

THEOLOGY AND THE EVENT: THE AMBIVALENCE OF ALAIN BADIOU

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Whoever enters into this text either abandons it or else grasps its movement and perseveres with it.¹

A tension runs through the lucidly militant work of Alain Badiou. It takes various shapes, such as the tension between the rigorous ontology of mathematics and the structures of narrative, or between fiction and argument, image and formula, poem and matheme, or Anglo-American analytic rationalism and continental lyricism.² However, the shape of that tension that interests me most is between the triumphant banishing of theology via mathematics and its perpetual recurrence in his thought. For all Badiou's efforts to dismiss theology as the philosophy of the 'One', for all his efforts to read Pascal, Kierkegaard or Paul as exemplars of the 'event' without buying into the belief system they purvey, for all his dismissals of the pious myth or fabulous core of Christianity, it seems as though he cannot avoid theology. The question then is whether this philosopher who is 'rarely suspected of harbouring Christian zeal'³ may actually provide an insight or two into theology.

The texts on which I base my reading are *Being an Event*, the short book on Paul, *Logiques des Mondes*, especially the section on Kierkegaard, and parts of the disparate collection, *Theoretical Writings*.⁴ A rather formidable collection, to say the least. In what follows I begin by considering the absolute blockage of theology in Badiou's philosophy, specifically through his banishment of the One. And yet, despite his best efforts to seal his system against theology, it has an uncanny knack of returning. I am particularly interested in the way theology has a ghostly presence in what appears for all the world like a fifth 'procedure of truth' (alongside the four pillars of art, science, politics and love), in his enthusiastic affirmations of Pascal and Kierkegaard, and the play between fable and truth in his engagement with the apostle Paul.

1. BANISHING THE ONE

Badiou's effort to close down theology comes with the opening assertion of *Being and Event* that the one is not – *l'un n'est pas*.⁵ And since theology is the thought par excellence of the one, theology is thereby ruled out of order. Let us see briefly how he gets to this point. In saying that the one is not he seeks to overcome the philosophical problem of the one and the multiple, especially in the way it asserted the priority of the one and thereby created a problem of the multiple. Rather, for Badiou the multiple is, not the one. And the way the multiple, the pure multiple, steps to the fore is through the set theory inaugurated by Cantor and then perfected by Zermelo, Fraenkel, von Neumann and Gödel. Cantor's simple definition of the set – 'By set what is understood is the grouping into a totality of quite distinct objects of our intuition or our thought'⁶ – establishes the fact that only

multiples exist and not the one (except for the operation called 'count-as-one', that is, that one may count a set of multiples as one).

How does all of this have a bearing on theology? For Badiou, thought of the one, or indeed an ontology of the one, is the definition of theology.⁷ Of course, by the one he means a singular transcendence, for which 'God' is the usual term. Immediately we come upon a problem, one that Badiou will partly recognise a little later. That problem is as disarmingly simple as it is obvious: theology is by no means excluded to the zone of the one. If we take theology in a broader sense as the development of a distinct discipline that deals with the various ramifications and problems of a religion or of religious belief and practice, then I would point to the many polytheisms for which the multiple is the dominant category. And if we understand theology in its narrow sense as a distinctly Christian discipline with its own history, language and modes of argument, then even here we come upon a problem, namely the paradoxical Trinity. Here we find a complex interaction of the one and the multiple, for according to this doctrine God is both singular and plural, with neither permitted to dominate. As we will see, Badiou notes later that Christianity in fact avoids the problem of the one with its initial split between Two. It is a little problematic, then, that he will continue to connect theology with the one. His only targets end up being strict monotheisms, such as Judaism and Islam, as well as certain forms of Greek philosophy with their unmoved mover and prime cause.

For now, however, let us see how Badiou develops his argument. He goes on to wrest ontology itself from the arms of the one and thereby theology, placing it under the care of the multiple. This is a relatively simple move, for if the one is not and the multiple is, then the concern of ontology – as reflection on being – is the multiple. For Badiou, since it is mathematics that has banished the one and given us the multiple, then mathematics itself is concerned with ontology; or rather, mathematics is ontology. All of which means that one cannot shirk the necessity of mathematics in any philosophical endeavour, as Plato showed only too well.⁸

Mathematics, it would seem, provides Badiou with a thoroughgoing way to banish anything that even vaguely smells of theology from philosophy. Apart from the ban on the one and the claim that mathematics is the ontology of the multiple, there are two further steps in this argument. One of those is really a historicising move, where he suggests that theology is tied in with Greek concepts of finitude.⁹ When theology first becomes a distinct mode of thought – through the combination of Greek philosophy and biblical narrative – God fits into the whole scene as that which is beyond the known limit of finitude. This is really what 'infinite' means. Thus theology works perfectly well within a Greek framework of finitude, but once it encounters the discovery of a proper infinity (of the multiple) with Cantor, Zermelo and Fraenkel's discovery of set theory, it meets its own limit and is no longer viable. At this historical juncture, theology comes to an end.

A final step, which may be seen as the logical step beyond the previous historicising move, is to argue that mathematics absorbs God into its workings, thereby overcoming the divine. Badiou makes this explicit in a rather striking discussion of Spinoza: 'God has to be understood as mathematicity itself'.¹⁰ Indeed, for Spinoza 'God' is really a place-holder for mathematics. Let us see how this happens. Spinoza's God or Substance is what Badiou calls the 'count-as-one'.¹¹ Now, this count-as-one is not the one, for the count-as-one marks a mathematical operation, namely the ability to say that a certain group of items constitutes one set. Thus, my bicycle, the statue of Lenin I found in Bulgaria, a 1951 baseball mitt, and Annie Sprinkle's *Post-Porn-Modernist* constitute the one set of things I can see right now. So, for Spinoza God marks an operation of counting as one a whole

range of items, whether singular things or multiple individuals.¹² Mathematics, then, consummates the death of God. Or rather, mathematics is the full realisation of what theology was able to glimpse in a glass darkly. If theology was once the queen of the sciences, Badiou would affirm the slogan of Karl Friedrich Strauss that now ‘mathematics is the queen of the sciences’.¹³

So we have reached the point where one of the most formidable materialist philosophers (a former Maoist, no less) writing today, systematically excludes any possibility of theology from philosophy and indeed political thought. And yet . . . for one who decisively breaks philosophy from its long and tortuous dance with theology, it is surprising how often theology or indeed God explicitly turn up in his works. Of course, I will now pick up those moments, exploring their implications not only for his own thought but for theology itself. We come across a scent on the breeze in the discussions of mathematics, and I deal with it first. Yet all that such a foretaste does is point me in the direction of the event, where there is more theology than we might have expected.

As far as mathematics is concerned, I am less interested in some of the more general problems – the tension between the intrinsic ontology of the Zermelo-Fraenkel system and the ‘forcing’ of Cohen that he needs to break through to the margins of that system,¹⁴ or the sense that the formidable code of formal language provides an impression of rigour, or his tendency to follow a ‘great men of the history of mathematics’ approach.¹⁵ Rather, I am much more interested here in the fact that mathematics bumps into theology every now and then. In fact, it does so at a rather telling point, with none other than the inaugurator of set theory and sometime theologian, Cantor.

For Badiou, Cantor is a curious figure, for he both makes the discovery that, according to Badiou, declares the end of the one and yet he uses his theory to take the path to God. Badiou finds this a wrong turn, for Cantor resorts to the absolute when a set becomes too large or cannot be conceived as a unity (the paradoxical multiple). In the face of this inability to see the totality of a set, he argues that such sets are absolutely infinite. From here it is a short step to God. In other words, when we reach the limit of a set we must postulate God outside the system, one who provides a deeper and more powerful consistency. For Badiou this is a mistake, although he gives various reasons for it.¹⁶ The first is that Cantor fails to see that with such an infinity we reach, rather than the limits of a set, the limits of language, the point at which language can no longer give an adequate description. But this won’t get Badiou very far, since this argument has been used by more than one theologian to argue for God. So Badiou switches tactics and suggests that Cantor, perhaps through a loss of nerve, failed to see the radical implications of his discovery. Indeed, rather than the ‘folly of trying to save God’,¹⁷ Badiou argues that there is no need to postulate beyond the multiple an infinite supreme being who holds it all together. What if we allow the inconsistency of the pure multiple to be as it is? In this case, we simply don’t need God, or the one. At one level Badiou is perfectly correct, for the set theory that Cantor inaugurated, which was then completed by Zermelo, Fraenkel and Gödel, is a closed system. It is, to use the term of Desanti, an intrinsic ontology that is sufficient unto itself, that simply cannot permit any contact with the margins.¹⁸ In this light, God is out of the question. Yet, towards the end of *Being and Event* Badiou himself comes to a problem very similar to Cantor’s: how does the event break into the given multiples of set theory? Here he must make use of Cohen’s theory of ‘forcing’ the break the boundaries of such a closed system. Perhaps Cantor saw more than Badiou grants him.

I did say earlier that this moment provides a first whiff of a deeper pattern in Badiou’s thought, for theology somehow will not leave him alone. He may have killed off the one at

the beginning of his story, but it continues to have a ghostly presence in his work. It haunts Badiou, particularly with his theory of the event.

2. THEOLOGY AND THE EVENT

The most well-known element of Badiou's philosophy, the canonical account of the event, goes something as follows. In the four realms of politics, art, love or science,¹⁹ an entirely chance, incalculable and unexpected event smashes its way into the status quo, which goes under various names such as Order of Being, the situation, or even the 'there is'. The terms cluster heavily around the event, which Badiou also describes as a supplement to or excess of a situation, or as a subtraction from the 'there is'. The catch is that the pure event – or rather 'events' since the event is a multiple and not a one – can never be apprehended directly. It can only be identified after it has happened by its consequences. If someone says, 'that was an event x', then that is a naming after the fact. Thus May '68, the words 'I love you', Galileo's discovery or Mallarmé's poetry are the always inadequate names of an event that had already taken place. They are traces of something that has abruptly happened and then passed. An event, therefore, leaves in its wake what Badiou calls procedures of truth, patterns of language and thought and action through which an event is identified – and thereby constituted – as a contingent moment. These patterns appear as the 'illegal'²⁰ naming of the event, the constitution of the subject as a result of the event, and an eventual fidelity to which others are attracted. What an event does, then, is thoroughly rearrange the coordinates of the way things are. Like an earthquake or a tsunami, we can know that an event has happened through its effects. The 'there is' will never be the same as the result of the event, its identification and the truth procedures it generates. It really is a thoroughgoing philosophical elaboration of the category of revolution, or rather, it subsumes revolution within a much wider philosophical discussion. Indeed, for Badiou it is possible for something genuinely new to happen, against the adage from Ecclesiastes, 'there is nothing new under the sun'.²¹

The ingenious thing about Badiou's theory is that philosophy is not one of the generic procedures or conditions of the event. Unlike art, love, politics and science, philosophy does not produce truth, nor is it the bearer of a truth. Should it do so, that would be a disaster: too often throughout its history, philosophy has tried to pass itself off as art, as the means of love, or as politics, or indeed as a science. Truth, therefore, should not be detained and imprisoned by philosophy. Rather, task of philosophy is what I have just outlined: to discern the procedures of truth generated by events. Philosophy's proper role comes after the fact of an event, grasping and organising the procedures of truth. It does not produce truth in and of itself.

Theology, it seems, is nowhere to be found, at least according to this canonical presentation (one that has been propounded time and again by Badiou himself, let alone his interpreters). However, there is more to the event and its procedures of truth than may at first appear to be the case. Indeed, I want to run against this received text of Badiou's thought and argue that he himself opens up a space for theology. There are three moments in such an argument: a ghostly presence of a fifth procedure of truth that is nothing other than theological; an explication of that procedure by means of Pascal's advocacy of the miracle; and then the opening up of the possibility that truth itself, as a result of the event, is just as much concerned with fable or myth as it is with any propositions of truth. These three moments constitute the real test, for Badiou attempts to read Christianity, Pascal's

Pensées and the letters of Paul, especially the epistle to the Romans, in a thoroughly secular manner, as a source of political insight.²² In other words, I want to suggest that theology cannot be banished all that easily from Badiou's thought.

3. A GENERIC PROCEDURE OF RELIGION?

Among the classic four conditions or 'generic procedures' of truth, theology seems to be far from the scene. It was thus with some surprise that I came across a few pages in *Being and Event* where religion, or more specifically, Christianity, does indeed seem to join the other generic procedures. Badiou does not say so directly, but by a repeated series of examples Christianity becomes part of the group.

The context of this underhand appearance of theology is his discussion of the 'theory of the subject' (a reconsideration of his early book by the same name). Here he deals with the themes of subjectivisation, chance, nomination and forcing. In brief, subjectivisation designates the way a 'subject' appears as a result of an event, chance designates the way a truth unfolds after an event (or the way the 'procedures of truth' develop), nomination is the process in which the subject names the event and certain features associated with it, and forcing speaks of the way those names expect some future fulfilment (they 'will have been true', as the future anterior would have it).

In order to ground these theoretical distinctions and steps, Badiou sprinkles his discussion with a number of repeated examples. As far as subjectivisation is concerned, he mentions '... , Lenin for the Party, Cantor for ontology, Schoenberg for music, but also Simon, Bernard or Clair, if they declare themselves to be in love'.²³ Let me state the obvious: these are the realms of politics, science, art and love – the four generic procedures of truth. Now let me fill in the ellipsis: '*Saint Paul for the Church*, Lenin for the Party, Cantor for ontology, Schoenberg for music, but also Simon, Bernard or Clair, if they declare themselves to be in love'.²⁴ It seems as though we have a fifth procedure of truth, one that comes at the beginning of the list. In case we might think that this is an isolated occurrence, I provide the rest.

So Badiou goes on to point out that each moment of subjectification also makes a subjectivising split between 'the name of an event (*death of God*, revolution, infinite multiples, destruction of the tonal system, meeting) and the initiation of a generic procedure (*Christian Church*, Bolshevism, set theory, serialism, singular love)'.²⁵ As he proceeds, Badiou uses various combinations of these examples, such as the eventual site for the *first Christians in Palestine* or Schoenberg's discovery in the symphonic universe of Mahler,²⁶ or the production of names that trail an event, asking us to think of "'faith", "charity", "sacrifice", "salvation" (*Saint Paul*); or of "party", "revolution", "politics" (Lenin); or of "sets", "ordinals", "cardinals" (Cantor).²⁷ In order to hammer the point home, one more example, now with the category of 'forcing':

That such is the status of names of the type 'faith', 'salvation', 'communism', 'transfinite', 'serialism', or those names used in the declaration of love, can easily be verified. These names are evidently capable of supporting the future anterior of a truth (*religious*, political, mathematical, musical, existential) in that they combine local enquiries (predications, statements, works, addresses) with directed or reworked names available in the situation. They *displace* established significations and leave the referent void: this void will have been filled if truth comes to pass as a new situation (*the kingdom of God*, an emancipated society, absolute mathematics, a new order of music comparable to the tonal order, an entirely amorous life, etc.).²⁸

It is a quite a collection: ‘Saint Paul for the Church’, ‘death of God’, ‘Christian Church’, ‘Palestine for the first Christians’, ‘faith’, ‘charity’, ‘sacrifice’, ‘salvation’, ‘religious’, and ‘the kingdom of God’. To all appearances, it would seem as though we have a fifth generic procedure of truth – the theological – alongside the four of art, science, politics and love.

I am not quite sure what to make of all this. Is this a remnant of an earlier draft in which religion was present, only to be excised rather imperfectly from the collection at the final stages? Or is it perhaps an unconscious recognition that due to his use of Paul and Christianity they really constitute another generic procedure? What I do know is that this ghostly presence opens up the possibility for religion – it is actually theology – to play some role in Badiou’s thought, no matter how much he may wish to banish it.

4. PASCAL’S MIRACLE

So let us see how this ghost haunts Badiou’s text. The signal moment where theology takes on all the trappings of a procedure of truth is in his treatment of Pascal, which now makes a good deal more sense after I came across the pages I have just mentioned. In short, Pascal’s attraction for Badiou is that through his championing of the miracle he points to the eventual kernel of Christianity itself.

There is of course a slightly longer answer as to why this intense Jansenist attracts Badiou so. Badiou writes that although he is ‘rarely suspected of harbouring Christian zeal’, what he admires so much about Pascal is that he goes ‘against the flow’ (*à contre-courant*), that he does not go the way of a weak and sceptical world, holding out instead for the possibility of changing the world itself. In other words, Pascal (like Paul) is committed to the ‘militant apparatus (*dispositif militant*) of truth’²⁹; indeed, he writes and acts (again like Paul) as a militant himself. It does help matters that Pascal was quite a mathematician and sprinkles his *Pensées* with the word ‘truth’.

Why is Pascal at odds with the world? It is not because he simply rejects the world and retreats into solitude in despair. This was indeed the position of some of the Jansenists. Nor is it because he falls back on what appears on a first read (which is indeed my own experience) to be the most reactionary and credulous of positions – belief in miracles, the church’s doctrines, the prophecies, and so on. No, the reason lies in a much more difficult path. And that is the effort to find some connection between two stern dialectical extremes: one is the radical assertion of the truth of a miraculous Christianity, and the other is the equally radical embracing of the rush of modern developments in science and mathematics to which he made a few signal contributions himself. The connection he seeks is not via some accommodation to the world, watering down Christianity in the process. Rather, it is through a radical and dialectical affirmation of both. This is why Pascal prefers to address the staunch atheist rather than any lukewarm believer who has made a home in the world. At this point we find two of his central means for bringing the dialectic into play – the miracle and the wager.

I will say a little more on the miracle as intervention, the eventual truth of Christianity (in Badiou’s opinion), and the wager before focusing on a curious vacillation, namely Badiou’s switching between speaking of the ‘event’ of Christianity and the ‘emblem of the event’.

As for the miracle, Badiou embraces Pascal as follows: ‘the miracle . . . is the emblem of the pure event as resource of truth’.³⁰ Pascal, after all, holds that ‘all belief rests on miracles’ (*toute la créace est sur les miracles*).³¹ What Pascal does for Badiou is provide an intricate instance of the workings of the intervention, which boils down to the line – the

diagonal of fidelity – that connects a previous event to the next. It does not lead one confidently to expect an event, nor does it allow one to calculate when and how it will happen; what it does is to establish a continuity from the previous event to this one so that it becomes possible to intervene in a situation when a new event happens. Or in Badiouese, fidelity to the first event opens up the possibility of the next without making it necessary. What it does is enable those who are faithful to the first to decide a new event has occurred, intervene accordingly and name it as their own. Indeed, in light of the new event, the truth of the first event is clarified.³²

This is precisely how miracles work, at least in Badiou's reading of Pascal. They provide that crucial diagonal line of fidelity from the prophecies of Christ's coming (suitably interpreted in an ambiguously Christian and typological sense³³) to the 'event' of Christ's death and resurrection. Even more, they set up the possibility of the third event in the sequence, the Last Judgement. Add the faithful avant-garde (the 'spiritual') as the custodians of the event and we have our agents of decision and intervention in the new event. By the time we get to the Paul book, Badiou will argue for the *form* of such a sequence – event, fidelity and intervention. But that is not his take here. Rather, what we have is a translation into Badiou's schema of the classic theological narrative of history.

Now, this is where it all becomes quite interesting, for when he shifts from his discussion of Pascal to Christianity as such, Badiou comes out in favour of certain features of Christianity insofar as they exhibit his own theory. Or, as he puts it, 'All the parameters of the doctrine of the event are thus disposed within Christianity',³⁴ although they are muddled with an ontology of presence. So let us see what these elements of the event look like once the waters have cleared. The main event is none other than the passion – the suffering, torture and death – and resurrection of Christ, and Badiou has no qualms calling it an event on a number of occasions. Further, it takes place in what Badiou calls a 'site', namely the Jewish background and the fact of human life at the edge of the void (marked by suffering and pain), and a 'situation', which is none other than the incomprehending and embarrassed state (the province of Palestine and the Roman Empire) that treats this Jesus as yet another nuisance agitator. So far, so good, for all this is rather conventional terminology for Badiou, although it does have the clear point that Christianity is at its roots a revolutionary and militant movement.

Until this point we have been in what might be called the story of Jesus of Nazareth – the 'historical' story of a political revolutionary that is standard fare among Christian Socialists, as well as a political and liberation theologians. But now Badiou shifts gear and drives full speed into theological doctrine. On the way he links his discussion of Pascal to the credal affirmation of the three points of what is nothing other than salvation history: the Christ-event is the fulcrum of two other events – the original sin of Adam and the Last Judgement.³⁵ This is a curious move on a number of counts. Badiou really produces a sleight of hand here, since he moves from what might be regarded as the historical Jesus to a distinct theory of history. Indeed, he asserts that there is an 'essential historicity'³⁶ about this periodisation in terms of original sin/Christ-event/Last Judgement. This phrase – 'essential historicity' – is nothing but ambiguous. Does it mean that Christianity is based on verifiable historical events such as the resurrection of Christ? I suspect not. Perhaps he means that this schema moves in a line from beginning to end rather than in some circular, agricultural pattern? If so, then it is neither original nor correct. Is it the case that Christianity and especially the Bible break with myth? Once again, not an original point and hardly justifiable, for this schema of history is also a mythical pattern. Indeed, it is not so much a biblical pattern, for the Bible is far too diverse for such a uniform view of

history; it is a theological extraction of certain elements from the Bible to give us such a schema. What about the point that any idea of history is heavily ideological and schematic? Then of course Christianity has an ‘essential historicity’, but then so does any other schematic story of how things have come about and where they will go. At the heart of this point concerning the historicity of Christianity lies, I suspect, the need for some historical kernel in order to link it with his theory of event and truth, for they indeed must be ‘historical’.

Not his strongest point, it seems. Badiou goes on to stress the way these ‘events’ provide both a pattern of fidelity from one event to the next and the possibility of intervention in a situation by the avant-garde or ‘faithful’ in light of this fidelity. We have seen this argument in relation to Pascal, so I will not dwell on it here. Rather, what is far more interesting is his point that Christianity avoids the trap of the one. As we saw earlier, Badiou has pronounced the end of the one, banishing it to the nether darkness where there is much gnashing of teeth. Even more, he will again and again connect theology with the one: all talk of theology is talk of the one, and for this reason theology is no longer viable. Yet here he gets Christianity off the hook, if only partially. He writes:

The ultimate essence of the evental ultra-one is the Two, in the especially striking form of a division of the divine One – the Father and the Son – which, in truth, definitively ruins any recollection of divine transcendence into the simplicity of a Presence.³⁷

I hardly need to point out that this is nothing but a theological point, honed in the intricate debates of the first centuries when Greek philosophy was harnessed to the biblical stories. But what it does is reveal the deep problem that attaches to Badiou’s elision of the one with theology, and that problem is none other than the ‘nonsense’ of not merely the split between Father and Son, but the Trinity itself. My earlier objection that not all religions have an ontology of the one also applies to Christianity, for here is a curious multiplicity at the heart of the one.

I am no great admirer of the doctrine of the Trinity, but what is fascinating is the way it allows Badiou to retrieve Christianity – understood in his own way – into his theory of the event. It works even better because of the incarnation: this earthy presence simply ruins any notion of divine transcendence. For one who asserts the end of transcendence (inextricably tied up with the one) in favour of immanence, this is good news indeed.

What we have, then, is a bold appropriation of two dimensions of Christianity into Badiou’s philosophy: the event of the revolutionary Jesus of Nazareth and his death, and the evental schema of Christian theology, with the bonus of sidestepping the one and transcendence. Like others, I get the impression every now and then that the examples – such as Pascal and Christianity – of the event and his truth are rather neatly moulded to fit the over-arching philosophical framework. But what are we to make of all this?

Badiou seems to have come rather close to affirming Christianity, at least as an authentic case of the event and its truth procedures. However, just when it seems as though he has paid his dues and received his membership card, he opens up an escape route or two – one via the suggestion that the Church has betrayed its fidelity to the event, another via Pascal’s wager and a third through a vacillation over the authenticity of what he calls the ‘Christ-event’. He is, after all, not noted for his ‘Christian zeal’.

To begin with, he dabbles with the possibility that the Church has betrayed the initial event, that it is no longer characterised by fidelity to the event that it claims as its own founding moment. The problem lies with a faulty ontologisation, for the Church seeks to contain the effects of the event (such as fidelity) within its own domain by means of

transcendence. In my terms, by referring to God, the Church tries to limit the possibilities generated by an interruption. The most telling examples are heresies: if you can't absorb them, burn them. Or, in Badiou's terms, the Church limits the set of multiples to the flock of the Faithful. It does so by positing transcendence as the maximal point and by locking everything into a hierarchy in which there can be no further errancy. Thereby, like communism and classical metaphysics, it effects a closure to thought.³⁸ This argument is all very well, but all it does is present in new garb the tired old argument that the Church, or indeed the various churches, have lost touch with, or betrayed, or prostituted, the authentic moment of Christ and the early Christian movement. There are as many variations on the nature of the betrayal (Emperor Constantine the Great, the split between East and West, the venal popes before the Reformation, those wayward churches that ordain women and gays) as there are theories of what the authentic original moment actually was (an existential Jesus who calls us to faith, a revolutionary Jesus, a morally pure movement, and so on). It is no surprise, then, that Badiou makes relatively little of this argument from betrayal.

A more viable escape hatch opens up via his treatment of Pascal's wager. Initially it poses few problems for Badiou (he leaves its treatment until last³⁹). However, if we peer a little closer, he makes two curious moves: he switches from 'wager' (*pari*) to 'choice' (*choix*) and then he opts implicitly for what he sees as the libertine's choice. Now, despite Badiou's impression that choice and wager are interchangeable, choice is a little different from a wager. Pascal argues that one cannot avoid making a wager on Christianity, and that the best wager is one for infinity itself. Yet, if we shift the terminology to choice, the immediate effect is a greater certainty: one may choose clearly and decisively one way or another. Indeed, Badiou later makes choice, of which Kierkegaard is a model, a central feature of his *Logiques des Mondes*.⁴⁰ So we find Badiou arguing that since the event is itself undecidable one must of course make a choice.⁴¹ Indeed, once an avant-garde of true Christians have decided that Christ was the crucial event, then one cannot avoid making such a choice. The catch is that one need not make their choice, for the option of the libertine – Pascal's chosen interlocutor – is also possible, namely to choose not to buy into that event and its consequences. If we replace each 'choice' or 'choose' in the preceding few sentences with 'wager' or 'bet', the whole sense shifts to far greater uncertainty. Why the shift? I suspect that the reason lies in Badiou's own certainty; he certainly does not wager that the one is not, that God is dead and that theology has no content. No, of this he is certain; it is a truth and he has chosen so. For that reason, he can side with the libertine: 'I am forced to wager [read: choose] . . . and I am made in such a way that I cannot believe'.⁴²

A new problem arises in light of his choice not to buy into this event, as well as its truth and fidelity. Is it a real event? Is it true? It seems to have the form of an event, but Badiou cannot assert that it is a genuine event – unlike the French Revolution, or the Russian Revolution, or Cantor and Cohen's discoveries in mathematics, or indeed falling in love. Is it a semblance or a pseudo-event, such as the Nazi takeover of power in Germany, or perhaps the attack on the World Trade Center on 11 September, 2001. These have the form of events – nothing will ever be the same! – and yet for Badiou they cannot be genuine events.⁴³ It seems as though it is neither. He would be loathe to put Pascal and Christianity in general in the same boat with the Nazis or the neo-conservatives in the USA, and yet he will not assert the truth of this Christian event.

For all its affronting boldness, this claim for Christianity really lies in no-man's land, a vacillation between the event and the semblance of an event. This vacillation rises to the surface if we look awry at Badiou's word choice. On the one hand, Badiou writes of the

'event' at the heart of Christianity 'that is the death of God on the cross'.⁴⁴ He will occasionally even use the term 'Christ-event', *l'événement-Christ*. On the other hand, he speaks of the miracle as the 'emblem' (*l'emblème*) of the pure event or as the 'symbol' (*symbole*) of an interruption.⁴⁵ The effect of both terms is to put some distance between the miracle and the event. Let me follow the path of emblem first. He uses 'emblem' again when referring to the Cross, this time as a synonym for naming the truth of the event of Christ's death and resurrection that establishes – for the Christians at least – that he is indeed the Messiah.⁴⁶ Now, this is a tell-tale move, for the lining up of both the Cross and the miracle as 'emblems' of the event merges them together. The initial impression is that Badiou has acknowledged the connection of Christian theology: the Cross is *the* central miracle of the Christian proclamation. The other miracles, of healing, of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, of the water into wine, are supports for this one great miracle. However, implicit in this connection is a double move on Badiou's part that shifts the miracle imperceptibly away from the event. To begin with, it seems that for most of the argument the miracle is another term for the event. Is not that which breaks into our mundane, everyday existence in an unexpected fashion precisely the miracle? This would be one step too far, for Badiou does, after all, affirm the libertine's response that he is made in such a way that he cannot believe. So we find the next move, namely to designate the miracle as an emblem of the event, just like the Cross. In this shift, the miracle is no longer on par with the event; rather, it is one move away, as its emblem or name.

Now his other term, 'symbol', comes into its own. Although it overlaps somewhat with emblem in French, there is much that lies beneath it. It too shifts the miracle away from the genuine event: the miracle functions as a symbol that may point to the event (in the same way that the Bible, according to some interpretations, is a symbol that points to God). The trick here is that the symbol is not the thing itself. Thus, the miracle may be a symbol of the event but it is not the event itself. There is a further connection with the French *symbole*, for is used not merely to designate a symbol, but it is also used for 'creed' as in *symbole des apôtres* and *symbole de saint Athanase* – the Apostles Creed and the Athanasian Creed.⁴⁷ I assume Badiou is aware of these connections; indeed, it enables him to shift the miracle into the realm of a creed that one can assert or deny.

For all Badiou's affirmation of the militantly unconventional Pascal, for all his assertions that Pascal's thought gives an insight into the event-based nature of Christianity, he leaves the question very much in limbo. Is the 'miracle' of the death and resurrection of Christ an event that Christians name as such and to which they are faithful? Or is the miracle an emblem or symbol, a creedal statement to which one may say, thanks but no thanks? This vacillation becomes much sharper in his discussion of Paul, the one who is far more of a radical, a far greater revolutionary than Pascal.⁴⁸

5. KIERKEGAARD'S ENCOUNTER

Before turning to Paul, I pick up Badiou's engagement with a theological comrade of Pascal, namely Kierkegaard in the recent *Logiques des Mondes*.⁴⁹ Here too we find an ambivalence, for despite Badiou's systematic translation of Kierkegaard's radical encounter with God into the terminology of a revamped theory of the event, he will not buy into Kierkegaard's explicitly Christian content. In fact, he finds that Kierkegaard's search for a path to God, along with his heavy reliance on the religious 'sphere' (the other two are the ethical and aesthetic), waters down the full realisation of Kierkegaard's insight.

The only surprise of Badiou's engagement with Kierkegaard is that it comes so late. It seems to me that the inner encounter, the radical disruption of coming face to face with God and the decision called for, all seem like the parts of a classic instance of the event. I would go so far as to say that the whole theory of the event has a deeply existential feel about it. After all, God's radical interruption in Kierkegaard's system is as unexpected, undeserved and unaccountable as the event itself.

Systematically throughout his discussion, Badiou points to the correspondences with his own theory, although that theory now has the elaboration of what he calls the 'point',⁵⁰ which turns out to be both the absolute choice generated by the irruption of the event and the localised place in which it happens. For Kierkegaard, the point is nothing other than the absolute choice: 'For Kierkegaard, the key to existence is nothing other than the absolute choice, the alternative, the disjunction without rest'.⁵¹ Other than this item, all the usual suspects turn up. Thus, the paradox of the encounter with eternity in a moment in time is nothing other than the specific and contingent moment of the event and its truth. The process of Christian subjectivisation in that encounter may be read as Badiou's theory of the subject. The identification of truth that comes only from a radically inward gesture for Kierkegaard all too easily lines up with Badiou's procedures of truth that follow an event. In short, for Badiou the moment of the impossible intersection between eternity and existence generates the crucial possibility of choice, which is the point where the subject of truth emerges.

It would seem that Kierkegaard, like Pascal, is another embodiment of that ghostly theological procedure of truth that I traced a little earlier. Indeed, Badiou feels that Kierkegaard's position is close enough to his own, mentioning 'the Christian paradox (which is for us one of the possible names of the paradox of truths)'.⁵² And Kierkegaard, writes Badiou, thinks and understands 'as we do' (*comme nous*).⁵³

Yet, despite the delicious scandal of this self-professed atheist lining himself up with some like-minded theologians, Badiou still holds himself back. He concludes the section on Kierkegaard by pointing to the limits generated by the latter's Christian commitment. The attachment to the highest religious sphere, the dependence on God, the need for repentance and reliance on God's love, the fact that the choice itself is weighted in favour of God – all of these lead to the despair of the being who is not absolute. Let me pick up my earlier comment concerning choice in my discussion of Pascal: implied in Badiou's assessment of the limits of Kierkegaard's thought is the possibility of another choice, however much Kierkegaard may seem to weigh it in God's favour. Should Kierkegaard free himself from the paraphernalia of Christian doctrine (the content of the religious sphere), then he would indeed find himself with Badiou's own conclusions. In other words, like Cohen, he has taken a wrong turn, thereby vitiating his insights.

6. PAUL'S FABLE

Now, at last, it is Paul's turn. What interests me about Badiou's analysis of Paul, apart from what I take to be a fascinating but unwitting Calvinist flavour, is the way the event that lies at the core of Paul's truth claims is inextricably tied up with a pure fable. Indeed, Paul's central proclamation is that Christ has been raised, a claim that he produces whenever possible.⁵⁴ Paul identifies the truth-event of Christ's resurrection only after the fact, only in his outright militancy, in occasional pieces written on the run (the epistles). But the event in question, the resurrection, is for Badiou pure fable or mythological core; it

has no verifiable or historical truth.⁵⁵ However, what draws my attention in Badiou's book on Paul is a comment barely made: the resurrection is not merely a fable, but a *necessary* fable.

At this point, we need to introduce a distinction: the 'event' in question should be designated a fiction and the 'truth' concerning it is actually a 'fable'. So we end up with parallel sequences: event-truth is parallel with fiction-fable. Indeed, Badiou himself insists on this distinction, arguing that in the realm of religion we necessarily deal with fiction and fable. Thus, when we are dealing with religion, the event has the structure of fiction. Even though it is named as an event, even though it produces all of the procedures of truth, even though we find people who act in fidelity to the event, the event itself must be fiction. And so we would expect fable to play a central role in formulating and determining the 'truth' of the event – as for instance in political movements such as the one around Thomas Müntzer. By contrast, in other cases, such as May '68 or the Chinese Revolution, the event has the structure of fact, so there is no room for fable.⁵⁶

For all its neatness, the distinction is not as clear as it first appears. It all seems straightforward: if one can know an event only by the truth that declares and names it, then the same applies to the fable in relation to fiction. Yet, how does one know we are in the realm of fact or fiction? We cannot rely merely on the word of those faithful to the event in question, for they will claim that it really happened, whether that is May '68 or the resurrection of Jesus. If we bring in external criteria of verification (whatever they might be), then we introduce evidence that is inadmissible in the terms of the event itself – it is, after all, unexpected, unknowable and unverifiable. The distinction is further troubled by Badiou's argument in the Paul book that he is interested not in the *content* of Paul's fable, but in its *form*.⁵⁷ This form exhibits a paradigmatic case of the procedures of truth. But then, just as with his discussion of Pascal, the boundaries between fable and truth blur even further. For if truth and fable have the same form, then there is even less to distinguish them.

So I would rather take the stronger line: it is not that truth procedures have some element of the fabulous about them, but that a truth is necessarily fabulous. Indeed, let me push Badiou here and argue that the very strength of Paul's central claim – that Jesus is resurrected – is that it is pure fable, that it is not tied to any element of the 'earthly' life of Jesus, or, more generally, any historical conditions or causes. It is not falsifiable or verifiable in terms of the order of fact, according to any of the canons of scientific or historical enquiry. And this fable of the resurrection has all of the procedures of truth in a paradigmatic fashion – the naming of the event as a truth, a militant movement characterised by fidelity and certainty. It seems to me that Badiou's Paul book reveals the truth of his position as a whole: a truth necessarily deals with the fable.

However, I have run on too far in my argument, neglecting to ask what should in fact be the prior question – what is a fable? In terms of genre, the definition is straightforward: a fable is a story that takes place in the world of animals, plants, or inanimate objects with a point to make about human society.⁵⁸ However, I am intrigued by Badiou's use of the adjective 'fabulous', *fabuleux*, or indeed 'element of fabulation', *point de fable*,⁵⁹ for they break out of the strict confines of the definition of fable I have just given. While 'fabulation' suggests the legendary and mythical, 'fabulous' moves beyond these associations to suggest the tremendous and extraordinary – all of which means that the story of the resurrection of Jesus is not a fable in the strict sense, it is both fabulation and fabulous, or, if you like, a myth. Indeed, the 'fable' of the death and resurrection of Jesus in Badiou's hands actually means myth.

It seems that for all Badiou's efforts to keep fable and myth under lock and key so that they will not taint the philosophical task of dealing with the event, truth, fable and myth

constantly mingle and rub up against one another. The first instance comes, tellingly, from mathematics, Badiou's favoured mode of thought. I cannot help but notice that in a variety of texts Badiou broaches what can only be described as a fabulous wonder at the beauty of mathematics, *precisely when he asserts the ontological priority of mathematics*. Out of a number of such moments, those of Mallarmé and Fernando Pessoa (in the persona of Álvaro De Campo) stand out. As for Mallarmé, Badiou writes: 'the injunction to mathematical beauty intersects with the injunction to poetic truth'.⁶⁰ A brief poem from Pessoa is even more to the point: 'Newton's binomial is as beautiful as the Venus de Milo. The truth is few people notice it'.⁶¹ It is not merely the oft-made observation that underlying Plato's rigorous philosophy lie the Orphic Mysteries, the music of the spheres and so forth, nor even that Plato struggles desperately with the quarrel between philosophy and art, resorting to images, metaphors and myths at the limit of thought,⁶² but that at the heart of the stark and courageous discipline of mathematics we happen upon a Platonic wonder at the beauty of mathematics.⁶³ It reminds me of the mathematician, whose name escapes me, who was overcome with the beauty of the simplest of formulas. Is it perhaps a wonder at the fabulous – and here I take the word in all its nuances – nature of mathematics?

The second instance of fable's unavoidable presence follows from this first example. Let me put a question to Badiou: is mathematics the only way to identify the procedures of truth that follow the event? How might he respond?

I have always conceived truth as a random course or as a kind of escapade, posterior to the event and free of any external law, such that the resources of narration are required *simultaneously* with those of mathematization for its comprehension. There is a constant circulation from fiction to argument, from image to formula, from poem to matheme – as indeed the work of Borges strikingly illustrates.⁶⁴

The play of oppositions is crucial here: narration and mathematisation, fiction and argument, image and formula, poem and matheme. And, I would add, myth and truth, as Plato's myth of Er the Pamphylian at the end of the *Republic* with all its 'traps and bifurcations'⁶⁵ shows only too well. Except that they are not so much oppositions as a series of points in a continual circulation, or perhaps an Adornoesque dialectic. So it seems that narration, fiction, image, poem and fable – all of these are as necessary for dealing with the truth of an event as are argument, formula and matheme.

What else would we expect from something that breaks into our everyday multiplicity? After all, the event is extraneous, unexpected and undeserved, operating at the edge of language and beyond. It is not for nothing that Badiou resorts to poetry, plays and fiction time and again, not merely in his own writing practice but also in speaking of the event. Indeed, just as speaking about the event takes place at the moment when 'language loses its grip',⁶⁶ so also mathematics at times enters the 'liminality of language'.⁶⁷ Poetry is no different, for it signals the instance when language itself starts slipping: 'Poetry makes truth out of the multiple, conceived as a presence that has come to the limits of language'.⁶⁸ So also with the fable of the event that speaks its truth.

7. CONCLUSION: NECESSARY FABLES

Perhaps we can sum up Badiou's take on theology as follows: with the death of God at the hands of Cohen's set theory (even though Cohen himself argued in favour of God),

theology turns out to be a distinct language that provides a paradigmatic instance of the event and its procedures of truth. We can see this model in the letters of Paul, the writings of Pascal and Kierkegaard, and indeed in the credal statements of Christianity. Minus the divine referent – the transcendent one – there is no risk that we will buy into this pious fable.

At one level Badiou may well come under the suspicion of secularised theology that Adorno expressed so well,⁶⁹ for the trace of the former theological use of a term or an idea is not excised so easily. However, there is a slight difference: Badiou does not so much seek to secularise theological concepts and processes as see them in terms of his own system. These concepts then become instances, fully decked in their theological garb, of the event and its truth procedures.

More to the point is the argument of this essay as a whole, namely that Badiou cannot quarantine his own system of thought from the implications of theology. By that I mean that the religious fable leaks into Badiou's thought on the event and truth. For at the heart of each instance – the ghostly theological procedure of truth, Pascal's miracle, Kierkegaard's encounter and Paul's militant proclamation – there lies that strange thing called the 'Christ-event' (a term Badiou himself uses). If these various examples are paradigmatic cases of the procedures of truth, we cannot escape the conclusion that truth and fable are inseparably entwined. Indeed, I would prefer to take the strong position and stress the necessary role of the fable. If the procedures of truth set in motion by the event also apply in the case of a religious fable like the resurrection, then the fable itself becomes a necessary feature of what Badiou calls a truth. Or more sharply, a primary mode for telling the story of the event takes the form of fable and myth.

Notes

1 Jean-Toussaint Desanti, 'Some Remarks on the Intrinsic Ontology of Alain Badiou', in *Think Again: Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy*, ed. Peter Hallward (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 63.

2 See Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (London: Continuum Press, 2006), pp. xiii–xiv.

3 Ibid., p. 222, Alain Badiou, *L'Être et l'Événement* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1988), p. 245.

4 Badiou, *Being and Event*, Badiou, *L'Être et l'Événement*, Alain Badiou, *Logiques des mondes: L'Être et l'Événement*, 2 (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2006), Alain Badiou, *Saint-Paul: La Fondation de l'Universalisme* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1997), Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), Alain Badiou, *Theoretical Writings*, ed. Ray Brassier and Alberto Toscano (London: Continuum, 2004). Over the long and slow process of reading *Being and Event*, on various ships and trains throughout Europe, I began to feel as though I was reading a somewhat strange novel: early on there is a death or murder, specifically of the one. Then we meet who is left, the old partner of the one, namely the Multiple. This multiple is a complex character, bristling with mathematical formulae, a specialist in set theory. In place of the one we encounter the enigmatic Void, a mysterious character who is both necessary and a danger that sometimes needs to be warded off. The Void brings with it (through the dense thicket of formal language) an event, be it in politics, science, art, or love. The event is the great turning point of the story. Before the resolution of the story, we must face the great challenge of constructivism (it is all language!) which forbids any event for it is unconstructible. Having won through, at last the hero (the 'subject') emerges to claim the event that has risen from the edge of the Void and force the way through to the future of truth.

5 Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 23, Badiou, *L'Être et l'Événement*, p. 31.

6 Quoted in Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 38, Badiou, *L'Être et l'Événement*, p. 49.

7 See, for example Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 90, Badiou, *L'Être et l'Événement*, pp. 104–5, although it is a recurring theme.

8 I am not so troubled by the effort to recover Plato (the more the better), but there is an unexamined classicism at work here. Such a classicism assumes a narrative that runs from ancient Greece to the West. Now, it may well be that the story has become true through its constant use, but it is always useful to note the bumps and ruptures such as the fact that Greece is part of the Balkan East, or that the insights of Greek philosophy passed through the Arab world before making their way via Spain into Aquinas' work.

9 Badiou, *Being and Event*, pp. 142–4, Badiou, *L'Être et l'Événement*, pp. 161–3.

- 10 Badiou, *Theoretical Writings*, p. 93.
- 11 Badiou, *Being and Event*, pp. 112–20, Badiou, *L'Être et l'Événement*, pp. 129–36.
- 12 Badiou's quibble with Spinoza lies in another area, namely that he tries to close down the void. The trick is that this cannot be done, for there is always an excess of the void.
- 13 Quoted by E. Roy Weintraub, *How Economics Became a Mathematical Science* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2002), p. ix.
- 14 Desanti, 'Some Remarks on the Intrinsic Ontology of Alain Badiou', Kenneth Surin, *Freedom Not Yet: Liberation and the Next World Order* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2009), pp. 408–10.
- 15 When dealing with mathematics, or more strictly the history of mathematics, Badiou slips into the age-old practice of focussing on various individuals and their unique contributions to the body of mathematical knowledge. As Weintraub points out (Weintraub, *How Economics Became a Mathematical Science*, p. 3), this narrative of brilliant 'discoveries' or even events in the hands of Cantor, Zermelo, Fraenkel, Gödel, Cohen and others perpetuates the impression not that these discoveries take place in a disembodied vacuum.
- 16 Badiou, *Being and Event*, pp. 41–3, Badiou, *L'Être et l'Événement*, pp. 52–4.
- 17 Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 43, Badiou, *L'Être et l'Événement*, p. 54.
- 18 Desanti, 'Some Remarks on the Intrinsic Ontology of Alain Badiou'.
- 19 On these four, apart from numerous references in various essays, see Badiou, *Being and Event*, pp. 339–41, Badiou, *L'Être et l'Événement*, pp. 374–6, Badiou, *Logiques des mondes: L'Être et l'Événement*, 2, pp. 18–42.
- 20 'Illegal' because the process of recognising and deciding must avoid drawing its terms from the situation or order of being. Any name for the event must be made out of an unrepresented element – hence 'illegal'. See Badiou, *Being and Event*, pp. 202–4, Badiou, *L'Être et l'Événement*, pp. 224–6.
- 21 A point that Badiou makes, offering a loose version of the Latin Vulgate from Ecclesiastes: 'there is some newness in being – an antagonistic thesis with respect to the maxim from Ecclesiastes, "nihil novi sub sole"' (Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 209, Badiou, *L'Être et l'Événement*, p. 231). Apart from pointing out that the text actually reads 'nihil sub sole novum' (Ecclesiastes 1:10 in the Vulgate), it is a rather telling mark of his Catholic context.
- 22 Badiou, *Being and Event*, pp. 212–22, Badiou, *L'Être et l'Événement*, pp. 235–45, Badiou, *Saint-Paul: La Fondation de l'Universalisme*, Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*. While I would have liked to discuss the whole area of a laicised and militant grace in Badiou's reading of Paul, I should say that I have already done so in Roland Boer, *Criticism of Heaven: On Marxism and Theology* (Historical Materialism Book Series; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2007), pp. 372–6.
- 23 Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 393, Badiou, *L'Être et l'Événement*, p. 431.
- 24 Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 393, Badiou, *L'Être et l'Événement*, p. 431; emphasis mine.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 394, Badiou, *L'Être et l'Événement*, p. 432.
- 27 Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 397, Badiou, *L'Être et l'Événement*, pp. 435–6; emphasis mine.
- 28 Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 399, Badiou, *L'Être et l'Événement*, p. 437; emphasis mine, except for 'displace'.
- 29 The preceding three quotations are from Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 222, Badiou, *L'Être et l'Événement*, p. 245.
- 30 Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 216, Badiou, *L'Être et l'Événement*, p. 239.
- 31 Quoted in Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 216, Badiou, *L'Être et l'Événement*, p. 239, Blaise Pascal, *The Pensées*, trans. J. M. Cohen (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), p. 229, Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (Paris: Hachette, 1950), p. 277. He is of course, as a Jansenist, faithful to Augustine here: 'I would not be a Christian without the miracles, says Saint Augustine'. Pascal, *The Pensées*, p. 229, Pascal, *Pensées*, p. 278.
- 32 Badiou, *Being and Event*, pp. 216–19, Badiou, *L'Être et l'Événement*, pp. 239–42.
- 33 I write 'ambiguously' since the prophecies have a double meaning: the literal meaning of immediate clarity and the proper prophetic meaning that only comes to light with Christ. There is nothing particularly complex about this since it is a rather old mainstream Christian way of appropriating Hebrew prophecy.
- 34 Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 212, Badiou, *L'Être et l'Événement*, p. 235.
- 35 It was a pattern that fascinated Walter Benjamin as well; see Boer, *Criticism of Heaven: On Marxism and Theology*, pp. 96–102.
- 36 Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 213, Badiou, *L'Être et l'Événement*, p. 236.
- 37 Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 213, Badiou, *L'Être et l'Événement*, p. 236.
- 38 See Badiou, *Being and Event*, pp. 238, 283–4, 392, Badiou, *L'Être et l'Événement*, pp. 263–4, 313–14, 430.
- 39 Badiou, *Being and Event*, pp. 220–2, Badiou, *L'Être et l'Événement*, pp. 243–4. Pascal, *The Pensées*, pp. 155–9, See Pascal, *Pensées*, pp. 93–7.
- 40 Badiou, *Logiques des mondes: L'Être et l'Événement*, 2, pp. 425–46.
- 41 Yet he seems to feel that wager and choice are interchangeable, for he writes a little earlier, 'Since it is of the very essence of the event to be a multiple whose belonging to the situation is undecidable, deciding that it belongs to the situation is a wager (*un pari*)' (Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 201, Badiou, *L'Être et l'Événement*, p. 223).
- 42 Pascal, *The Pensées*, pp. 158, Pascal, *Pensées*, p. 96; translation modified.
- 43 A pseudo-event or semblance of an event follows the following precept: 'I have never said that every transformation or becoming is a truth procedure and consequently dependent upon a founding event and a fidelity to this event' (Alain Badiou, 'Afterword: Some Replies to a Demanding Friend', in *Think Again: Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy*, ed. Peter Hallward (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 236). Surin notes the way the Right is all too ready to use the terminology of the event (Surin, *Freedom Not Yet: Liberation and the Next World Order*, pp. 387–9),

while Žižek pushes the line that the resurrection too is a semblance of an event (Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London: Verso, 1999), pp. 143–4).

44 Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 212, Badiou, *L'Être et l'Événement*, p. 235.

45 Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 216, Badiou, *L'Être et l'Événement*, p. 239.

46 Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 217, Badiou, *L'Être et l'Événement*, p. 240.

47 In this respect the French is closer to the Classical Greek sense of the word *symbolon*. Not merely a token, ticket or omen, it was also the term used for the distinctive mark of Christians, which then became the creed or the confession of faith.

48 Badiou, *Saint-Paul: La Fondation de l'Universalisme*, pp. 50–3, Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, pp. 47–50.

49 Badiou, *Logiques des mondes: L'Être et l'Événement*, 2, pp. 447–57.

50 Ibid, 425–46.

51 Ibid, p. 447.

52 Ibid, p. 450.

53 Ibid, p. 454.

54 Romans 1:2–6; 3:21–6; 4:24–5; 5:6–11; 6:3–11; 8:11, 32; 10:9; 14:8–9 and so on.

55 Badiou, *Saint-Paul: La Fondation de l'Universalisme*, pp. 5–7, Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, pp. 4–6.

56 Alain Badiou did in fact respond in this vein to a presentation of mine that was a very early version of this essay. It was at the 'Singularity and Multiplicity' conference at Duke University, 26 March 2005, organised by the Institute for Critical Theory.

57 Badiou, *Saint-Paul: La Fondation de l'Universalisme*, p. 6, Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, p. 6.

58 Eli Yassif, *The Hebrew Folktale: History, Genre, Meaning*, trans. Jacqueline S. Teitelbaum (Bloomington, IA: Indiana University Press, 1999), pp. 23–6.

59 Badiou, *Saint-Paul: La Fondation de l'Universalisme*, p. 5, Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, p. 4.

60 See also Badiou, *Being and Event*, pp. 191–8, Badiou, *L'Être et l'Événement*, pp. 213–20, Badiou, *Theoretical Writings*, p. 20.

61 Badiou, *Theoretical Writings*, p. 20.

62 Alain Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, trans. Alberto Toscano (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), pp. 19–20.

63 Alain Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, trans. Norman Madarasz (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1999), pp. 11–13.

64 Alain Badiou, *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*, trans. Louise Burchill (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 58.

65 Ibid, p. 58.

66 Badiou, *Theoretical Writings*, p. 109.

67 Sometimes he overdoes it. For example, in his discussion of the formal notation of the Void, \emptyset , he observes that the mathematicians had to search for a sign as far as possible from their usual languages (Greek, Latin and Gothic). So they settled on the old Scandinavian \emptyset . He writes: 'As if they were dully aware that in proclaiming that the void alone is . . . they were touching upon some sacred region, itself liminal to language; as if thus, rivalling the theologians for whom the supreme being has been the proper name since long ago, yet opposed to the latter's promise of the one, and of Presence, the irrevocability of un-presentation and the un-being of the one, the mathematicians had to shelter their own audacity behind the character of a forgotten language' (Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 69, Badiou, *L'Être et l'Événement*, pp. 82–3). Badiou has let himself go a little too far, for \emptyset is very much part of the vibrant Danish language.

68 Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, p. 22.

69 See Boer, *Criticism of Heaven: On Marxism and Theology*, pp. 422–30.