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## DOING THEOLOGY WITHOUT GOD? ABOUT THE REALITY OF FAITH IN THE 21ST CENTURY

**I**N ASKING ABOUT THE REALITY OF FAITH in the 21st century, the following questions arise: What is the meaning of faith? And what makes faith a reality? More importantly, however, to the question of the reality of faith is the reality of God, and it is this question of God that is under discussion in the present essay. For instance, if the Father-God of Christian tradition belongs to history, that, of course, has far-reaching implications for one's thinking about the reality of faith. In this essay I want to examine the work of H. M. Kuitert and Alain Badiou to show that a choice has to be made about this. It will be my argument that true faith can better be imagined without than with God.

### The Question of God and the Reality of Faith

Is God a matter of history? This is a serious question. I think one can take it in two ways. One possibility is: 'God is a matter of history,' which does not mean God is dead, but that the *conception* of a *personal* God is no longer useful. God is not dead but 'God' returns in the mythical conceptions of humankind. Another possibility is: 'God belongs to history,' which is about more than the loss of conceptions. 'Done with' means that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has died for good. In that case it is useless to keep looking for new conceptions. Whatever is said about god after God then becomes an illusion. How the answer turns out will have implications for the question of the reality of faith. I think choices are needed.

Do I choose the *first* answer? In that case I will be primarily looking for the reality of faith in my ability to find good religious conceptions. I will be able to quote poets and collect stories from the Scriptures and from tradition. Do I want that? Is that a way to remain faithful to a religious heritage? Or do I choose the *second* answer? The second answer says that the God of the Scriptures is dead. If that is true, the implications are far-reaching. For in that case the Christian religion will no longer be able to be a *living* religion. A true death is always irreversible. People may be claiming nowadays that religion

is coming back, or even flourishing again. But then the question is what the source of that new religion is. For there is nothing that returns just like that. On the contrary, nothing returns. That is a law that is true also for the living God of the Christian religion. (see Jean- Luc Nancy)

So where do we go from here? If God is dead, is what people used to get excited *about* in faith dead as well? It is self-evident that the question of the *reality* of faith is closely related to the question of God. What do I mean with that reality? About this issue of the reality I want to distinguish two possibilities as well. Is the reality of my faith only a matter of language/ conception? In that case I can always refresh and go on. Or is the reality of my faith related to a crucial truth *in* my conceptions and thoughts? In the latter case the crisis is more serious. In that case one must ask the question, what the truth is that was taught in the Christian faith. Is that truth over and done with as well? In order to answer that question I shall have to return to the source region itself of the Christian religion.

#### A Definition of Faith: *Dicere id quod res est*

In the vocabulary of Medieval Scholasticism one finds the word *realitas fidei*.<sup>1</sup> I think that is still a powerful expression. The term indicates that *reality* is inherent in the Christian faith, to its confession and its further expression in language, images and thoughts. In addition, the term *realitas fidei* says that faith has at least two sides. On the one side one has the people that express their faith. Then we are dealing with man's response: A person has been touched by something that takes him/her outside of her/himself. Faith expresses that one knows one is dependent, etc. This is the subjective side of faith. This is the *realitas fidei*, understood as a subjective genitive, as an act of faith. Faith, however, also has another side. Faith conveys something that holds independently of my expression of faith as well. Faith articulates something *about...* about God, about Moses, about Jesus etc. What faith says about..., that's the other side of the *realitas fidei*. It is *realitas fidei* as an objective genitive, as expressed content. The term teaches: the act of faith and the content of faith belong together. The term is a syntagm. It keeps together what belongs together. They are one side and the other side of the one faith. Accordingly reality has two sides. Faith *articulates* something, and it articulates *something* that goes beyond the language of faith. In faith the subjective and the objective side interlock.

With this distinction between subjective and objective component I'm not quite done with my definition. For beyond act and articulated content lies the reality or the event of the actual believing. Everything depends on that. For

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. H. M. Kuitert, *De realiteit van het geloof* (Kampen, 1966).

this I refer to a definition of Martin Luther, who said: The true theologian names what breaks through my thoughts and conceptions and has a passion for what is real. 'Theologus crucis theologus dicit id, quod res est.', says Luther in the 18<sup>th</sup> thesis of the Heidelberg Disputatio. The res, that is exactly what makes my believing real. With Luther the res is nobody else but Jesus Christ himself, who speaks in my believing and my action. The truth that is in Christ Jesus, will present itself in my words and thoughts by itself. So the point is the reality of *believing* itself. For that I can neither subjectively nor objectively find a formula. It is neither attitude nor articulated content. It is an, 'Ereignis', an 'event'. I can describe an attitude of faith psychologically, e.g. The content of faith I can describe dogmatically. Believing itself is what in Luther's formula is called the res, the *very thing itself*. This is about an event in which a human being meets God. In such encounters the act of faith has completely become content and the content completely act. Examples of such confrontations are Moses at the burning bush in the desert. Jesus at the Jordan River, Paul on his way to Damascus. Those encounters are callings; they are interventions in which the content of faith strikes people in surprising ways.

In the course of modernity the awareness that believing is itself an *event* has become very weak. The one *realitas fidei*, in which the encounter between God and man is at issue, has paled and certainly no longer appeals to the imagination. Consequently the words that confess the faith have become empty, pale, and often unintelligible. Our conceptions are sheer expression of our own emotion. Our thoughts are pure speculation. And the God that speaks to faith has become anonymous. We are having difficulty even finding names for God.

For that reason I am introducing two contemporary thinkers. I am doing this because they sought the source for a new way of putting things into words. They are naming the reality of faith, almost rendered incognita, anew.

### H. M. Kuitert and Alain Badiou: A Philosopher and a Theologian about the Reality of Faith

Here I will discuss the positions of H. M. Kuitert (born 1924, theologian)<sup>2</sup> and Alain Badiou (born 1937, Philosopher),<sup>3</sup> for both have a distinct passion for

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<sup>2</sup> I quote Kuitert's dissertation of 1962 about the *Mensvormigheid van God* [Human-likeness of God] (henceforth: *MG*) and his last book *Voor een tijd de plaats van God*, Baarn 2002 (henceforth: *TG*)

<sup>3</sup> For information on Badiou, see Jason Baker, *Alain Badiou. A critical Introduction*, London 2002; Peter Hallward, *Subject to Truth: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Alain Badiou*, Minneapolis 2001. Also: a special issue of *Umbra* 1 (1996). The most recent is: Peter Hallward, *Badiou. A Subject to Truth* (Minneapolis & London, 2003). This last work offers an exhaustive description and a complete bibliography.

the reality of faith. My question is, how exactly do they think about God. Where do they end up? I start with Kuitert, who is one of Holland's most famous theologians. Born into an orthodox Reformed family, he started out with a biblicist dissertation on the human shape of God and ended up as a typical liberal theologian, for whom God, Christ, etc. are part of a worldview.

### H. M. Kuitert

Kuitert has been doing theology for almost half a century. When I survey his development, one thing particularly strikes me. Kuitert fiercely opposes the thought that there might be any kinship to God in humankind. His last book begins with the question: 'a god in the depth of my thoughts?' (TG, 17). The answer is no. Why? Kuitert uses a clear argument. He says: A person who seeks the divine deep within himself expresses embarrassment. With it one reveals that one does not know the *true God*. For religion that seeks the divine in the embers that glow within a human being, God is infinitely far away. God is far away and therefore I look for traces of this God in the inner self.

Kuitert has a definite *passion* for what is real. He wants to give absolute priority to reality over our thoughts about it. In actuality this means that our *thinking* about God always takes second place. We cannot even imagine God, because the reality he represents has priority with regard to our thinking about God. This position is intriguing. It is known that Kuitert will abandon the Biblical conceptions of God. So where will Kuitert end up? I will follow a line of thought through his work.

*The Beginning. God is an Ally.*

In his dissertation of 1962 about the human-likeness of God, Kuitert argues that the doctrine of God must be updated. In his opinion the classical doctrine of God was too much of a construction. This tendency toward construction is a result of Gnosticism. In Gnosticism we do not know God's nature. We have to try to imagine God. For that we appeal to God's actions. We are looking for what has flowed out from God into this world. Theology seeks God. God is far away, and for that reason, theology must gather together the various notions that our thinking has of God. This activity will cause theology to go look for that far-away God. The result will be that theology will turn its back on the reality that surrounds us. Kuitert argues that all of Christian theology got a touch of this flight to somewhere else. Kuitert intends to change this tendency. Theology must start with the God of the Bible. This God is the Creator. This God addresses us in the language of the Bible. Kuitert rightly observes that the reality surrounding us is indeed a reality to be afraid of. It can make us or break us. But this should not cause us to flee into other-worldly speculative theology. Rather it should cause us to seek the *true face* of God. This we find, Kuitert says in 1962, in the *human-like*

God of Scripture. In it God reveals himself as an ally, as a friend. For that reason it is important that a theologian is a Scripture-theologian and relies on the language of Scripture. In Scripture God has declared himself to be a God of and for people. It is the living God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, a God who seeks to associate with humankind. This Ally is the Creator.

So the dissertation is completely dominated by the human-like God. One can find out from God, who or what being human is. This God also speaks the concrete *language* of people. In the Hebrew Bible God speaks Hebrew. In the text of the Bible is a subject that expresses itself in this language. God himself is Hebreomorph. Language depicts what and how God is. When God is touched, moved, angry, jealous, loving, this means that God really is that way. God is, it seems, more human even than humans. We can find out from God himself who man is.

*Man is a Vice-regent : He Takes the Place of God.*

One no longer encounters God the ally in Kuitert's later work. In 'Voor een tijd een plaats van God'[For a Time a Place of God] Kuitert speaks about mankind. It is this human being that breathes the spirit – written with a lower case letter – in and out. The history of religion teaches that this human being himself wrote the story that we call Scripture, Bible, in his own language. The Bible is myth, a *story* against chaos and death, guilt and failure. It literally holds up a world to us in which Jew and Christian were able to live for a while. As modern people *we* can no longer do much with this myth. And that doesn't matter. We now realize that we as people are a place of God. We are able to take the place of God. We even are able, as Schleiermacher already pointed out, to write our own story of God. If we couldn't do that, we would have to pull out all stops to maintain a world view of the past. All our mental powers would have to be sacrificed to this end. 'Wij moeten dan het verhaal dragen, in plaats dat het verhaal ons draagt'[In that case we have to carry the story instead of the story carrying us].(TG, 70) The result would be that all our creativity would be swallowed up in holding on to an imaginary world. And Schleiermacher, the theologian on the threshold of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, would have written his 'Reden über die Religion'[Speeches on Religion] in vain.<sup>4</sup>

So there is a big difference between the first book and the last book. There are also similarities. For the story that we are allowed to write ourselves does keep the same foci as the story which tells of the reality of the human-like God. The first point of agreement is that we as creatures are brought face to

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<sup>4</sup> Kuitert is extremely positive about Schleiermacher. See H. M. Kuitert, *Over Religie. Aan de liefhebbers onder haar beoefenaars*. In my opinion Kuitert wrongly appeals to Schleiermacher. Cf. G. W. Neven, *Schöpfung und Erlösung. Die Stimme Schleiermachers und eine aktuelle Debatte*, in: *BThZ* 10 (1993), 211-235.

face with the contingency of reality: chaos, love, death, poverty, guilt etc. The second similarity is that people are being *addressed*. That starts as early as the question to Cain: 'where is Abel, your brother'. Being a human being is most intense, a human being is most a human being when this voice is being answered. In the Bible Paul describes this answer in an unforgettable way in his hymn to love in I Cor. 13 (TG, 232-237)

*Kuitert and the Reality of Faith.*

The position where Kuitert ends up is the following. Kuitert abandons *theistic* concepts. In a theistic view God is a person. God then is the actor in a world-wide drama. The drama begins with creation and fall. Redemption is the dénouement of the drama. The crux or turning point of the story is Jesus Christ. Kuitert makes a break with this concept. He no longer wants to pull himself up by that story. So one can ask, what then is left of the reality of faith? If it is not to this God, to what then is believing directed, what then still makes believing real? The answer is that God is a code word for transcendence. God is another word for reaching out beyond oneself in love. If one believes, one discovers one's ability to live life freely and with respect for others. According to Kuitert the experience that man is a creature, a human being that is dependent yet free, is a consequence of the Christian religion. This religion has not come to an end with the death of the personal God. On the contrary, religion that dares to dissociate itself from a useless concept of god, finds opportunities, releases creativity.

Kuitert makes a stand *for a remythologizing* of religion. To this end Kuitert abandons the *notion of language* of his dissertation. In the dissertation he argued that the language of Scripture is the *original* language of God. Scripture is the expression of the notion that *God is happening* in the language of the Hebrew Bible. Later he determines that the tie to *one* language limits creativity. God can be spoken in much more than *one* language. God is plural and because of this plurality he can be named in many languages. Besides Scripture there is tradition. Tradition is the source region within which Scripture is the source. In the source region explanation takes place. Scripture is being detached from its original context and reinterpreted time and again.<sup>5</sup> In Kuitert's later books language gets a much more general character. Language is: 'putting into words', 'be[ing] significant'.<sup>6</sup> In 'Voor een tijd' [For a Time] this leads to the proposal that the entire Bible be understood as myth. It comes down to this, that we learn to see the stories of Scripture and tradition as poetic material. According to Kuitert the reality of faith manifests itself in the wonderfully expressive power of language. The future of religion

<sup>5</sup> Kuitert already develops this thought in the book mentioned earlier about the reality of faith. (1966)

<sup>6</sup> This is particularly stressed in H. M. Kuitert, *Jezus Nalatenschap van het Christendom*, Baarn 1998. See part II: Van betekenis naar '*van betekenis*'. (my italics) Cf. TG, I.3. about 'Een wereld "van betekenis" erven.' ['inheriting a world "of significance"']

is marked by re-mythologization. The Ally - God has gone away. Humanity that lets itself be addressed and knows it is addressed has remained.

Kuitert proposes to see the Christian religion as the art of living and dying, as *ars vivendi et moriendi*. What used to be in the background of earlier publications about morality, now is explicitly brought to the fore: The Christian religion contains an elementary anthropology: it is hardly capable of being articulated in notions – hence conceptually. The best thing is to do it with verbs.<sup>7</sup> The point is to live and die *well*. In this basic morality the hymn to love plays an essential part. 'Not receiving but giving love is the way to the top'. (TG 236)

### Alain Badiou

Badiou has a different tone to him than Kuitert. Like Kuitert, Badiou is seeking the source region of our creativity. And he too, is trying to break through ossified structures. The difference is that Kuitert radiates great equanimity with regard to the social and political reality. He endeavors to let people live in language, because the real world is so horrible. This is different with Badiou. With him the language of faith is very important, even though he has no personal relationship with a church. He has a different reason for his need for 'true words' than Kuitert. He is looking for words that evoke a reality that intervenes beneficially in what exists. I will explain this on the basis of his exegesis of the letters of the apostle Paul.

Before doing this, I will give a little of Badiou's background. Badiou was born in Morocco in 1937. He studied in Paris with thinkers like Althusser and Deleuze and was also influenced by the great French psychoanalyst Lacan. From 1956-1961 he was a member of the PSU, a split-off from the French Socialist Party, fiercely opposed to the war in Algeria. In the year of the uprisings in 1968 he invested all his energy in a small Maoist party, the UCFML. He did this because he wanted to remain faithful to the creative moment of the revolution.<sup>8</sup> In the years of the Backlash, the falling back of renewal, Badiou distanced himself from all political dogmatism. He looked for ideas that were so creative that they were helpful.

Throughout his work, Badiou has shown hardly any interest in so-called postmodernist thinking. His criticism is that the postmodern turn to language, that is, to a reality reflected in fragments, provides insufficient insight into what is human. The thinking of postmodernism starts with the idea that all people are faced with the same representation of the world. This means that every person is a world citizen. It argues that something like a

<sup>7</sup> Cf., e.g., H. M. Kuitert, *Een moraal van het jaar nul?*, in: Annemeike Tan en Leo van de Wetering eds., *Zijn de dagen van God geteld?*, Baarn 1995, 11-58.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Slavoj Žižek, *Die Tücke des Subjekts*, Frankfurt am Main, 2001, 171-323.

'global subject' exists. The ideal of postmodern thinking is that every person realizes his/her humanity in a way that fits him/her. Man, woman, hetero and homosexual, lesbian white, black homosexual... the more variety the better! Every position has its style. Every person has a right to his/her own particularity! Badiou mistrusts this thought. Does the wish to have an identity that distinguishes us from others really lead to *equality*? Badiou argues that our society only encourages the differences in order to be able to profit from them. Thus every individual displays his/her style, every culture its symbols, every kind of religion its conceptions. Do these differences emanate from within ourselves? Badiou thinks not. People appropriate those distinctions because they are continually held up before them. According to Badiou this is fatal. It leads to people not seeking each other, but rather excluding each other.

Badiou wants to break with this state of affairs. For that purpose he analyzes the domains in which truth or the development of truth is at issue.<sup>9</sup> He distinguishes four such domains. They are culture, technology, administration, and sexuality. Badiou wants to go back to the original inspiration behind these domains. In order to succeed in this one must find names that help visualize the true significance of things. The *true* name for *sexuality* is love. The true name for culture is art. The true name for technology is science. The true name for administration is politics. The true name for religion is faithfulness (or *fides*). In the last decades of the previous century Badiou wrote a series of books, of which his *l'Etre et l'événement* [Being and Event] (1988) has received the most reviews. In addition to these there is his very interesting book on Paul.<sup>10</sup> Here I will limit myself to the book on Paul. The book on Paul immediately leads us to our theme of God and the reality of faith. I will first give its main idea and then summarize the book briefly.

*The basic idea.*

Badiou characterizes Paul as one of the greatest thinkers on religion the world has ever seen. According to him one finds a *way of thinking* [or faith] with Paul that is unique in the world. This way of thinking arises from two different fronts. On one side are the strictly observant Jews. Paul argues that their legalism maintains a morality that prevents loving one's neighbor. The wisdom of the Greek constitutes the other front. Paul argues that with their compelling rhetoric they maintain a world that is eternally and invariably the same. Over against these two way, Paul defends way of thinking and living in which it is *by virtue of their very difference* that people can find each other.

<sup>9</sup> Processes in which truth is developed are called 'generic processes' with Badiou.

<sup>10</sup> Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul. La Fondation de l'Universalisme*, Paris, 1997. [Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism, translated by Ray Brassier (Stanford University Press: Stanford 2003 (abbreviated as *SP*)). See also Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul, fondateur du sujet universelle*, in: *Etudes Théologiques religieuses* 75 (2000), 323-333.

Jesus' appearance near Damascus is the hour of truth for Paul. The world completely changes for him. In his encounter with the risen one his world and his views get knocked over. The truth he so persecuted becomes a truth addressed to all and capable of being practiced by all. The event that will define him from then on is the event of the resurrection. With faith in the resurrection a new way of thinking emerges that is 'non-conformist' and for that reason is itself a way of *believing*.<sup>11</sup> At the end of his book Badiou Paul he quotes Rom. 12:2 ('And do *not* be conformed to this world, *but* be transformed by the renewing of your mind [NASB] ["Ne vous conformez pas..., mais soyez transformé', *SP*, 110]). This idea is pervaded by a conviction which Paul describes with the pithy statement 'Jesus is resurrected'. (*SP*, 4) For Badiou the resurrection hasn't actually happened, yet he cannot go on without this confession. Why is that the case? The answer is: Without this confession new thinking is impossible. Without this name-giving humanity is a prisoner of cosmic law or of the standard of morality.

*Saint Paul* consists of *three* units. Each unit contains a thought that we need in order to be able to have a conversation about the reality of faith. I will give a short description of each unit.

*Paul needs words of creation.*

Paul verbalizes a truth before which existing words fall silent. In itself that truth is clear to Badiou. Paul teaches something that overturns the existing order. He quotes Gal 3:28. '(In the church) There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female' [NASB] (*SP*,9). In that time this was something unheard of! True equality that causes people to truly communicate in their differences, requires a language that does not yet exist. Paul, who is also a poetic thinker, finds that language. The first chapter of the letter to the church in Corinth illustrates this. 1 Cor 1:28 says: 'God has chosen, the things that are not( ta mé onta), that He might nullify the things that are( ta onta). (*SP*, 47) Paul uses words that are essentially subversive. They are resurrection words that are creative. Paul carries those words with him. They are to him like a treasure in earthen vessels. The *reality* of it is that this treasure is transferable. It is possible indeed to end the hierarchy in which Jewish Christians elevate themselves above gentile Christians, and men above women.<sup>12</sup>

*In faith an old way of thinking passes away and a new way begins.* Paul describes how that new kind of subjectivity is constituted. As he outlines this, Paul follows the scheme of *not* (under the law) *but* (under grace). The legalism of the law and the 'for free' of grace cannot be reconciled. According to Badiou

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<sup>11</sup> The subject Badiou maps out here is only constituted as a subject in faith. I find that an extremely interesting position.

Paul speaks in a similar way of the relation between incarnation and resurrection. I cannot elaborate on that here. The point is that the event of the resurrection says that we are no longer slaves but sons. For Badiou this means that the legalistic connection with a 'Godfather' is severed. Here too the scheme not...but applies. According to this scheme one is no longer subject to a far-away God, but one is son, free. Where this subject comes into being, it receives the power to assent to life. Unlike Nietzsche, Paul knew, says Badiou, that the treasure is in earthen vessels.<sup>13</sup> It must be transferred forcefully and subtly. Otherwise it will be lost.

*The vocabulary of faith, love, and hope. (SP, 75-97)*

The last unit of Saint Paul deals with the words Paul needs in order to give the new life a permanent structure. With the words faith, hope, and love the event of the resurrection receives a name. Badiou says that truth is the reality of every person, everyone's reality. The resurrection message is addressed to all and intended for all. Badiou describes this vocabulary somewhat as follows:

- *Faith* is a conviction. The fact that it is faith means that there are no grounds for this conviction. It is an event without proof. It cannot be proven nor predicted. It is the opening toward a righteousness beyond the legalism of the law. It is righteousness for free. It has no other ground than the groundless event of the resurrection.

- *Love* follows the command: 'love your neighbor as *yourself*'. This is the only rule of law that can be universalized because it applies to all. 'Only love counts'. That is a rule that always applies. While faith points to the possibility of the new subjectivity, love points to the power of faith.

- *Hope*. It is not the prospect of reward or retribution. It is also not a relation to a future reality. Hope is perseverance, or faithfulness to faith. Love goes out to all. When a subject is not itself able to participate in *this* love, it will be lost. Now hope keeps the insight alive that the subject can truly participate. When hope is lacking, love will turn into resentment. Hope is the test which can show whether love is truly giving itself.

Thus the new way of thinking or subjectivity receives a name, a direction, an address.

One more essential element must be added. According to Badiou this

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<sup>12</sup> He says (in the last chapter) that Paul uses a subtle textual strategy to dismantle this hierarchical way of thinking.

<sup>13</sup> Badiou thinks that Paul was closer to the truth than Nietzsche. While Paul 'rejoices in the truth', Nietzsche perished based on his own truth.

articulation of faith is unthinkable without Paul's monotheism. Monotheism here means that God is *unique*, and *therefore* for all and of all. Why is that the case? That is the case, because this God is in no sense conditioned by any human force or value. The vocabulary that Paul develops is marked by this monotheism.

*Badiou and the reality of faith.*

The following three points give an outline of what is distinctive about Badiou.

- (1) Appealing to the apostle, Badiou introduces a *new* way of thinking. In that thinking language is being sought that is capable of expressing this new thing - which belongs to all and is for all. In the letters we see a discourse that is new in terms of type and that is different from prophetic discourse as well as from philosophical discourse. Prophecy thinks in terms of the sign to which a promise is connected. Philosophy carefully tailors its theses to the regularities of the universe. Paul's discourse breaks with the laws of the universe as well as with prophetic thought. Paul does not want to prophesy or philosophize but he wants the love he found to be universally heard as far as the remotest corners of the Roman Empire. We don't find resignation or conformism, but resistance. With Badiou we recognize something of what is called the 'royal human being' with Karl Barth. There is affirmation of earthly life and there is a strong will to convey this yes to life to everybody. This activity never leads to looking back at what has been, but to a focus on what can be done today.
- (2) Appealing to the apostle, Badiou is looking for language in which the reality of faith can be expressed. Its reality resides in the event of the resurrection. In working this out one must carefully distinguish between (1) the event of the resurrection itself, which is an anonymous event for which there is not yet a name —that is, it cannot be expressed in any myth or fable, (2) the confession that Jesus is risen, which is itself a mythical stable, that of a fable, and (3) living in the light of the resurrection. This can be practiced as a truth that is real.
- (3) Badiou takes *leave of God*. This leave is not only related to a theistic or metaphysical construction. It is related – as I have already said in the beginning – to God himself. God does not return. Can Badiou appeal to Paul for this? No. He even says that Paul was the last one to whom the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob revealed himself in actuality. Can we then continue to follow Paul's trail? Badiou thinks this is possible. For even if God is dead, one can certainly still name the reality that is confessed in faith.

## Conclusion

I conclude and return to the reality of faith as I worded it in the introduction. It is a *'dicere id quod res est'*. This *res* is an event in which the act of faith and the content of faith coincide. In that event the reality of God touches me in and through my conceptions and words.

How does Kuitert deal with this matter? With Kuitert the reality of faith is related to the power of language itself. In language humanity finds a means by which the chaotic world can be rendered 'meaningful.' Kuitert sees reality primarily realized in the mythical story. It is like a house in which people can live 'for a while' and die. What God is beyond that we do not know. An anonymous reality that we can do nothing with. A force? Who shall say?

How does Badiou deal with this matter? With Badiou the God of living religion is dead. If it is not God, then what reality is he in fact discussing in his philosophizing? I think Badiou is clear. The reality at issue here is related to an equality in which people can truly be fellow human beings to each other. In the summary of the Torah love directed to one's neighbor fulfills the law. Therein the truth of monotheism comes to light. Paul's monotheism teaches that only God counts. The monotheism of love says that only love counts. Its hallmark is extreme simplicity. Thus love is not deified; on the contrary, love is love, just like the God of Pauline monotheism is only God.

*In Conclusion a Weighing. Where to Go from Here?*

In conclusion, allow me to weigh the two approaches. Do I sign up for the *remythologizing* in the manner of Kuitert, or do I choose for the *demythologizing* of Badiou? I do not hesitate. I choose for Badiou. The reason for this is that he respects the truth of monotheism. Paul's monotheism teaches that faith is not about conceptions! Conceptions can be endlessly adapted and supplemented. But faith is about the way truth is put into practice. Badiou teaches how to do that. One must find names, words, to get the clogged up sources of humanity flowing again. This calls for a kind of thought that does not conform. Thought that conforms will get stuck one day as a matter of course. Thought that does *not* conform will be renewed and rejuvenated.

The kind of thought that I am willing to stake something on is about a new way of thinking. It is pursued in the hope not that we will find the thoughts of faith but rather that they will find us. Badiou ends his study of Paul with this hope. He concludes his book with a reference to Nietzsche and Paul with whom this hope is expressed. In this not Nietzsche but Paul is the greater. I

quote Badiou: "In *Zarathustra* Nietzsche says that the greatest events surprise us 'in the quiet hours,' that thoughts that 'come with feet of doves' guide the world." Badiou then continues: "In this point as in so many others he should have confessed his indebtedness to Paul, whom he punishes with his contempt. 'The Day of the Lord' it says in the first letter to the Thessalonians (5:2) 'will come like a thief in the night.'" (SP 111)

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