as “both its actor and its target.”<sup>4</sup> Badiou writes that “the process of truth induces a subject.”<sup>5</sup> This fact of induction, of creation, means that the subject does not pre-exist the truth-event that enables it. The simplest definition we get is: “I shall call subject the local or finite status of a truth.”<sup>6</sup> So this inducement also means, from the standpoint of a human life, that subjectivity as such is not coterminous with any kind of being – human or otherwise. Rather than a unit within the order of being or knowledge, the subject is on the side of a truth-event. Badiou is unequivocal on this point, that for him ‘the subject’ does not correspond to any of the classical notions in the history of philosophy. Here are some conceptions of the subject against which his work proceeds:<sup>7</sup>

- (i) substance: neither the reflexive, thinking substance of Descartes nor the simple animality of everyday embodiment, the subject does not begin with doubt or with dinner, but with engagement.
- (ii) transcendental function: the subject is neither an epistemological nor a phenomenological operator. In Badiou’s words: “a subject is in no sense the organizing principle of a meaning of experience.”<sup>8</sup>
- (iii) an invariant of presentation: if the subject does not belong to the order of meaning and of being, it is rare, “rigorously singular,” and always appears as a chance occurrence from

the perspective of the situation.

- (iv) autonomous, indifferent agent: simultaneously the initial product of and advocate for the truth-event, the subject's activity has above all the characteristic of fidelity to the event.

Already some of the Pauline themes we will consider are coming into relief. The subject's lack of autonomy, for example, does not entail an opposing heteronomy. To borrow the Kantian language, the subject is neither a "law unto himself" or herself, nor submitted to the law of another: the event – or insinuation of the void – induces the subject instead as the subtraction from and violation of the law of the given situation. As we turn to Badiou's text on Paul, we will focus on those aspects of his reading which enhance this philosophical concept of subject.

## II

*Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* is not a piece of historical or theological work; it is Badiou's explicit attempt to align certain elements of his own philosophy with Pauline doctrine. He introduces the book thus: "For me, Paul is a poet-thinker of the event, as well as one who practices and states the invariant traits of what can be called the militant figure. He brings forth the entirely human connection... between the general idea of a rupture, an overturning, and that of a thought-practice that is this rupture's subjective materiality...I am not the first to risk the comparison that makes of him a Lenin for whom Christ will have been the equivocal Marx."<sup>9</sup>

The chief characteristic of the subject is that of fidelity to its declaration of the truth-event. To attain this concept, we cannot ignore the two senses of the word itself: both our English "fidelity" and "faithfulness" translate as *fidélité* in French. The subjective sense – our "faithfulness" – may be more apparent, and as we have said the subject cannot be understood apart from its

advocacy of the event that induces it. The objective sense – "fidelity" – means that the subject's activity consists of conforming itself to and enabling the creation of the effects of the event (think of a high fidelity stereo that accurately reproduces the original). These two senses of the term *fidélité* confirm that the subject is neither indifferent to its event nor autistic in its concern. Again, the subject is both agent and target. Distinguishing these two senses of fidelity is vitally important, since faith, hope, and love are all too easily rendered exclusively as moods or personal attitudes, when in fact the objective sense of correspondence to the requirements of the event is equally germane. It is this objective sense that defeats the criticism which would find in Badiou a kind of *ex nihilo* decisionism. With this distinction in mind, we turn now to Badiou's analysis of the theological virtues. As he says:

In order to think [fidelity], one requires three concepts: one that names the subject at the point of declaration (*pistis*... "faith"); one that names the subject at the point of his conviction's militant address (*agape*... "love"); lastly, one that names the subject according to the force of displacement conferred upon him through the assumption of the truth procedure's *completed* character (*elpis*... "hope"). (SP 15)

### A. Faith

At the point of declaration, the subject's faith is a tenor of conviction and a degree of intensity. This is the aspect with which we might be more comfortable, and it demonstrates that every subject is in genetic and engaged relation to its truth-event. But Paul gives a second, objective sense to faith, and that is that faith is the order of existence which follows after the conclusion of the law. Badiou's definition: faith is "the absence of any gap between subject and subjectivation." (SP 81)

This definition relies on the discussion in Romans about law, sin and death. According to Paul, it is the law that unleashes the life of desire, the law that forms and then fixes the object of desire, such that the subject's will exists only for the automatic repetition of transgression. Psychoanalysis acknowledges here a great debt to Paul, who was the first to explain that the imposition of the law actually creates the drive for and the possibility of its own transgression. He says, "[I]f it had not been for the law, I should not have known sin. I should not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet.' But sin, finding opportunity in the commandment, wrought in me all kinds of covetousness. Apart from the law sin lies dead." (Romans 7:7-8) "Sin" therefore is the name of the process of death that the law imposes; the autonomy of the unconscious drive actually occupies, according to Badiou, "the site and place of the subject." (SP 79) Therefore, strictly speaking, an event could not constitute a subject within the confines of the law, because the process of subjectivation would have only sin and death for its target. Faith is the absence of a gap between the subject and subjectivation because faith is the ability of the subject to reposition its own site. Whereas the repetition of sin calculates on the basis of law, that is, according to works, faith operates independently of works. What appears as the subject's intense conviction is also the objective enabling of its own inducement.

This view of faith reinforces our notion that "subject" does not describe mere humanity; and it may just as easily describe a collective as an individual, for the disjunction between faith and the law already necessitates the *universality* of the truth-procedure. In law there is a kind of perverse all-encompassing breadth which cannot really be called universality, since its operation is rather the continuing proliferation of differences. Law is on the side of being – in contrast to the event – which means it designates only the

particular. "The law is always predicative, particular, and partial. Paul is perfectly aware of the law's unfailingly 'statist' character. By 'statist' I mean that which enumerates, names, and controls the parts of a situation. If a truth is to surge forth eventually, it must be nondenumerable, impredicable, uncontrollable. This is precisely what Paul calls grace." (SP 76) The universal scope of the event is therefore opposed to the oppositions and distinctions that the law creates, "[f]or there is no distinction; since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift ... to be received by faith." (Romans 3:22-25)

## B. Love

Love is the name for the subject "at the point of his conviction's militant address." In other words, love characterizes the subject as it proclaims the truth universally. Since a truth is not the final adequacy of a proposition but the process of an event, its universality does not raise specters of totalitarianism but rather the prospect of emancipation. If faith is the negation or rather, surpassing of the law, love is the naming of a non-literal law. Now Badiou notes that faith has already realized the global *possibility* of this new path, but that it is love's naming of a non-literal law that makes justification *effective* for those who hear it. We read in Galatians that "faith works only through love" (5:6), since love regains precisely those features of life which, under the burden of legal transgression, had fallen onto the side of sin and death.

Primary among these is the unity of thought and action. Under the law, Paul could only lament his inability to do the things which law requires – his action could not conform itself because of the overwhelming automatism of transgression. Additionally, from within the situation, or from under the law, the truth of the event can only appear as madness and illegality, as Kierkegaard's "thought which thought itself

cannot think.” But once the subject’s thinking and doing is transformed by an event, “this recovery turns life itself into a universal law. Law returns as life’s articulation for everyone.” (SP 88) Where the old law introduced difference and particularity at every corner, the law of love “functions as principle and consistency for the subjective energy initiated by the declaration of faith.” (SP 89)

What exactly does this law of love look like? Badiou reads Paul as needing to satisfy two conditions: first, love must not produce a new fixed object of desire that will trigger the infinite dialectic of prohibition and transgression. As we have said, love’s law must affirm the trajectory of the subject’s truth, which means it must not produce new differences. Second, it must “require faith in order to be understood.” (SP 89) The maxim “love your neighbor as yourself” satisfies these conditions: it is pure affirmation, and it “requires faith, because prior to the Resurrection, the subject, having been given up to death, has no good reason to love himself.” (SP 89) The maxim “love your neighbor as yourself” also speaks to both of the meanings of the term “fidelity” that we discussed above. Loving the neighbor satisfies the subjective sense, in that the universal address of a subject turned toward all the others continues in “faithfulness” as a witness to the event. And the “as yourself” connects the disjunctive and redemptive site of faith to the extended power of love in an objective fidelity to the event – that is, an increasingly effective truth-procedure corresponding to what the event requires.

### C. Hope

When we speak of the effectiveness of the truth-procedure, we run up immediately against the question, what if the truth faces opposition? The prominence of the subject’s description as “militant” testifies to the expectation that truth will *always* face opposition: since every event happens only as the exposure of the void of a situation, or

what that situation refuses to count, the event is inherently polemical. Besides the inherent resistance of the situation itself, Badiou speaks of subjects who are not faithful, who therefore fall away from subjectivity. There are three possible modes of de-subjectivation, which Badiou names as the three sources of Evil: simulacrum, betrayal, and disaster.<sup>10</sup> Simulacrum, exemplified in Nazism, is the identification of a supposed event not with the void but with the plentitude of a situation. A literal copy of the truth, it replaces the universal address of a generic subject with the elevation of a particular group or community, and does so with inevitably devastating consequences. Outright betrayal is another form of evil: the subtractive and originary inducement of the subject means that a truth-procedure can never be simply abandoned – it can only be fully disavowed. Betrayal of a truth requires the assertion that the event *never really happened*, and that the subject never really existed. Badiou gives the example of former political revolutionaries who force themselves to testify that the entire enterprise was a grand illusion, or of a lover who no longer understands what she loved about her partner in the first place. Finally, “disaster” describes the absolutizing of a truth, the will to make the regenerative power of the truth-procedure *total*. Because the truth-procedure is a process of re-organizing and re-naming the elements of the situation in which it emerges, and because it is also founded on the basis of that situation’s void, there is always a tension between what the truth can accomplish and the void that restrains it.<sup>11</sup> This limit-point or obstacle is called the “unnameable”, and the third kind of evil is the naming of this unnameable element.<sup>12</sup>

What do these three forms of evil have in common, and more importantly, what does this have to do with hope? Note first that evil for Badiou is a perversion of the Good, that the Good comes first and is our first concern, not the other way around. Now evil is the failure of the subject in the

context of adversity, either a short-circuiting of the event, a supreme acquiescence, or a rash totalization of the truth-procedure. Hope is the name of a subject which remains. In contrast to any grand eschatological reading of Paul, Badiou finds him espousing an “imperative of continuation....Faith would be the opening to the true; love, the universalizing effectiveness of its trajectory; hope, lastly, a maxim enjoining us to persevere in this trajectory.” (SP 93)

The dual sense of fidelity which I have noted becomes an exhausting tension in the case of hope. As the third aspect of fidelity, hope marks the possible resolution of the conflict between these two senses. We saw in the case of love that love’s universal address enables the unity of thought and action, of adequation and intensity. With hope, we find a tension between the subjective rigor of perseverance and the objective requirement of a truth’s continued success. On the one hand, Paul’s injunction to “press on toward the goal” (Philippians 3:14) takes on similarity to Lacan’s maxim, “do not give up on your desire.” Since desire has been freed by faith and transformed by love, it needs only to continue. On the other hand, there is the demand for justice, for success and realization of the truth’s effects, exemplified in Paul’s exhortation that “salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed; the night is far gone, the day is at hand.” (Romans 13:11-12)

Hope resolves this conflict by means of a logic that Badiou takes from set theory, called “forcing”.<sup>13</sup> Forcing is, “the point at which a truth, although incomplete, authorizes anticipations of knowledge concerning not what is but *what will have been if truth attains completion*. This anticipatory dimension requires that truth judgments be formulated in the future perfect [tense]. Thus while almost nothing can be said about what a truth is, when it comes to what happens *on condition that that truth will have been*, there exists a

forcing whereby almost everything can be stated.”<sup>14</sup> Forcing therefore secures *three* advantages: first, it enables the subject to continue in its path by providing anticipatory verification of the subject’s claims to truth; second, it also defends against the three failures of the subject described above by limiting the scope of truth’s claims on immediate being; third, the anticipatory projections modify the internal logic of the very situation as it currently exists, providing guidance for future steps and a measure of retroactive justification. The details of Cohen’s initial discovery and Badiou’s amplification are too complex even to summarize here, but some examples might suffice. One clear case is Galileo’s innovation and fight with his Aristotelian counterparts. Galileo envisioned the complete mathematization of astronomy, but even without complete proofs he was able to force the concession of his adversaries. Later, the far-reaching effects of his discovery vindicated his initial proclamation. Returning to Paul, we see that his own proclamation of this paradoxical hope engendered a transnational religious movement that, at least in its early stages, traversed the existing economic, ethnic, and cultural divisions and radically challenged the political situation in which it emerged.

Having considered all three aspects of the subject’s fidelity, we must be reminded that both the subjective and objective dimensions of fidelity will be intelligible only to those subjects (whether collective or individual) that are engaged on behalf of the event. The event can never be perceived from within the logic of the situation or from the side of knowledge, which is why fidelity to the event in the forms of faith, hope, and love will never proceed as mere reform, alteration, or amendment, but as the radical transformation of the whole environment.

### III

In the seminal collection *Who Comes After the Subject?*, published in 1991, both Badiou and Gilles Deleuze contributed

essays whose implicit answer was, “No one – we’re not quite finished with the subject.” As Deleuze put it: “a concept does not die simply when one wants it to, but only when new functions in new fields discharge it. This is also why it is never very interesting to criticize a concept: it is better to build the new functions and discover the new fields that make it useless or inadequate.”<sup>15</sup> The analysis above suggests that Badiou’s theory of the subject is clearly a redefinition of the concept; the analysis below will cast it as a discovery of the new fields and functions that make contemporary definitions inadequate. Our final task is to situate Badiou’s reading of the Pauline subject in the prominent discourses of that age. Badiou identifies four discourses in the Pauline corpus: they are named Greek, Jewish, Christian, and mystical. (cf. *SP* 40-54) The first thing we understand is that “Jew” or “Greek” does not name an ethnic or cultural identity but rather the dominant “regimes of discourse”. (*SP* 41) Christian discourse will of course be opposed to both of them, and the mystical is a kind of quasi-discourse understood as the perversion of the Christian. Additionally, “discourse” here has nothing to do with the linguistic worries of so much contemporary philosophy, but merely names these dominant regimes as constitutive and determining.

- (i) Greek – The Greek discourse expresses itself as wisdom. Its subjective figure is the philosopher for whom all of reality can be expressed as a totality. Wisdom is the absolute matching of *logos* – the law – to being. In Paul’s time, wisdom is experienced as both the sophistry of his Athenian opponents and as the ever-present hegemony of the Roman Empire – both sides testifying to the impossibility of escaping the natural cosmic order.
- (ii) Jewish – The Jewish discourse is that of the sign. Judaism, which by this point is practiced also by Gentiles throughout the empire, is no longer the exclusive domain of a particular ethnicity, but

nevertheless remains the rule of exception, the law of election. Its subjective figure is the prophet, who likewise gains control over the universe through the literal tradition’s deciphering of signs.

Badiou notes at this point that the Greek and Jewish discourses are “two aspects of the same figure of mastery”. (*SP* 42) Jewish election presupposes a backdrop of totality against which to assert its transcendence, while the Greek cosmic order requires the Jewish point of exception as a crisis on which to impose itself. Paul’s claim is that the dialectic of these two discourses divides humanity in two and blocks the event’s universal message.

- (iii) Christian – In this sense Christianity is completely *new*. Where the first two discourses maintain the mastery of the Father, Christianity is a discourse of the Son. Its subjective figure is the apostle. Paul, who was never a companion of Christ, is able to assert his apostolic status because it is a matter not of historical witness, but of subjective fidelity. Christianity does not occur within the order of knowledge: as Paul says, “God chose the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and God chose the weak things of the world to confound the strong; God chose what is base and despised in the world, and even things that are not, to bring to nought things that are.” (I Corinthians 1:29) Christianity will appear to Greek wisdom, which is based on reason, as folly, and to Jewish election, which demands divine signs of power, as weakness. We also note here the affinity of Paul’s phrase “what is base and despised...and even things that are not” and Badiou’s doctrine of the event as what exposes the void of the situation and what re-asserts those elements which the situation does not count.
- (iv) Mysticism – This is only a quasi-discourse, for it is the perversion of the

Christian universal address into a private and unutterable language. Where Christianity consists in declaration, universalization, and forcing, mysticism makes claims to ineffability, glorification, and rapture. Where Christianity puts the cosmic and literal law into a deadlock in order to transform it, mysticism resubmits itself to the mastery of the literal and then clothes itself in silence.

In the context of these discourses, Badiou's theory of the subject relates itself to the deconstructive and premodern moments with Continental philosophy of religion. In the case of Levinas, Badiou seems willing to distinguish the dominant reception of the ethics of alterity "from Levinas' actual conception of things."<sup>16</sup> But he also dismisses absolutized oblatory love as "narcissistic pretension" (SP 90). Perhaps we may understand the ethics of alterity as corresponding to the Jewish discourse outlined above: Levinasian ethics depends upon the continued hegemony of the "Western tradition" as a backdrop against which it can oppose the radical exception of ethics – the prophetic election of my self by the Other. When both I and the other are reduced to our role as victims – I am the always-already guilty sacrifice, the other is a mere widow, orphan, or stranger – the one thing that is forbidden is an event that would break this dialectic of totality and its supposed infinity. Although the proposition that Levinas is a politically relevant thinker is finally gaining wider acceptance, Levinas's own reluctance to draw out the sociopolitical implications of his thought displays the extent to which any thought that begins with ethics (rather than, for example, with the irruption of ontological innovation) risks confining itself to the normative categories of its own time.

Derrida's variation on this in *The Gift of Death* combines the ethics of alterity with the Christianized reading of the Abrahamic *mysterium tremendum*, resulting in a kind of secret and ineffable self-sacrifice. This

variation seems very close to what Badiou has called mysticism: it takes the rupture and the new logic announced by Christianity and empties them of power, leaving them trapped within a private and unutterable language. Abraham's transgression of the ethical order is made *permanently* inexplicable. Recall that while the rupture of Event always appears as madness from the perspective of the situation, it also forces a new logic, a new account, and this is what Derrida forbids when he introduces the notion of "religion without religion": "What engenders all these meanings [gift, the gift of death, love, faith] and links them, internally and necessarily, is a logic that at bottom ... has no need of *the event of a revelation or the revelation of an event*."<sup>17</sup> Derrida's move is a valuable reminder of the inevitably guilty quality of any meaningful act – a defeat *par excellence* of the beautiful souls – but this is always from the perspective of the situation: Badiou's insistence on the possibility of retroactive justification should be contrasted to the debilitating effects of such pervasive guilt.

A similar movement from ancient discourse to ineffable mysticism takes place within Radical Orthodoxy. In this case it is John Milbank's claim that "every discipline must be framed by a theological perspective";<sup>18</sup> theology is the ultimate discourse, the only mode competent to oversee every other discipline. For example, in his most recent book, Milbank writes: "granted autonomy [in the early modern period] to explore pure nature, philosophers quickly did not find what they were supposed to find....This meant that the only 'true' philosophy was mostly done with their left hand by theologians."<sup>19</sup> Theology here assumes the role of ultimate wisdom about what may be said, a surprising usurpation of the role that philosophy once took for itself. Proving that the two ancient discourses can in fact form the same figure of mastery, Radical Orthodoxy also prohibits the category of event: by denying each discipline the ability to speak of a "zone apart from God," Milbank *et al.* ground all



things in God, canceling the void from which the Event emerges. There can be no creation *ex nihilo*.

The biggest surprise, however, is when, in an effort to extend his panoptic appropriation even across postmodernism, Milbank concludes by submitting to what Badiou is calling mysticism: “The Gospel concerns, above all for us today, this issue of affinity....Affinity is the absolutely non-theorizable, it is the almost ineffable. Affinity is the *mysterium*....[W]e cannot say *in what respect* we are like God; the image [of God] simply is an ineffable likeness.”<sup>20</sup> That most crucial philosophical enterprise – the rational investigation of subjectivity – is precisely what Milbank seems to prohibit. Since the late modern announcement of the “end of philosophy,” Judaic election and Greek wisdom have become unsustainable: just as Levinas’s Judaic retrieval immediately gives way to Derrida’s play of salvific economy and divine secrecy, so does Milbank’s theological imperialism – having banished the void on which being depends – collapse into rapturous silence. Although the book was not itself conceived in response to these movements, my reading of *Saint Paul* is obviously motivated by a profound dissatisfaction with the available positions in contemporary thought. Caught between the political lethargy of Levinas-inspired deconstruction and the theological aggression of Radical Orthodoxy, Badiou is more than just a way out: his philosophy attempts precisely what the others refuse.

Against the Judaic election, Paul announces a subject who loves the neighbor *as himself*, not via a deferential self-sacrifice which would be the structural obverse of the totality, but by the power of the universal address of faith, which is love. And in opposition to any form of discursive closure, “radically orthodox” or otherwise, the subject forces an anticipation of its truth-procedure’s success while refusing to determine *all* elements of the situation. Finally, against any obscuring mysticism, Badiou’s theory of the Pauline subject

articulates precisely how subjects participate in immortal being. Since the Christian subject only comes about through the inducement by Christ’s Resurrection, effability is not the guilty and unfortunate necessity of a “fallen world”; declaration is instead the first mode through which the subject emerges.

Badiou’s theory of the subject is therefore as timely as it is unique. In an age when every element of difference is easily co-opted by and conformed to the market’s global order: when love is replaced by trite romanticism and mere sexuality, when the sciences have given way to technology, when artistic endeavors are replaced by the blandness of popular culture, and when emancipatory politics is forbidden in favor of synoptic management; in these conditions, it is precisely and only the subject’s rarity, intensity, and generic universality that can mark a new path for the whole of humanity. This is the lesson of the figure of Paul who, threatened on all sides – by the Empire, by enemies, and even by friends, can write to his comrades in Rome: “I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of Christ...” (Romans 8:38-9) Neither an emperor nor a victim, Paul demands of us the militancy of love; Badiou appropriates him for today because Paul also demands of us a new love of militancy.

## Notes

1. Badiou’s theory is expounded most fully in *L’être et l’événement* (Paris: Seuil, 1988), translation forthcoming. Peter Hallward’s *Badiou: A Subject to Truth* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003) is helpful on every aspect of Badiou’s thought. For a shorter survey, see also the introduction to *Infinite Thought: Truth and the Return of Philosophy*, edited by Justin Clemens and Oliver Feltham (New York, Continuum, 2003).
2. Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth*, p. 141.
3. Badiou, “Being by Numbers,” *Artforum*,

October 1994, p. 87.

4. Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, translated by Peter Hallward (New York: Verso, 2001), p. 125.
5. Badiou, *Ethics*, p. 43.
6. Badiou, "On a Finally Objectless Subject," in *Who Comes After the Subject?*, edited by Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, and Jean-Luc Nancy (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 25.
7. *L'être et l'événement*, pp. 429-30, 434.
8. "On a Finally Objectless Subject," p. 26.
9. Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, translated by Ray Brassier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 2. Hereafter *SP*.
10. *Ethics*, p. 71.
11. *Ethics*, p. 72-87.
12. See especially Badiou, "Truth: Forcing and the Unnameable," in *Theoretical Writings*, edited and translated by Ray Brassier and Alberto

- Toscano (New York: Continuum, 2004).
13. Paul Cohen, *Set Theory and the Continuum Hypothesis* (New York: W. A. Benjamin, 1966).
14. "Truth: Forcing and the Unnameable," p. 127, emphasis in original.
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16. *Ethics*, p. 20.
17. Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. D. Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 49, his emphasis.
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19. John Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 116.
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