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BADIOU AND PAULINE THEOLOGY: DETECTING A  
THEOLOGY OF DEATH

*Introduction*

The 20<sup>th</sup> century's theological legacy could be located in the transformation that developed with and beyond death-of-God theology, a seemingly short movement that, despite the failure of the initially optimistic secularization thesis, persisted in the face of hope to the contrary among some confessional theologians. With this a/theological undercurrent a shift from a theological focus on transcendence to a narrowing of the scope on continental traditions occurred that stressed the significance of immanence, especially streams of thinking about immanence that followed the writings of, among many others, scholars like Deleuze and Guattari, Jean-Luc Nancy, Jacques Derrida and, of course, Alain Badiou.<sup>1</sup> The importance of these continental traditions for theology, of which we can see wildly variant (anti-)philosophical systems, emerged in the latter days of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with numerous and important works by Jack Caputo, Jeff Robbins, Clayton Crockett, Marcus Pound, Ward Blanton, Carl Raschke, and Creston Davis.<sup>2</sup> The labour of the previous writers working variously in theology, religious studies, and biblical studies points definitively to ways in which contemporary continental thinkers have affected the field of theology, from a broad understanding of the term.<sup>3</sup> Stating such in some contexts is certainly scandalous, as some confessional thinkers have resisted such

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<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey Robbins, 'Alain Badiou and the Secular Reactivation of Theology,' *Heythrop Journal* 55, no. 4 (July 2014): 613.

<sup>2</sup> The works by these authors are too numerous to list, but for some recent ones see, Jeffrey Robbins, *Radical Theology: A Vision for Change* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2016); John D. Caputo, *Hoping Against Hope: Confessions of a Postmodern Pilgrim* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015); Clayton Crockett, *Radical Political Theology: Religion and Politics After Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011); Creston Davis, Marcus Pound, and Clayton Crockett, eds., *Theology After Lacan: The Passion for the Real* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014); Ward Blanton, *A Materialism for the Masses: Saint Paul and the Philosophy of Undying Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014); Carl Raschke, *Critical Theology: Introducing an Agenda for an Age of Global Crisis* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2016).

<sup>3</sup> Raschke, *Critical Theology*, 38-39. As Raschke remarks, it may be that we can talk of this theological interest not just in terms of the 'theologians' appropriating or noting the importance of these individuals mentioned, but more interestingly in the divide between 'old' and 'new' critical theorists, the latter having noticed the peculiar importance of religion and theology.

movements, detecting a breaking into of the stronghold of subjects and disciplinary landscapes that have been a part of confessional property for a long time.

This break of specific subjects outside of disciplinary landscapes can be seen prominently in the Pauline appropriation by figures working in critical theory and continental philosophy, perhaps foremost among these the Badiouian Pauline figuration. Much has been written, and will continue to be written, both about possible ways in which these Pauline figurations fit into the legacy of theological, biblical studies, and broadly Western archives that play with the apostle, and also how these writings will orient and augment the stream of archives. And there is no shortage of works attesting to this interdisciplinary field of action between disparate communicators. Ward Blanton and Hent de Vries' edited volume, *Paul and the Philosophers*, alone attests to the ongoing, plentiful, and beneficial work being done, not to mention the score of similar collections from the past decade.<sup>4</sup>

With this in mind, the current article will focus specifically on Badiou's Pauline figuration, how this Badiouian Paul influences Pauline theology, and how Pauline theology can in turn influence the form Badiou uses to critique capitalist hegemony. Badiou's work has revolutionary potential within the intertwined disciplines of philosophy, theology, politics, and economy; and, his Paul is poised as displaying a form through which we can understand a theological universalism that rivals the false universal of capital. Nonetheless, in what follows, the emphasis will be on Badiou as a springboard to illuminate those Pauline theological moments that allow for deeper engagement with a politically/economically subversive Paul. With this in mind, we will look at Badiou's shortcomings in his explication of the Christ Event, wherein he thinks death has a limited element. From here, we will connect the importance of death within the social aspect of Paul's gospel to the function of *charis* (benefaction/grace) in his broader work. These interconnected elements will be seen as subversive to Empire, but in such a way that it touches on the economic. Both will go beyond the possibilities found in Badiou's Pauline work, though they will play off of his insistence that Events must irrupt within the situation, present as an impossible, though contingent, happening. Badiou, then, despite insisting in his work on Paul that he is not

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<sup>4</sup> Ward Blanton and Hent de Vries, *Paul and the Philosophers* (New York: Fordham, 2013). See also, among many, Steven Frick, ed., *Paul in the Grip of the Philosophers: The Apostle and Contemporary Continental Philosophy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013); Douglas Harink, ed., *Paul, Philosophy, and the Theopolitical Vision: Critical Engagements with Agamben, Badiou, Zizek, and Others* (Eugene: Cascade, 2010); David Odell-Scott, ed., *Reading Romans with Contemporary Philosophers and Theologians* (New York: T&T Clark, 2007).

interested in theology, becomes a worker of theology through Pauline augmentation. A close look at the critiquing of regimes of discourse, and an insistence that Paul enter into the present as a militant figure of the Event who opposes the political theology of the capitalist empire, amounts to a significant elaboration of a Pauline theology/ethic that forms in light of ancient problems that continue contemporarily. Each Pauline figuration created poses particular theological bricolages; the question is, what is the theological landscape of the Badiouian Paul, and how has the Pauline work that Badiou has done contributed to further Pauline figurations that continue in the militant stream?

### *Badiou and his Atypical Paul*

Badiou's broader project has to do with 're-founding a theory of the subject which subordinates its existence to the random dimension of the event, as to the pure contingency of multiple-being, without sacrificing the motive for truth.'<sup>5</sup> And, while Badiou's magnum opus, *Being and Event*, was organized in such a way as to work through a theory of the subject that centred on event, he found in Paul a clear illustration of subjectivation through a truth-procedure of the event.<sup>6</sup> In Badiou's work, what this all means is that there are those things that 'are', that can be accessible to knowledge, a multiplicity, a situation. These are things that are countable, that are ontologically reliable and realized. But, for truth to emerge, and for a subject to exist, something has to arise out of the situation in a 'contingent, unpredictable, and undemonstrable way.'<sup>7</sup> And, furthermore, this event's 'effect has been to raise a challenge to some well-established . . . dominant system of values and beliefs.'<sup>8</sup> What arises is an event, but the event is never in isolation, it has to be recognized by a subject, and in this way the two are mutually dependent. The event gives rise to the subject, and the subject sustains the event through fidelity to this event that leads to 'a reconfiguration of the initial situation from which it has unexpectedly arisen.'<sup>9</sup>

Badiou's opening chapter in *Saint Paul* represents a dual attempt to describe the specific political situation he is concerned with, and also to introduce Paul as a modified

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<sup>5</sup> Alain Badiou, trans. Ray Brassier, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 5.

<sup>6</sup> Badiou's fascination with Paul, and his realization that Paul's legacy complements an understanding of the militant subject, predates *Saint Paul*. In fact, Badiou first ventured into figuring Paul through his play *The Incident at Antioch*, which dramatized the story of Paul in several inventive ways, including re-gendering Paul as a female named Paula.

<sup>7</sup> Alain Gignac, 'Taubes, Badiou, Agamben,' in *Reading Romans with Contemporary Philosophers and Theologians*, ed. by David Odell-Scott (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 171-72.

<sup>8</sup> Christopher Norris, 'Alain Badiou: Truth, Ethics and the Formal Imperative,' *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia* 65 (2009): 1106-07.

<sup>9</sup> Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 172.

formulation for describing the importance of the Event in breaking from this current situation.<sup>10</sup> What I think is crucial to realize is that while Badiou's larger project is concerned with truth, fidelity, subjectivation, and the militant subject, it is also coming during a time of globalized marketization, and as a Marxist (Maoist) thinker Badiou is concerned, in the contemporary situation, with the break from the dual machine of identitarian concerns (pluralization) and reduction of all to capital (a false universal which assumes wrongly infinite and ubiquitous circulation); as Badiou explains,

For each identification (the creation or cobbling together of identity) creates a figure that provides a material for its investment in the market. There is nothing so captive, so far as commercial investment is concerned, nothing more amenable to the invention of new figures of monetary homogeneity, than a community and its territory or territories.<sup>11</sup>

Event, in his system, brings about a true universality in contrast to the false universal of capital, and the form he sees Paul take represents precisely what he is attempting to sketch in *Being and Event*.<sup>12</sup> Paul does not pre-exist the event, but is subjectively constituted through his encounter with the resurrected Christ, which occurs out of place and breaks from the two dominant regimes of discourse (Jew and Greek), according to Badiou, in reference of the opening section of 1 Corinthians, Galatians, and other passages.<sup>13</sup> These regimes of discourse are paralleled with his contemporary concerns, with the Jew lining up with identitarian concerns, and the Greek aligning with the false universal of capitalism. With Paul's break, a new regime of discourse is created, Christianity, which neither relies on a false universal (cosmic wisdom) nor on exceptional, particularistic identity (prophetic sign). The new discourse is essential because the Greek and Jewish discourses do not allow for a universality, as 'each supposes the persistence of the other' and 'that the two discourses share the presupposition that the key to salvation is given to us within the universe.'<sup>14</sup> Or, to put it another way, neither breaks from the count-as-one; both discourses occur within the situation.

Badiou reads Paul, however, as announcing the discourse of the Son, or Christianity, which has the 'potential to be universal, detached from every particularism,' precisely through its rupture into the existing realm of discourses.<sup>15</sup> The rupture, the event, is the Resurrection, which is not, for Badiou's Paul, 'of the order of fact, falsifiable or demonstrable.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 4-15.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 14-15.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 40-41.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 42-43.

It is pure event, opening of an epoch, transformation of the relations between the possible and the impossible' which 'testifies to the possible victory over death.'<sup>16</sup> It is neither cosmic mastery, nor is it based on a mastery of signs or a literal tradition; it eschews mastery. Instead of mastery, Christian discourse is obsessed with the foolish (as opposed to the wisdom of the Greek) and the weak (as opposed to the power of mastering signs and traditions); and likewise, Badiou points to Paul's statement that 'God has chosen the things that are not [*ta me onta*] in order to bring to nought those that are [*ta onta*].' It is here that Badiou notes a sort of 'ontological subversion to which Paul's antiphilosophy invites the declarant or militant.'<sup>17 18</sup>

### *Criticisms of Badiou's Universal Paul*

While Badiou's Paul fits into the broad formula that he desires for the purpose of signifying his wider project, it is no secret that he is no Pauline scholar, nor does he claim to be.<sup>19</sup> Nonetheless, interesting paths can be taken up from the sketch Badiou has rendered. It may be that for the sketch to become more aesthetically pleasing some erasing, shading, and line work has to be done, but the form, or skeleton, of the work provides an adequate angle to see Paul through, and points to a militant Pauline theology.<sup>20</sup> Badiou's broader project invites reading Paul through a new vocabulary, and using the Badiouian vocabulary, entering into the Badiouian system, allows for thinking Pauline theology anew through reframing Paul's situation.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 46-47.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 2, 18. Badiou is intimately familiar with the text and even consults the Nestle-Aland, though an outdated version; nonetheless, he is clear that his purpose is neither 'historicizing' nor 'exegetical' in nature. Beyond this, however, it is clear that Badiou is at least broadly acquainted with Pauline scholarship, noting, for instance, the 'retrospective construction' of Acts (p. 18) and the 'apocryphal nature' of the contested Pauline epistles (ibid.). But, of course, outdated scholarship, or at least contested claims are made often, such as the claim that he comes from a 'well-off family' (p. 21).

<sup>20</sup> James G. Crossley, *Jesus in an Age of Neoliberalism: Quests, Scholarship, and Ideology* (Durham: Acumen, 2013), passim 69-98; Robert Myles, 'The Fetish for a Subversive Jesus,' *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 14, no. 1 (2016): 52-70. There is a temptation to qualify this Pauline theology as thoroughly subversive; however, there is a thoroughgoing problem in New Testament studies with certain high-profile figures utilising the term 'subversive' as a gesturing toward anti-whatever-one-is-against. Noting the neoliberal tendencies in labelling figures as 'subversive' has been championed most significantly in the work of James G. Crossley (who notes the individualization of the Great Man of history found in work on the historical Jesus) and Robert Myles (who notes explicitly the trope of 'subversiveness') with the figure of Jesus, but it can just as easily be applied to various figures of Paul as well.

Nonetheless, with the rise of Empire criticism and the so-called New Perspective(s) on Paul, it has to be stressed that the nice, clean divisions that Badiou envisions through the delineations of specific Jewish and Greek regimes of discourse are inaccurate and misleading.<sup>21</sup> Paul is hardly enacting a new religion that breaks from Judaism. Instead Badiou's work portrays a thoroughly Protestant Paul, one which, starting with Krister Stendahl in the 1960s, has been reacted against quite sternly.<sup>22</sup> However, one must be gentle with Badiou on this point. He stresses that his work on Paul is 'subjective through and through,' that his intention is 'neither historicizing nor exegetical.' While it may be that Badiou wants to have his cake and eat it too, to provide a complete critique of Badiou's work in light of Pauline scholarship has been done thoroughly in other places.<sup>23</sup> As well, doing so distracts from the deeper and more profound theological possibilities found through augmenting Badiou's work, through noticing what it draws out of Paul and how what is drawn out can be utilized.

Thus, while Badiou can be forgiven for his errors that relate to some specificities of scholarship, especially in light of his insistence that he is interested in the mere form of Paul, criticisms need to be levelled at the particular weak Pauline form that is presented; the criticism need not be, however, a means to rewriting the content to fit the form of Badiou's Paul. Presented as a foil, Badiou, as I have said, provides a nice framework for thinking about Pauline theology as breaking from regimes of discourse, encountering a subjectivating Event, and providing a means of critiquing marketisation.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Neil Elliot, *The Arrogance of Nations* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 46-57. Elliot notes, for instance, how, even among the NPP, often 'discussion fails to consider the political pressures in which ethnic identities are constructed' and how 'rich and complex discussions of political pressure on Jewish identity in the Roman world do not carry over to interpretation of Paul.' Connecting these lingering liberal (universalizing) Christian scholarship misconstructions to Badiou is quite easy.

<sup>22</sup> Neil Elliot, 'Ideological Closure in the Christ Event' in *Paul, Philosophy, and the Theopolitical Vision*, ed. Douglas Harink (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2010), 148-50. As Elliot points out, 'Badiou follows . . . a flawed tradition of Protestant scholarship going back to at least F. C. Baur. . . [and] wrongly places a supposed opposition to Judaism, Jewish identity, and the "exceptionalism" of Jewish law as such at the center of Paul's thought.'

Krister Stendahl, 'The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West,' *Harvard Theological Review* 56 (1963): 199-215.

<sup>23</sup> Daniel Bell, 'Badiou's Faith and Paul's Gospel,' *Angelaki* 12, no. 1 (April 2007): 97-111; John Barclay, 'Paul and the Philosophers: Alain Badiou and the Event,' *New Blackfriars* 91 (2010): 171-84; Elliot, 'Ideological Closure in the Christ Event.'

<sup>24</sup> Here, in which we note that these diverse elements are intimately related, it is crucial to point to the theological significance of a contemporary Pauline figuration whose theological emphases allow for a stringent critique and political alternative to rampant and ubiquitous neoliberalization. A Paul

Here, however, we need to pay attention to two main failures: foremost, the truncating of the Christ-event; and secondly, neglecting the importance of the Pauline communal form. Both of these weaknesses highlight Badiouian insufficiency in creating a Paul who has something to say about capitalism, whose philosophical and theological possibilities can perform the militant function that Badiou so desperately wants.<sup>25</sup>

#### *A Pauline Theological Emphasis on Death*

For Paul. . . the event is not death, it is resurrection. . . suffering plays no role in Paul's apologetic, not even in the case of Christ's death. . . What constitutes an event in Christ is exclusively the Resurrection.<sup>26</sup>

Such words would be anathema to many Protestant sects, as fixated as some of them are on a particular understanding of the atonement which requires a judicial and substitutionary function to be present for the crucifixion to have full theological meaning. Nonetheless, one can't help but sense that a reaction against Badiou's truncation of the Christ-event is perhaps in order, and not simply for the purpose of defending penal substitutionary atonement. Paul, especially in Romans, makes it quite clear that death has a central place:

Being united with Christ in a death like his. . . our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For he who has died is free from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him.<sup>27</sup>

Death is mentioned as well in various other Pauline passages, such as 2 Corinthians 4-5, and the constant description of 'crucified' in relation to Christ (1 Corinthians 1:18 names the gospel as a 'message about the cross') is obviously gesturing toward death. Suffering imagery is peppered throughout Paul's writings, and while some may be for rhetorical

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whose theology encounters Badiou opens to even more robust ways of thinking politically, especially as Badiou allows for a non-confessional relation to a figure who remains persistently theological.

<sup>25</sup> Bell, 'Badiou's Faith,' 103. Though, it may be that capitalism must not be as boldly acted against as one would think for Badiou, as Bell's criticisms note the universalizing system of Badiou is a mere rival, and therefore leaves open for the viability of a capitalist system. We can see this, particularly, in Badiou's strong reaction against community because of the asociality of the eventual break: 'He denounces every invocation of community as antithetical. Fundamental to his vision is the critique of any communal notion of relation or "being together." Such being together is but the product of the assemblage of particular, animal interests, which is contrasted with the solitary immortal singularity sustained by the sheer subjective conviction that is fidelity to the truth-event.'

<sup>26</sup> Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 66-68.

<sup>27</sup> Romans 6:5-8

purposes (such as Paul recounting his suffering in 2 Cor. 11:16-33), often it has a specific theological purpose.<sup>28</sup>

'The event consists in,' Badiou writes, 'Jesus, the Christ, dying on the cross and coming back to life.'<sup>29</sup> However, it remains painfully obvious that the cross is only important insofar as it functions as a chronological mechanism, something which allows for the Resurrection to take place. L. L. Welborn has pointed toward the immense symbolic importance the cross had in the time period surrounding Paul.<sup>30</sup> For example, Cicero, in a moment where he betrays his social class, insists, 'The mere mention of [the cross] is shameful to a Roman citizen and free man'; the daily lives of slaves are saturated with the very real possibility of being put to death in such a manner.<sup>31</sup>

Welborn points to the ubiquity of the cross for slaves, and its play upon the psyche of the slave, through surveying popular literature, novels, satires, poems, and paying attention to popular taunts used between slaves (such as cross-meat or cross-bird).<sup>32</sup> While for Badiou, the point of death's connection with the Resurrection is to allow for the Event, Badiou also conceives of death in Paul's corpus as designating merely those discourses that have been broken up by the Resurrection: "'death" does not signify a biological terminus, but rather a subjective stance or path, a way of dying to life within life, a living death.'<sup>33</sup> Coming back to Welborn, in his analysis of a 'handful of recent studies, critics of Silver Age literature have noted the number of works in which characters seem to be dead before actually dying'.<sup>34</sup> Summarizing these works, Welborn points to a 'fundamental split' in the nature of subjectivity that seems to occur in the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.E. that seems to lie in the 'political and cultural order around the figure of the emperor.'<sup>35</sup>

Paying attention to Ovid's exile poems allows one to note their being a 'testament to the consolidation of Augustus' power' and their being a 'model of imperial subjecthood', all while being saturated in images of death.<sup>36</sup> Welborn goes on to note

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<sup>28</sup> 2 Corinthians 1: 5-7. 2 Corinthians 13:4, Gal. 2: 19-20, 5:24. Phil. 1:21; 2: 6-11; 3:10-11.

<sup>29</sup> Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 65.

<sup>30</sup> L. L. Welborn, 'The Culture of Crucifixion and the Resurrection of the Dispossessed: The Interpellation of the Subject in the Roman Empire and Paul's Gospel as "Truth Event",' in *Paul and the Philosophers*, ed. Ward Blanton and Hent de Vries (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 127-140.

<sup>31</sup> Cicero, *On Behalf of Rabirius* 5.16., as cited in Welborn, 'The Culture of Crucifixion,' 135.

<sup>32</sup> Welborn, 'The Culture of Crucifixion,' 134-35.

<sup>33</sup> Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 129.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 130; Here Welborn draws from T. N. Habinek's, *Politics of Latin Literature*; P. A. Miller's, *Subjecting Verses*; and B. Dufallo's, *The Ghosts of the Past*.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 130-31.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

that much of the literature contemporaneous to Paul's mission 'give[s] expression to a deepening disillusionment with the realities of Roman rule, especially in the aftermath of the Caligula crisis.'<sup>37</sup> Along with Welborn, Ted Jennings notes the contemporaneity of injustice and crises among the political class during the time of Paul, interpreting Romans 1:18-2:5 as having explicitly to do with political class, specifically with the behaviours of Tiberius, Caligula, and Nero.<sup>38</sup> If this is the scene that we find Paul's presentations of his gospel in, then it may be, especially coupled with Welborn's work on crucifixion, that 'death' and the cross take on completely different significations not only for slaves, but for many common people.

It is precisely here that we find in Paul a sort of proto-Marxist figure, one whose rhetoric and explicit message align with the 'nothings' and 'nobodies' of the first century.<sup>39</sup> <sup>40</sup> Fixating on Paul's consistent obsession with crucifixion and a message that is oriented toward minute figures of no importance is a slap against the insistence of Badiou that death is temporally related, and when it is mentioned should be taken strictly as symbolic and functioning within the operations of subjectivation. Instead, death and crucifixion work as symbolizing that, quoting Welborn,

God's intervention in history was not the liberation of a universal subject from the path of death, but rather the redemption of the many oppressed, whose identities are submerged in shame and whose lives are in danger of disappearing on account of the annihilating power of the cross [of Empire].<sup>41</sup>

Crucifixion, likewise, is significant in regards to its often referring to 'suffering' broadly. This, of course, widens the impact of statements of solidarity. The audience isn't comprised solely of slaves, but a broad social range of those who have variously suffered, especially in the class struggles of living under Roman rule.<sup>42</sup> While there is much contention regarding precise percentages, Longenecker, Friesen, Meggitt, and others have done a remarkable job in establishing that both in Christian associations and in broader society often

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 131-32.

<sup>38</sup> Theodore W. Jennings, Jr., *Outlaw Justice: The Messianic Politics Paul* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 31-40.

<sup>39</sup> Myles Lavan, 'Slavishness in Britain and Rome in Tacitus' Agricola,' *The Classical Quarterly* 61, no. 1 (May 2011): 297-303. One can see clearly the 'nothingness' of slaves through Tacitus' writings, specifically Agricola, which contains a psychology of the slave, slavish traits (compliance, passivity, and silence), and notes the complicity of slaves in enslavement.

<sup>40</sup> Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 2. It must be noted here that Badiou makes that worn comparison of Christ and Paul to Marx and Lenin, respectively.

<sup>41</sup> Welborn, 'The Culture of Crucifixion,' 137.

<sup>42</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:22: 'those who have nothing.'

individuals lived near subsistence level or below.<sup>43</sup> Meggitt, especially, has pointed to the strong possibility of Pauline churches being composed completely of the non-elite, and also the crucial survival role of being related to an association, such as the various churches that Paul was connected to.<sup>44</sup> That is, Paul's churches were demographically identical to the wider public within the Roman Empire, an empire that, unlike contemporaneous western nations, was not composed of elites, upper class, middle class, and several levels of poverty; as Meggitt mentions, 'over 99% of the Empire's population, could expect little more from life than abject poverty.'<sup>45</sup> Poverty, here, points to much of the populace living at or near subsistence levels.

But how is it that the proclamation of the cross, a symbol of shame and fear, brings about redemption for the hearers of Paul's news? Welborn goes on to recognize that these proclamations of Paul's summon the weak into the material density of the cross, where 'Christ's willingness to suffer the very death that threatened their existence became the resource for living in [justice].' And, going on, one realizes in the sections comprising chapters 4 and 5 of 2 Corinthians that Paul makes a decisive shift, such that his fixation on Christ and Christ's death forms the event followers participate in. Paul says,

For Christ's love compels us, since we have reached this conclusion: if One died for all, then all died. And he died for all so that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for the one who for their sake died and was raised.<sup>46</sup>

Here, then, is where the oppressed class finds hope and solidarity, and if Paul is a worker for the poor then the emphasis on the cross makes much sense.<sup>47</sup> To quote Stanislas

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<sup>43</sup> Bruce Longenecker, *Remember the Poor: Paul, Poverty, and the Greco-Roman World* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010); Steven J. Friesen, 'Poverty in Pauline Studies: Beyond the So-Called New Consensus,' *JSNT* 26 (2004): 323-61; Justin Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998).

<sup>44</sup> Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival*, 97-154.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 50. This author is well aware of the works subsequent to Meggitt's, but finds that Meggitt's work still represents well, crucially, stark divisions that existed.

<sup>46</sup> 2 Corinth. 5:14-15.

<sup>47</sup> This reading is, then, not merely some redemption that is accrued through suffering, as if simply the act of suffering is what bestows some sort of supernatural or theological blessing itself. It should also not be missed that there are obvious communal implications found in this imagery, as, being drawn to the material density of the cross is, as Meggitt has shown, a strategy of survival. Those living near subsistent level come together in associations, praising a crucified being; doing so allows for a continuance of their own material lives through solidarity with their fellow non-elites.

Breton, connecting to the Philippian Christic hymn (a paranetic section): 'The sign of the cross is not only the object of proclamation or preaching. In Christ, that word was made flesh, the palpitating flesh of a slave.'<sup>48</sup>

However, despite being on the correct investigative path, Welborn misses a possible exposition of personhood in Roman law (and, likewise, in the various ontological conceptions of the slave's body in Greek literature), and I think this could bring two main differences to tweaking Badiou's work.<sup>49</sup> If Roberto Esposito, Agamben, and other writers are correct that personhood existed on a spectrum, such that slaves were appropriated as possessed things, not full persons, then the solidarity of a crucified and resurrected Christ ruptures the stigma of thinghood, incomplete-personhood, possessed by the slave class.<sup>50</sup> The dead things, then, are opened up through the solidarity of the humiliated dead god; this is certainly a break from the 'regime of discourse' one finds in the Greeks, to play into Badiou's Pauline story. Power is inverted in such a way because while resurrection is noted by Paul as a crucial theological element, death becomes much more significant, or at least significant in a different social-theological way. Crucifixion is no longer merely the means to get to the end of Christ's arising from death. This is, taking Welborn seriously, another way that the slave points, through alleged 'foolishness', to the realized foolishness of the old discourse.

But secondarily, after exposing through solidarity, Paul's specific forms of community open up personhood as it pushes back at seemingly immovable particularities, as seen in Galatians 3:28 (there is no. . . slave or free), in the *Haustafel* codes present in some of the Pauline epistles, in Paul's naming the slave Onesimus as a 'brother' (and no longer merely a slave, but more than a slave) to his owner in Philemon (16), and in Paul's exhortation for slaves to free themselves as possible, and to avoid becoming slaves of men (1 Corinth. 7:21-23).<sup>51</sup> Personhood ruptures through to those who are

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<sup>48</sup> Stanislas Breton, trans. Joseph N. Ballan, *A Radical Philosophy of Saint Paul* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 146-47.

<sup>49</sup> For a detailed discussion on the master/slave relation in Aristotle, especially as it relates to selfhood, and ways to rethink selfhood, see Giorgio Agamben, trans. Adam Kotsko, *The Use of Bodies* (Stanford: Stanford University, 2016), 3-114 passim.

<sup>50</sup> Roberto Esposito, 'The Dispositif of the Person,' *Law, Culture and The Humanities* 8, no. 1 (2012): 17-30; Roberto Esposito, trans. Zakiya Hanafi, *Third Person: Politics of Life and Philosophy of the Impersonal* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012), 76-79.

<sup>51</sup> Neil Elliot, *Liberating Paul: The Justice of God and the Politics of the Apostle* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), "Paul and Slavery (I): 1 Corinthians 7:21." All of these are subject to a diversity of interpretive stances. The 1 Corinthians passage, especially, is open to completely opposite possible translations, which Neil Elliot spells out well as resting completely on what the translator/interpreter considers the direct object of what Paul calls for the slave to 'take advantage' of. What an interpreter/translator

deemed unworthy, and as Badiou realizes, Paul's break from past regimes of discourse focuses on the reversal of power, such that those things that are not, and those things that are foolish, are considered pre-eminent. Paul proclaims, 'I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me' (Gal 2.19-20); and here, the importance of the identification of being crucified is underlined by the pervasiveness of the present perfect tense; crucifixion, is an ongoing identifier that aligns the fidelity of the subject to the Event. Paul, then, pronounces solidarity with the low through theologically inverting the place of death, and through this inversion (rupture from a generic, non-binary regime of discourse) points to the broader Christ-event, which re-subjectivates those interlocutors who become members of Pauline theological communities. This new community of those who have been subjectivated and pledged fidelity to what they have encountered as truth, then, allow for a conversion of social ideals as well, which includes a re-situation of those who identify with death and a life of suffering and near or below subsistence. Life is found, now, precisely through death. The process of subjectivation through death is all but incidental to rupturing from previous regimes of discourse. This, of, course, centres Pauline theology by acknowledging the full range of movement needed for subjectivation to occur, opening up Paul beyond merely the resurrection.

While Badiou seems to be against notions of 'community', his hesitance bucks up against the very essence of Paul's 'regime of discourse'. In fact, it is through a community of personhood, one that is extended toward solidarity with the slave, that one finds a connection from Welborn's Marxist Paul to the Paul that brings rupture to benefaction/grace/gifting practices that extend reciprocity, and engage systems of patron/clientage on upwards among the class pyramid. While Paul appropriates gift as a normative mode of action, it has to be realized that Paul infects gifting with a subversive element that upends the larger foundational logic of the system. Or, to put it more directly, Paul's playing with gift and his building connected intra and inter-city associational bonds provides a sort of Bartlebey-esque withdrawal from the dominant social order, and challenges the more overt suppressive imperial elements. Here, economics, social system, and imperialism are bound closely together, and through reworking the dominance of an order of symbols that Paul challenges.

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considers is, obviously, further dependent on contextual issues, namely how other terms are translated and understood. It becomes clear, through Elliot's work, that much rests on anachronistic understandings of 'calling' within the Corinthian section. This 'calling' has less to do with 'station of life', and everything to do with a calling to belong to Christ.

Consider the inter-related scenes painted in 2 Corinthians 8: scenes consisting of joyful emptying out in the midst of poverty; a kenotic meditation on Jesus utilising specific benefactive language; and a transumptive section, echoing equality through calling forth to his hearers YHWH's provision. In all of this, Paul notes the dynamism of his project, the inner logic that constitutes intra-communal relations, but we can also see the subsumption of the communities under a logic of lack whereby their mutual-relational strategies are viewed as a sort of 'auto-gifting,' where the individually dual, or in certain instances tertiary, nature of the exchange is hidden through lack. Here, the lack is due toward the Patron, Paul's God, but the inter-relational strategy causes the negation of the group that has been caught up under one grouping mechanism; whatever is 'owed' isn't directed toward the patron, but to the self, illustrating this 'auto-gift.' This is, likewise, an expectation of Paul toward the sections within the larger architectonic structure; or to use a Pauline organological metaphor, the body is a whole with the diverse parts of the single organism to be upbuilt.

In the main Pauline texts referenced above we can see the emphasis towards emptying out, and this emptying is founded precisely on the Event of the encounter Paul has with the impossible (his encounter with the resurrected Christ); but, Paul connects his political communal strategy with the scandalous stupidity of reversed power, an identifying power with a dead, crucified messiah. The constant emphasis in Pauline texts, which can be seen in the communal ties through celebratory Eucharistic practices, are on the event of crucifixion, the identification with this lack of power, and how this foundation subverts power as seen in the impossible resurrection of Jesus.<sup>52</sup>

If there is a hope to subvert the oppressive and seemingly ubiquitous powers that dominate Paul's contemporary landscape, it can only be found in a side-stepping and short-circuiting of centres of power of which there are various permutations of socially, politically, and economically intertwined structures. While a contest of brute force seems the most obvious of modes in which a proper winner is decided, and here we could insert then rebellious ventures within Second Temple Judaism's particular temporal view, it is likewise apparent that any such strategy will end in utter

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<sup>52</sup> Roberto Esposito, trans. Timothy Campbell, *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 9-11. Esposito, in his book centred on community, opens with noting the important double move – historical-institutional and theological-philosophical – of early Christian community, highlighting the powerful Pauline imagery of gift-giving, participation, emptying out, losing something, and sharing 'the fate of the servant.' Esposito insists, trucking along with the general trajectory of this essay, that in the Eucharist 'what one participates in isn't the glory of the Resurrection but the suffering and the blood of the Cross.'

failure, as can be seen with the various attempts made in the centuries before and decades after Paul.

Paul's community of lack sketched above, then, plays a purely negative role on his contemporary social scene, rather than a positive and violently antagonistic role. Coming back to the 2 Corinthians section we can see that not only is Paul's community taking the form of lack, but that through doing so it also mirrors the subversive stupidity of a dead messiah. Certainly, there are not many other images that capture as forcefully a reversal of power than collecting bodies around a leader who is counted as conquering precisely through his painfully tortuous execution and mutilation. In struggling to start an intra-communal collection of money, staying within the particular communal ties, Paul short-circuits a system of patron-clientage that follows a triangular or pyramid of power up to and into Imperial forces.<sup>53</sup> Or, to expand the scene's detail, within a social system that relies upon public displays of honour and shame, honour is ultimately accounted toward certain ends in Paul's communities which do not lead to the common *telos*, the civil imperial religious public economy of honour (here, the ultimate benefactor is reckoned as something else). As Richard Horsley insists regarding Paul's project of mutuality, 'By contrast with the vertical and centripetal movement of resources in the tributary political economy of the empire, Paul organized a horizontal movement of the resources from one subject people to another.'<sup>54</sup>

### *Conclusion*

The Badiouian insistence is found in determined resistance to capitalist hegemony. The neoliberal age is dependent on a particular reimagining of the person, such that Wendy Brown can riff off of Foucault's *The Birth of Biopolitics*, insisting that in the neoliberal age *homo economicus* is the ubiquitous mode of human reality, permeating all spheres of social and political existence.<sup>55</sup> Likewise, the ubiquity of this neoliberal spirit has provoked a new order of slavery, such that Maurizio

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<sup>53</sup> John K. Chow, 'Patronage in Roman Corinth,' in *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society*, ed. by Richard Horsley (Harrisburg: Trinity International Press, 1997), 104-125.

'Patron-client ties tend "to arise within a state structure in which authority is dispersed and state activity limited in scope, and in which considerable separation exists between the levels of village, city and state." One ancient historian actually suggests that patronage was the secret to the integration of the Roman empire. . . . The networks of relationships in Corinth can roughly be seen as a hierarchy made up of the emperor, Roman officials, local notables, and the populace.'

<sup>54</sup> Richard A. Horsley, '1 Corinthians: A Case Study of Paul's Assembly as an Alternative Society,' in *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), 251.

<sup>55</sup> Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2015).

Lazzarato can talk of the 'indebted man.'<sup>56</sup> These issues are contemporaneous and concern the broad scope of Badiou's philosophical project. And, as he makes clear in his dialogue with Marcel Gauchet, mere reformism of parliamentary democracy will not solve the global issues of capitalist hegemony.<sup>57</sup> Paul's (theological) form, however, is of the order of eventual break from a dual regime of discourse (dual because they fuel one another), causing to emerge a discourse that challenges the logic of the former master. This, once again, has to do with breaking from an Empire; this aligns with the desires of Badiou's Marxism, a calling to revolutionary action rather than reformism of contemporary political slavery, no matter the particular mode it takes.

If these are the current problems, and if the Pauline analogy constitutes the continuing political importance of Paul then, contra Clayton Crockett, Paul can remain a militant figure for strategizing against capitalist hegemony.<sup>58</sup> This insistence solidifies Badiou's Pauline theological importance. But, this Badiouian importance must incorporate the crucial element of death within the breaks from the situation. This centrality of death re-imagines Paul's community, reminding the reader who the audience is, in turn recognising a particular community. But, the community, the association of Paulinist Christians, does not exist for the sake of existence, but instead is a political form which exists in a politically antagonistic way, challenging, through a sort of Agambenian withdrawal, hegemony. It is here where Badiou opens up Paul, and it is here where Paul completes Badiou.

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<sup>56</sup> Maurizio Lazzarato, trans. Joshua David Jordan, *The Making of the Indebted Man: An Essay on the Neoliberal Condition* (Amsterdam: Semiotext(e), 2011).

<sup>57</sup> Alain Badiou and Marcel Gauchet, trans. Susan Spitzer, *What is to be Done?: A Dialogue on Communism, Capitalism, and the Future of Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), 70-72 .

<sup>58</sup> Clayton Crockett, 'Radical Theology and the Event: St Paul with Deleuze,' in *Radical Political Theology*, Clayton Crockett (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).