

Truth as Formal Catholicism - On Alain Badiou, Saint Paul: La fondation de l'universalisme

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INTRODUCTION

For there must in fact be divisions among you
so that those of you who are approved may be evident

Paulus, 1 Kor 11,19

Das Ganze ist das Unwahre. Adorno, 1980: 57

Up until the late eighties, Soviet Communism was a significant point of reference for leftist political thought. Although heavily criticized, it at least lent formal support to the idea that our capitalist neo-liberal system had an alternative, an 'outside', an 'other'. After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, Western ideology critique had to make it without that support. A radically alternative society seemed to be impossible. Besides, post-modernity was now telling us that the "grand narratives" were over and that we were, finally, *beyond* ideology. Since then, all "grand ideas" – even the very idea of truth itself – have been on the verge of being abandoned. Have not all catastrophes of recent history been caused by absolute truth-claims? Was it not for this reason that revolutions have turned so easily into totalitarianism, or, as we should now say, into fundamentalism? These days, absolute truth – *truth as such* – can no longer form the horizon for any critique of ideology.

Such, at least, is the generally accepted idea today. But this is not an idea that Alain Badiou is convinced by. According to this contemporary French philosopher, these well-

known post-modern conditions most definitely do not make up the horizon of our current critique. To the contrary. Today, more than ever, our post-modern era needs truths – truths that (despite that strange plural!) claim – and must claim – universality. Moreover, the genuine locus for truth-claims is revolt and, therefore, the age of Revolution is far from being over. Not reformation, but revolt will give our time the truth it needs. It needs *leftist* revolts, Badiou adds, for these are the only true ones. Formed in the Althusserian school, his political position has always been ‘far left’.ⁱⁱ He was – and still is – a convinced Maoist. And his entire oeuvre is to be read as an attempt to give this leftist position a solid new philosophical ground. It is stunning therefore to see how positively he writes about Saint Paul, one of the founding fathers of Christianity. For isn’t Christianity precisely the conservative ideology that for almost two millennia legitimized the existing political and cultural power? Was it not for this precise reason one of the primary targets of our lengthy critical tradition? How can we, then, explain Badiou’s appreciation for someone who is responsible for this type of ideology? Why did he write an entire book on Saint Paul (Badiou, 1997a)?

It is certainly not because of Saint Paul’s well-known evocations of human finitude and sinfulness in which one easily recognizes the modern analysis of our ‘condition humaine’. This is what we find, for instance, in Jacques Lacan, another of Badiou’s ‘masters’.ⁱⁱⁱ Badiou’s approach to Saint Paul is completely different. He appreciates Paul solely for his doctrinal side, i.e. his belief in Christ’s resurrection, and, more precisely, his belief that this is a ‘catholic’ truth, a truth for everyone in the whole world (being the meaning of the Greek word ‘καθ’όλος’, ‘*kat’holos*’)^{iv}. What Badiou affirms in Paul is above all his ‘formal Catholicism’. In this essay, I will first give a rough sketch of the theoretical context in which Badiou’s reading of Paul is to be situated (cf. 1- 3). I will explain how, with his reference to Paul’s belief in Christ’s resurrection, Badiou illustrates his own theory of the ‘event’, i.e. the main topic of his magnum opus, *L’être et l’événement (Being and the event)*, Badiou, 1988), as well as that of his entire oeuvre. This will bring me, in a second moment, to an analysis of the fundamental presupposition secretly sustaining Badiou’s entire theoretical framework (4). Thirdly and finally I will counter Badiou’s interpretation of Paul with a reading of chapter eleven of Paul’s *Letter to the Romans* (5-6). I will show how the universality claimed there by Paul’s text contains an important element Badiou neglects. This will provide the basis for my critique of Badiou’s notion of universal truth.

1. Event

“Why Saint Paul?” asks Badiou in the opening lines of the first chapter of his book. Why should he, Badiou, a convinced atheist philosopher, refer to one of the founders of

Christianity? His answer is clear: Paul fits into the “development” of his theory. He is a perfect illustration of what his philosophy is about. In a few lines on the first page of *Saint Paul*, which give a good impression of his clear and often apodictic style, Badiou briefly summarizes the meaning of his entire philosophical project. “Why Saint Paul? [...] How to inscribe this name in the development of our attempt: to give a new foundation to a theory of the Subject, which subordinates its existence to the aleatoric dimension of the event as well as to the pure contingency of the ‘being multiple’ without sacrificing the theme of truth?” (Badiou, 1997a: 5; my translation)

Rebuilding a theory of the subject, founding the subject in the ‘event’, connecting it with the ‘multiplicity’ of being, and linking it up with a new theory of truth: these four points perfectly encapsulate Badiou’s philosophical project. Let us briefly develop the logic linking these four topics together.

The immediate background of his attempt to formulate a new theory of the subject lies in his disagreement with Louis Althusser’s structuralist critique of the subject. This taught us that the human subject is not so much the *master* of its ideas or its ‘ideology’, as the *effect* of those ideas or ideology. The subject is already the result of an ‘ideological interpellation’, Althusser claims.⁹ Even man’s most intimate subjectivity is a creation of ideology. Running counter to Althusser’s structuralist elimination of it, Badiou stresses the philosophical and political value of the subject which he judges indispensable for an effective critique of ideology. Despite the subject’s undeniable spontaneous inclination towards ideological interpellation, a free subject is nevertheless possible. While ideology’s grip may be unavoidable, it is, at least to a certain extent, capable of acting independently of it. According to Badiou, after the revolution of 1917, the Russian proletariat became the subject of a fidelity to a new truth. This subject – , the Communist Party – was not only the effect of a new ideology. It was, first and foremost, a free subject that, by its fidelity, gave support to the truth-event of the revolution.

As we will see, Badiou’s theory – including his theory of the subject – is largely mathematical. Therefore, it is useful to consider the problem of the subject in its broader historical and philosophical context. The ‘subject’ is a term – *and* a problem – we inherit from a long philosophical tradition. The term itself is derived from the Medieval Latin word ‘*subjectum*’, which for its part is the translation of the Aristotelian Greek word ‘*hypokeimenon*’. In Aristotle, it is a purely *logical* term and stands for the ‘bearer’ or ‘support’ of an attribute. In the proposition ‘the table is red’, for instance, ‘table’ is the *hypokeimenon* (*subjectum*) of the attribute ‘red’. In the early middle ages, the term took on greater weight and became an *ontological* concept, becoming the ‘bearer’ or ‘support’ of *reality*, of *being* as such. In contrast to ancient philosophy, where the ‘subject’ was Being itself, medieval Christian thought situated Being’s ultimate subject (its final ground) in God. For (Aristotelian) Thomism, God was creation’s ‘first cause’ and, in that sense, was its ‘subjectum’. While

speaking 'logically' of things, one was all the same supposed to know them '*ontologically*': one presumed to have knowledge of their essence – of their finite bearer, 'substance', 'subject' – *and* thus to have knowledge of the ultimate 'subject', i.e. of God, the infinite subject of all those finite subjects.

Modernity is defined as a break with that presupposition. Modern science no longer presumes to have knowledge of reality's essence. This is why modernity is, in the first place, a break with Aristotle, i.e. with an 'essentialist physics'. In the field of religion, it was already with the Reformation – under the influence of anti-Thomist Occamism – that this pretension was discarded.^{vi} In the eyes of the Reformers, God was so profoundly elevated above man that it became impossible for man to have any positive knowledge of God. In the scientific realm, the 'mathematization of our world picture' enhanced this tendency.^{vii} Galileo and Newton constructed a science based on both observation and mathematics: they mathematically described the 'outside' of the things they observed, and were no longer methodologically interested in their 'inside' (i.e. their essence).

Mathematics is of great importance to Badiou as well. He not only frequently refers to it; the very form of his reasoning is often purely and directly mathematical. Mathematics is literally the grammar through which a large part of his work is written. One of Badiou's fundamental claims is that 'mathematics is ontology' and 'ontology is mathematics'.^{viii} With this claim, he wishes to strengthen the characteristically modern 'mathematization' I just referred to. Mathematics, for Badiou, is our most radical remedy against the nostalgia for transcendence that haunts modern thought. Indeed, since modern thought acknowledges its own finitude, the infinite can easily be understood as what lies beyond the boundaries of human knowledge. According to Badiou, this is modernity's "romanticism," giving new life to a medieval transcendentalism that is completely incompatible with modernity's own radically immanent thought.^{ix} What is radically modern in mathematics is its claim of an infinity that does not lie beyond the limits of its finitude. It considers infinity as simply one of the elements that it can play with. The infinite is just one of the 'numbers' that mathematics reckons with. While our knowledge is of course finite (we cannot know the real *qua* real), infinity lies not outside that knowledge but *inside* it.

Mathematics is thus a superlative instrument for remaining faithful to modernity's radical immanence (or, which for Badiou amounts to the same thing, to its materialism). For it considers being *qua* being as purely immanent and contingent multiplicity, including being's infinite dimension. To put it in terms of Badiou's chief source of reference, set theory, it considers being as an infinite set of sets. Mathematical set theory enables one to acknowledge the "the pure contingency of the «being multiple»", referred to by Badiou in the opening lines we quoted from *Saint Paul*.

With this thesis, Badiou critiques the fascination with alterity that is the hallmark of many philosophies today. Thinkers such as Adorno, Horkheimer, Levinas, Derrida, de

Certeau among others argue that the way we usually think of Being excludes a radical kind of 'Otherness'. This is why, to their minds, our classical way of thinking can easily degenerate into totalitarianism: it ensnares all otherness within the circle of a single dominant standard; it subsumes all difference under the grasp of a monolithic 'Sameness'. It is because we want to make the other – the fool, the woman, the black, the Jew, the gypsy, the immigrant, the '*sans papier*' – equal to the Same that we persecute him or her., This sameness should thus be opened up to its radical Other, and Being itself opened towards what is "other than being" (to quote the title of one of Levinas's major works: "Autrement qu'être", (Levinas, 1974; 1981).

According to Badiou, it is not sameness but otherness that characterizes Being. The difference that modern philosophy should reflect upon is thus not the one between Being and its other, but the difference – and, more precisely, the differences – within Being itself. This is why Being is to be considered as multiplicity, as a set of different sets, as an 'infinite set of sets'. But how does Badiou articulate the "contingency" of the "being multiple"? Or, to use a word that he prefers to avoid: how does he think its 'finitude'? For this is what he tries to do: to think the finitude of ontology without referring to the distinction between infinity and finitude.

It is here we must introduce the notion of the *event*, another of the four basic elements of Badiou's philosophy as given in the passage cited above. With this notion, Badiou will be able to think contingency and finitude in a radically immanent way. For with this, ontology, which articulates Being's infinity in an abstract way, does not have a total grip of the *real* ground of 'all that is'. This 'real' does not lie simply in Being in its settled form (or, in Badiou's terms, as it is 'represented'), nor is it 'other than being'. Being's 'real' ground is its temporality, its contingency, i.e. the mere fact that it happens, occurs, takes place. Ontology is there to formulate being's contours, not by formulating what differs from it, but by formulating its 'historicality'. Being, i.e. the infinite set of sets, is not a substance resting upon its eternal ground; it is resting upon a *contingent* ground, upon the mere fact it is 'occurring', 'happening'. Being 'as such' is not to equal the totality of sets representing being, it is not the totality or representations; it is what is present without being represented, without being part of the totality of representations. Being *as such* – being *qua being* – can only be felt in what is merely present (without being represented), in what only 'occurs', 'happens', 'takes place'. This is what Badiou calls an *événement* (event).

In a sense, then, Badiou's thesis is not unlike one of Heidegger's main concerns. He, too, focused on temporality or 'historicality' ('*Geschichtlichkeit*'), of being qua being. No wonder that he is an important reference for Badiou, in spite of their different politics.^x Badiou's thesis is also close to one of the main topics pursued by Gille Deleuze, the other great thinker of the event.^{xi} Both, Heidegger and Deleuze – albeit in profoundly different ways – approach being from a reflection on time – Heidegger proceeding from Aristotle, Dun

Scotus and (a critique of) Husserl; Deleuze proceeding from ancient stoic philosophy, Bergson, Spinoza, Leibniz, and Nietzsche. Badiou fully admits the influence of both^{xii}, but nonetheless approaches the problem of 'being and time' in a different way. His way of thinking 'being and time' proceeds from mathematics.

He approaches being mathematically, i.e. as an 'infinite set of sets'. This implies that every single being belongs to a particular set – or, to put it in another of his terms, it 'represents' a particular set. That is why being is "representation": every single being 'is' something in so far it is represented as a particular set of beings. However, being *qua Being* is not to be considered as a set amongst the others, nor is it a set transcending all other sets. In the 'infinite set of sets', being *qua Being* is not 'represented' at all. It is not a *part* of the totality of *particular* representations. Can we say, then, that it *is* not? No, for it certainly *is*, but is not a set, nor a particular *representation*. It is only a "*presentation*"; it is *present* merely as a 'set' that, paradoxically, must be described as empty^{xiii}; or, which amounts to the same thing, it is present only in *single* elements, single insofar as they do not (or no longer) belong to one of the existing particular sets and, in that sense, float unsubstantially about being *qua Being's* 'empty set'.

Imagine, for example, several elements from different sets that come to leave off representing their particular sets.^{xiv} Imagine that they begin to function on their own. In such a case, something happens. An 'event' takes place, and disturbs the existing order, the collected sets representing being's totality. At that moment, the order comes to realize that it does not rest upon its 'representations', upon the distinctions and particularities constituting its supposed identity. In the final analysis, it is only based on radical contingency, on being *qua Being*, on a 'presentation' that cannot be locked up in the infinite totality of 'representations', i.e. of sets representing being. At that moment, revolution is in the air. It is the moment when nothing is safe or secure, and everything is on the verge of changing. In such moments, truth can emerge. That truth is the effect of a fidelity to the event, a truth fighting for a new world proceeding from those floating single elements that undermine the existing order.

Eighteenth-century France, for instance, can be considered a 'set of sets'.^{xv} The social and political order consisted in a balanced relationship between four general sets, i.e. the three estates – nobility, clergy, the third estate (the bourgeois) – and the ones without 'standing' (the majority of the population). In this sense, everyone represented a particular set and the entire 'set of sets' was more or less in balance. In balance at least until certain elements from different sets left their traditional way of thinking behind and discovered that each were, in the first place, not so much part of their set (part of their estate, for instance), as *singular*, and that, precisely in this quality, *universally equal* to everyone else. They discovered themselves simply as human beings, and realized, from this perspective, that all humans are equal. The distinctions invoked until that moment that enabled them to perform

their particular identity – as nobleman, clergyman, bourgeois or whatever – became unimportant. From now on, the truth of human beings was they were universally equal. However, there was no *representation* for that truth. There was no such thing as a ‘universal set of equal humans’. This set was, so to speak, still empty, having not yet found its ‘representation’. So, universal equality could only claim existence by referring to the empty set being *qua Being*. And that empty set could only be experienced as an *event*, as an unforeseen ‘happening’ that makes all ‘settled sets’ lose their ground and gives pure contingency its full chance.

However, this contingency must be the place – the ‘site’ – where a new truth can emerge. The empty and abstract ‘universal set’ must be transformed into a real one; its ‘presentation’ must become a ‘representation’. It has therefore to be *made* so, in the active sense of the word. That is what happens in the *act* of revolution. Only a revolution can unchain the power still sleeping in an event. It gives the event its name, its subject, and enables that subject to become faithful to the event. This is how the ‘French Revolution’ ‘worked’, and, as Badiou says, was able to set up its ‘truth-procedure’. By the very force of its name and its slogans (“égalité, fraternité, liberté”, “la liberté ou la mort”, et cetera), the empty set began to change into a more concrete, full set. And it generated militants supporting the revolutionary cause unconditionally, i.e. the empty set of ‘universal equality’ they were fighting for. Only by promoting the revolution’s truth could the empty set really become the set – the norm, the standard – of Being itself.

The revolutionary experience of the event implies the discovery of a truth that belongs to none of the existing sets, but has, nevertheless, something to say concerning elements from each one of those sets. This truth can only be ‘one’, and at the same time must count for everyone.^{xvi} But this universal truth is never simply given. It is not a ‘truth of facts’. This truth demands a changing of the facts. It is a truth we must fight for, a truth that is impossible without unconditional faith or a revolutionary act.

It is only now that we can clarify what Badiou means by ‘subject’. It is the bearer of a fidelity to an event, the bearer of a faith in the truth founded on the event. It is the subject of a belief, not in what already exists – not a belief in one of the existing ‘sets’ –, but in a truth based upon an unseen event, having the power to disturb the totality of particular sets. The subject is the bearer of a belief in an empty set, which, unlike the existing sets, claims universality. It is a subject, in other words, of a set still *to come* or to be realised. Thus, the proper locus of the subject lies in the future, too. Paradoxically, it does not precede its own fidelity to an event; it does not precede the truth of which it is the subject. It comes into existence only *through* fidelity and truth. It is an effect both of the event and of the fidelity to that event. Only through fidelity does truth come into being (in what Badiou calls a ‘truth-procedure’). Truth is, by definition, ‘post-evental’. In the same paradoxical way, Badiou asserts that the subject of fidelity is fidelity’s own effect, its own product.

2. Paul's event: ...

If Badiou is interested in Saint Paul, it is because he recognizes in Paul's doctrine some of the central concerns of his own theory. His theory of truth, for instance, can easily be linked to one of the central dogmas of Paul's theology: his belief in a single truth as the truth for everyone in the whole universe, 'whether he is Jew or Greek, man or woman', as we read in many of his letters. This is literally the most 'catholic' side of Saint Paul. For while Paul is perhaps not the founder of Christianity (since this is presumed to be Christ himself), he is certainly the founder of the Christianity's 'catholicity', i.e. of its claim to have a true message '*kat' holon*', for the whole universe: Christ's resurrection brought Glad Tidings, not only for the Jews, but for the 'Gentiles' – for all the other 'nations' – as well.

However, Badiou's reference to Paul's 'Catholicism' concerns only the *formal* structure of his truth-claim. He explicitly rejects the content of Paul's – or Christianity's – doctrine. Its universality-claim, however, is what makes Paul our "contemporary" (as the title of the first chapter suggests). Like Paul, we must also acknowledge that no one can claim a truth in his quality of a *particular* person, community, territory, culture, or whatever. Truth cannot be claimed by a settled *part* of society, but only by a marginal, *singular* element that is incapable of speaking in the name of any part, and is, therefore, obliged to invoke universality. Thus Badiou writes in his first chapter:

Paul's outrageous gesture consists in withdrawing truth from the communitarian grip, be it the grip of a people, a city, an empire, a territory or a social class. What is true (or what is just, which in this case amounts to the same thing) cannot be reduced to an objective set, neither as its cause nor as its destiny. (Badiou, 1997a: 6)

Truth is not only for Jews like Jesus and himself, Paul claims. With regard to truth, "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female – for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3: 28). Truth is not the concern of a particular part of a totality, "for there is no partiality with God" (Romans 2:12).^{xvii}

But on what grounds does Paul claim this truth, , according to Badiou,? Not on the grounds that Paul himself asserts. Not because the Creator of the universe revealed this to him. This is what Christian doctrine teaches, which in Badiou's eyes is just a "fable", a "name", for what on the most fundamental level must be described as an event (Badiou, 1997: 5). An event, however, is accessible only through an absolutely singular experience. Although it generates a universal truth, the experience of the event can be shared with no one. It is an experience beyond communication. So how can an event be described? It can only be reconstructed *afterwards, indirectly and retroactively*, in terms that link it up to a truth.

If describing the event is already extremely difficult for the one who experienced it, it is even worse for another, for Badiou for instance, describing Paul's event. Nevertheless, relying on some details from Paul's biography as well as on some of his own theoretical tools (for instance his 'set theoretical' approach), Badiou reconstructs and interprets what happened to Paul on the way to Damascus. For this is the precise moment of Paul's event.

What happened to Paul in that moment, according to Badiou? Not unlike Oedipus, he became blind the very moment he saw the truth. It was the truth a dissident Jewish group believed in. At that moment, Paul, a Jewish Pharisee from Tarsus operating in Jerusalem and Palestine, vigorously prosecuted that group of dissenters. They believed that Jesus, who died on the cross, had risen from the dead, and that he was therefore the Messiah, the Christ. We do not know if this was what bothered Paul the most in this dissident doctrine, but this was, after his experience on the way to Damascus, the truth he became convinced of.

In fact was it the only thing he retained from the dissenters' doctrine. In his eyes, Christianity's sole truth is Christ's resurrection. Other issues concerning Jesus remain almost unmentioned in his letters. All the great things the gospels talk about – his preaching, his parables, his controversies with Pharisees and Sadducees, the acts he performed, and the wonders he witnessed – seem of little importance to Paul. The only thing that counts for him is that Christ was resurrected, or, which amounts to the same, that Jesus is the Christ.

3. ...Christ's resurrection

Christ's resurrection: this is the 'name' Paul chose for the event he experienced. It was his word for what disturbed and suspended all the 'words' and 'names' constituting the world at that time. With that name, Badiou explains, Paul opened this world towards its own contingency, its own 'occurring', its act of 'taking place', 'of happening'. This does not mean that the chosen word was a term unknown to Paul until then. This term belonged to the 'set of sets' constituting the then world. But it did not yet name a separate set. It referred to elements from existing sets, without forming a set of its own. It was, if you like, the name of a 'non-existing' or empty set – a set that could only come into being through the 'intervention' of believers.^{xviii}

Or, to put it in another one of Badiou's metaphorical schemes: the word Paul uses to express his experience of the event belonged to the '*situation*' in which Judaism was settled at that time. 'Resurrection', 'Christ' and 'Messiah' were terms functioning in the culture of the day, but they did not really support the 'situation'. They operate on the contours, in the margins of it, i.e. in what Badiou calls a 'site': a place on the borderline of a 'situation', in the quasi non-existing area of the 'empty set' where the situation faces its own contingency.^{xix} Paul's event, and the name he chose for it, threw Judaism's 'situation' back upon its 'evental'

ground, upon the 'place' where it 'took place'. There, in that 'site', a new truth – resurrection – could emerge.

The possibility of resurrection and the idea that someone could be the Messiah accorded with the 'situation' of the Judaism of those days. It is a part of the messianic movement of that time, a movement that was grafted onto the kernel of Judaism, i.e. its Torah. Elected among all nations by the universal God for a special relation with him, the Jewish people received the Thora, a sign of that election. This was the Law that God had given to his people as their proper way to happiness. Although this Law was perfect in itself, the people never managed to fulfill it, so the Jewish 'fable' related. Several times during their history, God had warned – or even punished – them by the well-known vicissitudes they were forced to endure: the division of David's Kingdom (9th century BC), the Exile and destruction of the Northern Kingdom (722 BC), the Exile of the Southern Kingdom (i.e. the Babylonian Captivity, 586-540 BC) et cetera. But since it was all in vain, the idea came into being that God Himself, through a messenger (a new King, a Messiah), would intervene to fulfill the Law and deliver Israel from the debt run up by their failure to fulfill the Law's commandments. This is why, in Paul's time, several individuals were pretenders to being the Messiah (or, in Greek, the Christ), i.e. the creator of a new 'Davidian Kingdom'. 'Christ' was thus an idea that fitted into the culture – the 'situation' – of that time. And so was 'resurrection', being a major topic of dispute between Pharisees who believed in it, and Sadducees who did not. But, on the other hand, Christ's resurrection was a term that did *not* fit in that 'situation'. Or, it did only so in a "diagonal" way (Badiou 1997: 29, 46). It assembled elements, collected 'diagonally' from different parts and discourses constituting the Jewish world of that time. Moreover, it drew on elements from the other world Paul lived in, the world of the 'Greek', i.e. the Hellenistic culture of the Roman Empire.

'Christ's resurrection' was thus a term representing a 'collage' that, as such, did not yet exist at that time. It had no proper place *in* the 'situation' yet, nor *outside* it. It had its place only in the *contours* of it, i.e. in its '*site*'. Comprised of several elements from different parts of the situation, but, as such, having no proper existence or place in it, it existed only by the grace of being *qua Being*. It could only find its support in the most abstract support there is, in the support every singular element is resting upon, independent of the part it is settled in: pure Being. This is what Paul experienced on his way to Damascus. For years, he had been engaged in the diverse – Jewish as well as Greek – discourses and discussions of his time. But now those engagements and reflections had brought him into the very margin of that world. He faced the point – the 'site' – where those particular discourses lost their ground and confronted the pure contingency of their being.

Paul's experience is thus a fall into the 'gap' – the 'void', the 'empty set' – the world is resting upon. However, according to Badiou, this 'gap' or 'void' is not the Nothing from which God created the world. Rather than a reference to something transcendental, it is radically

immanent; it is Being itself in its contingent act of being. It is Being experienced as an event that explodes the differences and distinctions constituting the world up till then. This is why Paul's experience is an experience of being *qua Being*, and, therefore, annihilates the difference between the two worlds he was living in, the Jewish and the Greek one.

Here for Badiou, two completely different worlds collapse, each representing a different type of discourse presupposing opposite paradigms. Jewish discourse approaches reality as a set of signs referring to what is 'beyond'. In that sense, it is the "discourse of the sign" (Badiou, 1997: 44). Things are true, only insofar as they refer to transcendence. Truth itself is not natural but exceptional, and can only be known by reading signs that reveal their transcendent origin. This is what a prophet does par excellence. The Greek discourse, on the other hand, presupposes reality not as referring to a transcendent outside, but as being entirely self-referential. It rests upon 'nature', 'phusis' ('φύσις'). So, the Greek discourse focuses not on exceptions but only on what is constitutive for being's totality. Truth is a matter of gaining insight into that totality, and this is the task of a philosopher or a wise man par excellence. For Greek discourse, a (Jewish) prophet can only be a fool. And, similarly, for the Jewish discourse, (Greek) thought and wisdom are foolish.

Both discourses deny their real 'ground', since they deny the event they rest upon. The 'Christian discourse' does not make this mistake, since it fully acknowledges the event of Christ's resurrection, and, through Christ's resurrection, the event of Being itself. Precisely because of its belief in an event, Christian discourse can no longer be Greek or Jewish. That Christ had risen from the dead means that, now, the particular difference between Greek and Jew has lost its importance. Being Jew or being Greek has become indifferent with respect to the kind of 'being' the experience of the event has revealed. From now on, Greeks and Jews deal in the same open possibility that being *qua Being* is. This is the truth that Paul saw. This is the "truth procedure" he put into action. Both Greek and Jew – i.e. everyone in the whole universe – share in the fact that the 'gap' being is founded on, is not a sign of death's dominion, but of the radical possibility named life.

It is this that Badiou understands by resurrection. The experience of the real ground our world is built upon – the experience of the impossible real, to use a Lacanian term Badiou often refers to – is the experience not of finitude and death but of infinity and life. The experience of what lies beyond our capacity to experience is an experience of universal possibility, not of impossibility. This is what happened in the event of Christ's resurrection. This is what Paul experienced falling from his horse on his way to Damascus.

4. In Being We Trust

Badiou's concept of the 'event' is not unlike a crucial paradox found in many other philosophers and critics in the twentieth century : *an experience revealing the very limits of*

our capacity to experience. It is the experience of a radical finitude that marks us. Unlike traditional philosophy, many modern and post-modern thinkers refuse to consider this finitude as a negative proof of transcendence and infinite truth. They claim we must deal with our finitude in an entirely *immanent* way. Most therefore conclude that we ought to reconcile ourselves to it and renounce our aspirations to infinity as much as we can. Despite our infinite technical power, we must remain aware of our incapacity to go beyond the limits of our finitude. This, for example, is how Heidegger interprets that experience and, on that basis, declares human truth to be radically finite. Or, as post-modern thinkers would say: since we are able to invent any kind of truth we want, we had better stop speaking in the name of a single and eternal truth or, perhaps, in the name of truth at all.

Yet, the same paradoxical experience brings Badiou to a radically opposite conclusion. The ‘experience incompatible with our capacity to experience’ is precisely what *gives us our capacity for infinity*. It invites us to create truths that transcend the ‘opinions’ we are settled in; it restores our possibility of infinitude, not in the metaphysical sense of being eternal souls, but in the sense of destroying the finite limits in which we become established. It gives us the generosity of being: not the generosity of a divine Creator, as monotheistic religion believes, but the generosity of immanent being itself, of being as an inexhaustible source of possibilities. This is what Christ’s resurrection did, according to Paul: it “changed the relation between possibility and impossibility”. (Badiou, 1997a: 47) Suddenly, what had until then seemed impossible became possible, what had seemed to be death’s impasse became a true, universal way of living.

The sole criterion for a change or revolution to be true is its universality. Therefore, the privileged distinctions constituting the existing society (the ‘estates’, the classes, the groups) are to be destroyed, and power must become accessible to everyone. This is why in contrast with the Russian Revolution of 1917, the fascist revolution in Germany 1933 was not a true revolution for Badiou. It maintained the privileges of one part of the world (the “Aryans”), while the promises of the Russian Revolution were explicitly intended to be universal. Fascist revolution, Badiou explains in *L’Éthique*, was not built upon a real event, but only upon a supposed one, a “simulacrum”. It did not bring the “void” of the previous society into existence, the contingent ontological void upon which society rests. Rather, fascist revolution privileged merely one of the existing society’s parts (Badiou, 1993: 64-65: 2001: 72-73). Only what is inexistent in the previous society, what is lacking in it, can connect a revolution with the empty set that being *qua Being* is. And only such an ontologically-based revolution is a true revolution.

Here, we touch upon a hidden assumption secretly sustaining Badiou’s philosophical system. Surely, things like ‘event’, ‘revolution’ and ‘truth’ must be situated on the level of concrete and ‘material’ reality; they concern the *content* side of it. However, Badiou approaches reality in a strictly *formal* way. This is why mathematics is so central to his

thought. For Badiou, only a totally abstract system is capable of articulating a new theory of truths. Of course, the eternal Truth of which the metaphysical tradition dreamed is a chimera. But truths exist. Although radically contingent, they nevertheless function as truth and at times really change the world. From this perspective, Badiou's purely formal approach is able to think the truth of Paul's Christianity, neglecting its entire content. While he does not believe a word of what it teaches, he nevertheless explains why it once was true, and why the truths of our days are true for the very same *formal* reasons. Indeed, because of truth's contingency, we cannot take a meta-position and tell the Truth about the different (so-called) truths. At least, we cannot do this with respect to content. But nonetheless we have a formal criterion for truths: they must be universal. So was Paul's truth in the first century AD, so was Lenin's truth in 1917, and so should our truth be at the beginning of the 21st century. Why, precisely, should universality be the formal criterion? Because universality characterizes Being at its most fundamental level. Being in its purely ontological dimension (being *qua being*) belongs to no one or nothing in particular, but nonetheless characterizes everyone and everything.

Thus far, Badiou's approach appears to be strictly *formal*. At this level, being *qua Being* is an empty set. Nevertheless, it hides an important assumption *at the level of content*, an assumption upon which his entire approach appears to rely. He presumes that being at its most fundamental level – being *qua Being*, as experienced in the empty set that disturbs all existing sets – is something in which we can nonetheless unconditionally trust, and that, therefore, it is something inherently good – also in the ethical sense of the word. Being *qua being*, being at the level of the 'real' as Lacan would call it, is trustworthy. This is something that Lacan never would say. For the real, should it break into our ordinary (symbolic) world, causes evil and disaster, and even destroys it. Human trust can never be embedded in the real; it has no ontological basis. At least, such is what Lacan, one of Badiou's main references, claims. Yet, this does not prevent Badiou from claiming exactly the opposite. Universality is true because it is 'real', because it accords with being *qua Being*, and *therefore* with something inherently good. One might sum up the fundamental non-articulated line of Badiou's thought in this way: ontology is *not only* a question of mathematics; at the most fundamental level, mathematical ontology is a kind of belief in the truth and goodness of Being as such. It believes that truth and goodness can be realized, not only because they correspond to a *formal* criterion, but because, in the last resort, they correspond to being *qua Being* at the level of content. Because they are a response – or, perhaps more precisely, a gift – of being's generosity, a present proceeding from the inexhaustible source of possibility that being *qua Being* is.

A revolution can only be true to the extent that it demolishes the established social distinctions, and reinstalls society on a more universal basis. This universality is true because it throws society back upon its ontological ground, i.e. its being *qua Being*. Thus –

and here we find Badiou's presupposition – irrespective of its formal emptiness, being *qua Being* is true and good *per se*. The ontological ground of revolution, which is the 'event', presupposes the permanent *good* revolution that being *qua Being* is imagined to be: not formally, but as regards content. While formally, the 'event' disrupts society's settled organization, at the level of content, disruption itself is presumed to be inherently good. Being *qua Being* might be anarchic, impossible even to experience, but this impossible anarchy is surreptitiously considered an ontological 'archè'. It may be a field of powers and forces that no one can ever master and that is capable of being as cruel as death, but, in the long run, real being, being *qua Being*, is presumed not to be death but life. It is death's permanent resurrection. Being *qua Being* is revolution: positive, constructive revolution. This is ultimately why both revolution and fidelity to its event must be considered the real foundation of politics for Badiou. This is, I believe, the founding assumption that secretly sustains Badiou's thought.

Here, perhaps, we discover why it is that Badiou never really concerns himself with revolution's dark sides. In his eyes, Robespierre's infamous 'Regime of Terror' (1793/94) did not discredit the reputation of the French Revolution, nor did the cruel Cultural Revolution of the sixties and seventies put China's Maoist revolution in the wrong. Of course, one should best avoid such cruelties, Badiou also contends, but at the same time, he emphasizes how politics ought to not be built *solely* upon a will in order to avoid this. Politics is first and foremost a matter of truth, and thus of fidelity to an event (i.e. a revolution). Avoiding terror is noble, but with respect to truth, it takes secondary place.

Is it not for similar reasons that he fails to mention the well-known negative effects that Christian faith also produced during its history? At no place in *Saint Paul* does Badiou connect Paul's truth-claim with the terror the Church has been responsible for. Here, Badiou might argue that the reign of terror carried out by the Inquisition, for example, was caused not by the universality-claim in which Christianity originates, but precisely in the denial of it. Christianity was the cause of terror only when it lost all feeling for its 'evental' – and thus universal – ground, and became concerned with excluding non-Christians or (presumed) false Christians. To Badiou, Christianity's truth is, like every truth, neither exclusive nor inclusive of the other, but the creation of a universal ground upon which the difference between the one and the other no longer counts. This is what we must learn – and retain – from Christianity's origin as presented in the letters of Saint Paul. At least, this is what Badiou claims.

However, looking more closely at the text of these letters, one can easily perceive how, in contrast to Badiou's 'reading', Paul does articulate an inherent link between universality and exclusion. The passage in Paul's letter to the Romans where he argues his universality-claim can scarcely be read in any other way. As I will show, Paul's universality explicitly presupposes the exclusion of what one might call with Derrida its 'originary supplement'.

5. Universality's mirrors (Reading Romans 11)

If I confront Badiou here with the Paulinean text, it is not with the intention of enumerating all of the differences between the original text and Badiou's (mis)reading. One can, for instance, observe Badiou's silence over the well-known passage in Romans 13 where Paul clearly states that Christians should accept and obey the ruling political power, because "the authorities that exist have been instituted by God" (Romans 13:1). How can Badiou then argue that political revolution has something to learn from Paul? Of course, Paul does not say what Badiou says, and Badiou's reading is unquestionably coloured and contrived. But this is, in a sense, the very 'force' of his text. Badiou is not so much interpreting Paul as he is illustrating his own thesis by means of a forced reading of the Paulinean letters. If I here confront Badiou's interpretation with the Paulinean text, it is not for the sake of a so-called objective criterion we might find in it. What concerns us is not Paul's text per se, but Badiou's theory. The reading of Romans 11 I propose here is thus intended to shed some critical light on the kernel of Badiou's theory. As I will show, there is a dialectical movement in Paul's reasoning to which Badiou cannot help but remain blind. This dialectics connects universality with *time* and therefore infects Badiou's theoretical claim regarding universality as a criterion for truth. But let us first take a closer look at the 'dialectics of exclusion' at work in how Paul argues his universality-thesis in *Letter to the Romans*.

The main theme of that letter is precisely the theme Badiou emphasizes in Paul: the non-difference between Jews and Greeks. The reason why Paul wrote to the Christian community in Rome is thought to have been a major conflict between both, i.e. between those who converted from Judaism (and possibly in the majority) and those who converted from other religions (and who, as an effect of Paul's interventions, soon *became* the majority). A sense of superiority among the Jewish Christians must have forced Paul to write to them that this is without any ground, for in Christ all, Greeks *and* Jews, are equal. This is why, in his letter, Paul exhaustively expands upon Judaism and explains how the Jewish Law had failed and had been replaced by Christian Love. Think, for example, of the famous chapter 7 previously mentioned that describes the fatal 'dialectics between law and sin', and how – in chapter 8 – Christ has delivered us from this deadlock.

Chapters 9 to 11 explicitly deal with the relation between the Jewish people (Israel) and the (other) 'nations' (the 'goïm', the Gentiles). This brings Paul to one of the most important questions confronting early Christian theology .. If Israel and the 'goïm' – in Paul's vocabulary, Jews and Greeks – are non-different in Christ, why should God, at the beginning, have made them different? In other words, why did God first elect *one* nation to bring about its salvation, if he ultimately intended to bring salvation to *all* nations? Quoting a verse from Malachi, Paul refers to Israel's origin. When God elected Israel, i.e. Jacob^{xx}, the second son

of Isaac, he disowned Jacob's brother Esau, Isaac's first-born son. "Just as it is written: «Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated»", Paul quotes (11:13).^{xxi}

The God of all nations elected a single nation to whom he would give his privileged love. Why did He do so? Because of His Grace and Mercy, Paul answers, introducing a theme that will dominate Western thought for the next two millennia. "It does not depend on human desire or exertion, but on the mercy of God", he writes (9:16) In such Mercy, one can only *believe*. Faith alone gives access to it. However, in time, Israel neglected that faith and ultimately lost it. At the critical moment, the elected nation stopped believing in God's mercy and refused to recognize Jesus as the Christ. And the question again is: 'why?' Surely, it must be Israel's own mistake, since it could have done otherwise, but, as Paul claims, it is simultaneously God himself who made Israel into an obstinate unbeliever. Here, in one of Christianity's earliest texts, we encounter the inherent ambiguity of later Christian thought regarding Judaism: its blindness is its own fault as well as a blindness caused by the Lord himself.

Thus, at the beginning of chapter 11, Paul claims that God did not cast Israel away. Of course, once elected and honoured by the gift of the Law, Israel had now lost that honour, but it nonetheless remained elected, albeit in a different, fairly formal, negative way. Now it was elected *not* to see the truth; it was chosen (with eyes wide open) *not* to see that Jesus is Christ.^{xxii} It was chosen, if not to lose its election, then at least to be the "scandal" (σκάνδαλον, skandalon) among nations. In a paradoxical, ambiguous way, it was elected by the God of all nations to be *the only un-elected* nation in the world.

However, a small part of the 'nation who elected to lose its election' is nonetheless elected to save that election (to put it in a way that emphasizes the strange paradox of Paul's logic). "[A]t the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace", Paul writes (11:5). This "remnant" – a Christian one, because "chosen by *Grace*", i.e. the Jews who converted to Christianity) functions as a bridge that will bring the election to the 'nations'. This is what Jews such as Paul do: their conversion into Christianity opens salvation to all Gentiles. Here, we are entering the tricks of Christianity's 'holy economy'. For in a covert way, the conversion of the Gentiles will imply salvation for the Jews too.

Let us first focus on the Gentiles. It is through the Jews's fault that they have access to salvation. "[B]y their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles", Paul writes (11:11). *Fortunately*, the Jews transgressed the Law (nota bene precisely by trusting *solely* in the Law and not the Grace it comes from), so that Grace could be given to others, to the Gentiles. Through Israel's mistake, the world will be saved. More precisely, by becoming aware of Israel's blindness, the Gentiles will gain insight into the truth and the world will attain salvation.

The *whole* world? Yes, because the Gentiles' election will cause the Jews to become jealous, and, once again in negative fashion, will maintain their longing for salvation and for

the election that, through their willing blindness of the Messiah, they threw away. Here is the entire passage:

But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make Israel jealous. Now if their transgression means riches for the world and their defeat means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full restoration bring? (11:11-12).

Israel's jealousy holds open the door to its salvation, and thus to the salvation not only of the Gentiles, but of the *whole* world, including Israel.

This is what the Gentiles must keep in mind, Paul warns in what follows. They must not forget that Israel remains the origin of the salvation they actually enjoy. It is from this "tree" that God broke off the Jewish "branches" so that, in their place, He could graft the branches of the Gentiles. They must therefore always remember that God can do to them what he has done to the Jews. "For if God did not spare the natural branches, perhaps he will not spare you." (11:21). Thus, there is no reason to consider themselves superior to the Jews. The Gentiles, too, disobeyed the Law even though they were ignorant of that Law, - but that is their own fault, as well. Finally, it is only through the Jewish Law that they have discovered salvation. Of those Jews, Paul writes, "if they do not continue in their unbelief—will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again" (11:23).

Thus neither Jews nor Gentiles can claim to be superior to anyone else: in Christ, all have become equal. In a sense, they were already equal in their very difference. Addressing himself to the Gentiles, he writes:

Just as you were formerly disobedient to God, but have now received mercy due to their disobedience, so they too have now been disobedient in order that, by the mercy shown to you, they too may receive mercy. For God has consigned all to disobedience so that he may show mercy to all. Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! (11:30-33)

By now, it should be clear that Badiou's 'reading' could only make an abstraction of this kind of dialectical 'holy economy'. To Badiou, the "wisdom and knowledge of God" is not the secret kernel of a dialectical logic but a 'name' that translates fidelity to an event. Although it is clear now how far Badiou's 'reading' operates from Paul's literal text, it is therefore not untenable. For what Paul claims here is indeed a universal truth, i.e. a truth that enfeebles the truth-claims of both Jews and Gentiles, i.e. of the units constituting the existing world that Paul lives in. He correctly emphasizes how, to Paul too, truth is only possible as an entirely new and revolutionary universality based on the singular experience of an event.

It is, however, questionable whether the dialectical logic through which Paul develops his universality-thesis can simply be neglected as Badiou does. Badiou neglects it because, for him, the universality that Paul claims has nothing to do with dialectics (and its *Aufhebung*)^{xxiii}, but is founded in being *qua Being* or, which amounts to the same, in the *event*. What Paul, in a transcendent way, describes as the “wisdom and knowledge of God”, Badiou defines in an immanent way: the event, the experience of being *qua Being*.

Nevertheless, if we read the argument closely, we discover that universality is in fact dialectically realized. In Paul, universality is not so much the result of an event as it is the result of an enduring mutual relation between two oppositions. Or, even more dialectically, it is the result of how a ‘split’, after many vicissitudes, finally is overcome. The starting point is the split between one elected nation and the totality of others, i.e. between Israel and the Gentiles, whereas the main purpose of (inherently ‘catholic’) Christianity is to realize the same election on a universal (‘catholic’) level: in other words to realize Israel’s election on the level of the Gentiles *plus* Israel.

In fact, the realization of universal salvation is profoundly imaginary. According to the text’s logic, it does not so much rest on reality or events as on images that each participant ascribes to the other. As we saw, it is a logic of jealousy. It is because the Jews believed too exclusively in their own Law (and forgot the Grace it came from) that they lost their election-status. This was then transferred to the Gentiles, precisely in order to make the Jews jealous, so that they would not forget to long for the salvation they had ‘willingly’ refused. Confronted with the ‘other’, Israel is expected to remain blind to the image it sees of its own salvation; it is only a persistent, secret jealousy that ultimately opens its eyes. On the other hand, the Gentiles must not blame the Jews for their ‘jealousy’, for they too ought rather to be jealous of the Jews, since Israel remains the origin of their salvation. They, too, must continue to hold Israel as the image of their salvation.

The logic that Paul performs in Romans 11 represents universal salvation as the result of a mutual relation between Israel and the Gentiles, i.e. between those who once were elected among all nations, and the universe of nations newly inheriting that election. What is crucial here is that this relation is supported not so much by reality as by *images*. It is the image of the other that supports one’s universality-claim. We can only encounter Israel’s universality in the image of the Gentiles’ salvation, as Paul argues. Similarly, the Gentiles must also recognize their salvation in the image of Israel’s election. It is precisely this imaginary relationship that installs a permanent jealousy between both the Gentiles and Israel, each constructing their own identity in an imaginary relation to the other – simultaneously admiring and jealous.^{xxiv}

However, the tension between the Gentiles and Israel – between universality and election – is not described as a dialectical relation *in the strictly Hegelian sense of the term*: i.e. a relation of two opposites progressively growing towards each other. On the contrary,

only the Gentiles progressively grow towards the other, whereas Israel – the part of Israel that rejects Christ – remains *outside* that evolution. Here, Paul must explicitly rely on what he calls God's "mystery" (μυστήριον, *mustèrion*). Warning the Gentiles that they ought not consider themselves superior to Israel, he writes:

For I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: A partial hardening has happened to Israel until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved. (11:25-26)

Universality's realization is not a gradual evolution, but a process in which a single small original element obstinately resists. What is more, the whole process only operates thanks to that original resistant element.

6. Truth & time

What is the function of Israel's blindness in Gods 'holy economy'? Referring to certain recent philosophical schemas, one might say that, in Romans 9-11, Israel functions as an "originary supplement", (Derrida 1967; 1976), or as "*objet petit a*" (Lacan 1978; 1979). The logical construction of identity (here: universal salvation) is always already *deconstructed* by some seemingly unimportant detail it originally excluded but upon which it secretly depends, as Derrida argues. Similarly, the imaginary/symbolic identity Lacan talks about is 'decentered' by an originally excluded object (*objet petit a*). In that sense, the construction of a universality-identity (for this is what a 'truth-procedure' concerns) only functions by means of a 'radical' exclusion, i.e. an exclusion at the level of the 'radix' or origin. From this perspective, truth or universality is never *really* what it is. Truth will always need to conquer a little piece of 'untruth' or (so to speak) 'a-truth', in order to *really* become what it is – meaning that it will never be what is really is. Universality will always be forced to fight against a single strange left-over, a kind of 'originary remainder' by which it is at the same time secretly sustained.

Paul's text ultimately argues that kind of exclusion *away*, it is true: once time's circle is closed, Israel, too, will be saved and all Gentiles will become 'Israel'. But, contrary to Badiou, Paul does refer to the logic of original exclusion, and in a way admits that the only solution to the problem is a 'deus ex machina', his reference to God's '*mysterion*'. Paul at least recognizes, that is, a kind of unmanageable split or difference at the very heart of the truth-procedure he is setting up – and even in the truth that he is promoting. This problem is absent in Badiou. For Badiou, truth is One and Indivisible; it is not marked by any kind of difference. And neither is the truth-procedure. It operates in a world that is filled with differences, but is itself without difference. Universality's truth-procedure will never cease

struggling against the differences, distinctions, fissures and ‘splittings’ the world is comprised of, but is never described as split *in itself* or as characterized by an inner exclusion. Nowhere does Badiou define it as being dependent on – or deconstructed by – an ‘originary remainder’, unwittingly produced by the universality-claim itself.

The fundamental problem behind all this is Badiou’s theory of time, more specifically, how he links time with being and truth. Like other twentieth-century philosophers, he attempts to think the inner temporality of truth and being. This is the main question of *Being and the Event* – and, in a way, his entire oeuvre. Truth-claims are possible, he argues in this text, even if truth is no longer founded in eternal substances, in a *Ding an sich* (*Thing in-itself*). More precisely, truths, even ‘eternal’ truth, are *only* possible if they are *not* based in any kind of substantial and eternal *Ding an sich*. Only historicity and temporality can be truth’s foundation – temporality, considered not as a continuum, but as a contingent series of discontinuities, of ‘events’. Truth is inherently contingent. Its ‘site’ is the *event*, the eruption of an unforeseen and unforeseeable ‘occurrence’ or ‘happening’. It emerges only when what is settled becomes ‘unsettled,’ when particular distinctions that hold society together collapse; when being – i.e. the realm of existing differences – loses every supposed ground. This is when being is delivered to ‘itself’, i.e. to its ‘being *qua* *Being*’ lacking all self, - the empty set, the void. If there is truth, it is based on being *qua* *Being*, i.e. upon the void, the unseen lack in the supposed totality of being. Yet, truth is not some kind of “illumination” emerging suddenly from lack. Truth is a “procedure”, a process. Besides its foundation in pure temporality (contingency), it is by definition a temporal procedure as well: a procedure both using time and limited in time. If Badiou speaks of it in terms of “eternal truth”, then, eternity is not the opposite of temporality but of actuality.^{xxv} Truth is only eternal in so far as it is radically different from the actual differences and distinctions the world is made of.

Yet, how precisely is time involved in a truth-procedure? Doubtless in the way that it takes time, once there has been a fidelity to an event, to build up the subject of that fidelity as well as its object (truth). But is not time essentially employed here *to keep time out*? Is it not used to *deny* the inherent temporality of ‘eternal truth’? Can we not say the procedure is temporary only insofar as it takes all the time to deny that the eternal truth it is fighting for, is affected by time? Remember, Paul explicitly links difference with time. It is precisely because the truth – universal salvation – was marked by difference (by a holy/unholy remainder, by Israel as origin/remainder) that it took time to be realized. It took literally *all* the time. In his eyes, the actualized universal salvation coincides with a destruction of time. itself To Paul, the destruction of differences equals the destruction of time. Is this not the case in Badiou as well? Truth is beyond existing differences and, in that sense, ‘eternal’. However, isn’t truth’s eternity and infinity most especially the result of a truth-procedure’s continuous exclusion of time? This is what certain passages in Badiou literally say. For example, in his book on Deleuze, we read: “It is in the abolition of time that truth’s eternity emerges” (Badiou, 1997b:

97). Are truth and truth-procedure ever possible then, without either taking all the time to exclude time, or, in a purely *formal* way, to exclude it imaginarily, i.e. to act as *if* time does not – or does not *yet* – affect the truth we are fighting for?

But how could truth not be affected – and thus weakened, destabilized and undermined – by time? If being is temporal, if being is at times turned over by revolutionary events, why should truths escape that rule? They do not, Badiou would reply. Truths, too, are susceptible to revolutions. However, they cannot take this into account, precisely because they are based upon revolutions. A revolution is the effect of history's contingency but, once started, it can no longer take into account its own contingency. This would shatter its militancy in advance. It can only unconditionally promote the truth to which it is faithful.. No truth procedure can pretend to install once and for all the ever-lasting true society, but they nevertheless speak in the name of a truth that is different from all the differences society is made of, a truth that is the one and indivisible truth of those differences. It is in this sense that truth can be eternal.

Here, in this difficult and paradoxical knot of Badiou's thought, one can see the hidden, unarticulated assumption slumbering in his *formal* ontology once more. Although this ontology is said to be strictly formal (mathematical), it is secretly supported by a presupposition at the level of content, i.e. a belief in being's fundamental goodness and generosity. Truth's universality-criterion is based in the non-differential, universal character of being *qua Being*, and the fact that we can trust that ontological side of being supposes that it is *in itself* trustworthy; that being *qua Being* is 'good' and 'generous'.

Badiou's theory of eternal truth presupposes the same belief. For if truth is based in a revolutionary event, it is founded not in being (i.e. the totality of particular sets) but in being *qua Being*. And if truth is marked by time, it is by the kind of time that, on one level of being, intervenes destructively, but at the level of being *qua Being*, is positive and constitutive. It is precisely ontological time – the time of being *qua Being* – that makes truth 'eternal'.^{xxvi} Every genuine truth-claim is anchored in this ontological foundation and in the type of time that reigns there as well. That is why a truth-claim and its procedure are immune to the temporary differences that being is made of. Truths and truth-procedures are embedded in a time in which destruction and death do not represent finitude, limitation, decline, beginning and ending^{xxvii}, the hallmarks of being at the level of life and society as they normally function. At the ontological level, however, there is neither beginning nor end, because, there, death equals resurrection, and destruction is only another word for the liberation of being's truth. At that level, there is only the presence of 'presentation', a presence radically different from the temporary differences characterizing the level of 'representation'. In this ontological and 'eternal' presence, death is always already resurrection. Except, you cannot put it the other way round: resurrection is not always already death. Death, life and death, temporality, finitude etc. belong exclusively to the worldly time of being. Being *qua Being* has only life.

There, even death is life, in the way immediately it turns into resurrection. And this is why we can trust that ontological level and make it the base of our truth. At least, such is the hidden assumption slumbering in Badiou's ontological theory of truth. He himself emphasizes how ontology and truth are to be purely formally defined.

This is what he emphasizes in Saint Paul as well. Paul's formal 'Catholicism' is the ontological condition of truth as such. But this is not the ontological condition defended by traditional Christianity, Badiou stresses. For God is dead, and if truth is based in being as such, one can only claim this on purely formal, mathematical grounds. But the question I raised here is whether the dead God does not secretly return in Badiou's supposedly atheist, formal ontology. Doesn't the Christian God, being's Creator and therefore truth's ultimate base, secretly resurrect himself in Badiou's ontology? Isn't God, including his resurrection, simply ontologized? Is he not still responsible, despite his death, for being's permanent resurrection? Does He not survive in the assumption that being's permanent resurrection – or, which amounts to the same thing, permanent revolution – is inherently good and generous? Is he not still the ultimate guarantee, enabling us to speak in the name of being *qua Being* so that we can remain settled in an eternal truth beyond being's contingency?

Given time and space constraints, I am unable to extensively explore this basic assumption at the level of content (perhaps a fundamentally *Christian* assumption) that I have been arguing secretly sustains Badiou's purely formal ontology. This has nevertheless given us a certain insight into the way he attempts to reinstall a fundamental trust in a positive, creative idea of being *qua Being*. After all he is not the only one in this attempt. Deleuze and many other post-modern philosophers seem driven by the same concern. But, unlike Badiou, their ontology operates *explicitly at the level of content*, and this, to them, appears to be no problem at all. From this perspective, perhaps the most interesting point in Badiou is his refusal to do so. Even if, as I suggested, he does not really succeed in creating a purely formal ontology, he at least admits, as Kant did before him, that speaking in the name of being *qua Being* (at least at the level of content), will forever be impossible. Badiou's philosophy shows how difficult it is to construct a theory of truth that does not secretly speak in the name of a God, i.e. a theory that doesn't presume to know the content of being *qua Being*. But, difficult or not, this is what we are called upon to do. We must speak about being without basing our speaking on any insight into Being as such: this is the problem that our modernity and/or post-modernity still confronts.

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ⁱ Badiou discerns four “generic procedures”, four domains independent from each other, each supporting the possibility for a proper Truth procedure: science, politics, art and love. Cf. for instance (Badiou, 1988: 23). See also (Lecerle, 1999: 9).

ⁱⁱ Cf. the first part of Bruno Bosteels’s excellent essay about “Badiou’s Theory of the Subject” (Bosteels, 2001).

ⁱⁱⁱ Think, for example, of a famous passage in his seventh chapter of his *Letter to the Romans*: “For we know that the law is spiritual – but I am unspiritual, sold into slavery to sin. For I don’t understand what I am doing. For I do not do what I want – instead, I do what I hate. But if I do what I don’t want, I agree that the law is good. But now it is no longer me doing it, but sin that lives in me. For I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh. For I want to do the good, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but I do the very evil I do not want! Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer me doing it but sin that lives in me.” (Letter to the Romans 7: 14-20). For Lacan’s comment of this passage, cf. (Lacan, 1986: 100-102) and (Lacan, 1992: 82-84).

^{iv} *Κατά*, *kata*: stands for ‘concerning’; and *όλος*, *holos* means ‘the whole’, ‘the universe’.

^v Cf. his article, “Idéologie et appareils idéologiques d’État” in (Althusser, 1976).

^{vi} In this respect, one must remember that Luther’s great enemy was not primarily the Pope (it was only later he gradually became virulent antipapal), but Aristotle. A few months before he nailed his 95 theses (on the “power and efficacy of indulgences”) on the Wittenberg church door (October 31, 1517), Luther had written another series of theses (as was a typical in those days, a proposal for public ‘disputatio’), that made his anti-Aristotelianism very clear. By way of illustration, I quote several of these theses: “41: Almost the entire Ethics of Aristotle is bad and against grace. 43: It is wrong to say: without Aristotle, one cannot become a theologian. 44: On the contrary, one becomes only theologian without Aristotle. 50: In short, the whole work of Aristotle relates to theology as darkness to light.” A few weeks before (May 18), in a letter to a friend about the intellectual climate at his university, Luther wrote: “Aristotle is declining and his definite downfall is near.” (Boendermaker, 1982: 57, 60; my translation).

^{vii} Cf. (Dijksterhuis, 1969). According to Dijksterhuis, the “mechanization”, typically modern way of looking at the world, goes hand in hand with the fact that mathematics has become increasingly dominant in our science.

^{viii} Cf., for instance: (Badiou, 1988: 20ff). Cf. also Peter Hallward’s interview, “Politics and Philosophy : An Interview with Alain Badiou” in (Badiou, 2001: 130ff).

^{ix} In an interview in *Artforum*, Badiou claims: “The real romantic heritage – which is still with us today – is the theme of finitude. The idea that an apprehension of the human condition occurs primordially in the understanding of its finitude maintains infinity at a distance that’s both evanescent and sacred and holds it in the vicinity of a vision of being that’s still theological. That’s why I think the only really contemporary requirement for philosophy since Nietzsche is the secularization of infinity. [...] Mathematics secularizes infinity in the clearest way, by formalizing it.” (Badiou, 1994: 86). For a more elaborated version of this issue, cf. his essay “Philosophie et mathématique” in (Badiou, 1992: 157-178).

^x In this respect it is significant that the first reference in *L’être et l’événement* is, precisely, Heidegger (cf. Badiou, 1988: 7).

^{xi} Badiou wrote a monographic study on Deleuze (Badiou, 1997b).

^{xii} In his book on Deleuze, Badiou claims: “je soutiens pour ma part que Deleuze est sur nombre de points cruciaux (la différence, l’ouvert, le temps ...) moins éloigné de Heidegger qu’on l’imagine communément, et sans doute qu’il ne le pense lui-même” (Badiou, 1997b: 34). « For my own part, I recall that on a number of crucial points (difference, the opening, time) Deleuze is less far from Heidegger than one commonly imagines, and that he doubtless thinks so himself. ».

^{xiii} See for example, the “Fifth Meditation” of *L’être et l’événement*, (Badiou, 1988: 73-83). For Badiou’s theory of the empty set as a criticism of Deleuze concept of ‘the virtual’, see Badiou, 1997b: 70-72.

^{xiv} In this sense, Badiou will define truth as a “diagonal” set: “La vérité est diagonale au regard de tous les sous-ensembles communitaires, elle ne s’autorise d’aucune identité et (ce point est évidemment le plus délicat) elle n’en constitue aucune.” (Badiou 1997a: 15). “Truth is diagonal with regard to all the communal under-sets; it neither gives any identity nor (and this point is clearly the most delicate) does it constitute any.”

^{xv} For a more elaborated ‘mathematical’ analysis of the French Revolution, see Badiou, 1988: 201ff.

^{xvi} According to Badiou, the post-modern idea that there are no longer truths and that there is a fortiori no longer a single Universal Truth is an ideological idea in the negative sense of the word. This kind of relativism secretly claims a single grand *empty* Truth: the truth that everything is related to the great unifier of capitalism’s money. Against this empty universal claim, Badiou wishes to reinstall the possibility of truly universal claims that acknowledge their own contingency (or “relativity”) in a correct, non-dissembling way. See, among many other passages, Badiou, 1997a: 7.

^{xvii} Both passages are cited in Badiou, 1997a: 10.

^{xviii} For the notion of intervention, see. for instance Badiou, 1988: 223-233 and Badiou, 1997a: 33.

^{xix} For the concepts of ‘situation’ and ‘site’ (comparable to some extent with ‘representation’ and ‘presentation’, or, ‘set of sets’ and ‘empty sets’), see Badiou, 1988: 114ff, 121-128, 193-198.

^{xx} It is Jacob, Isaac’s son, whose name, after having fought with him in a dark night, God changed to “Israel” (Genesis 32, 23-32).

^{xxi} Not that, in the passage of Malachi, God proves his “love” for Israel/Jacob by explicitly referring to the exclusion of his brother Esau: “What follows is divine revelation. The word of the Lord came to Israel through Malachi: ‘I have shown love to you,’ says the Lord; but you say, ‘How have you shown love to us?’ ‘Esau was Jacob’s brother,’ the Lord explains, ‘yet I chose Jacob, and rejected Esau. I made Esau’s mountains bare of population and gave his land to the jackals of the desert.’” (Malachi 1: 1-3).

^{xxii} Letter to the Romans 11:8-10: “as it is written, «God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, *to this very day.*» And David says, «*Let their table become a snare and trap, a stumbling block [skandalon] and a retribution for them; let their eyes be darkened so that they may not see, and make their backs bend continually*».

^{xxiii} See for example the chapter in *Saint Paul*: “L’antidialectique de la mort et de la resurrection,” Badiou 1997a: 69-78.

^{xxiv} It is strange how Badiou, who, often refers explicitly to Lacan in his theory of the subject, does not pay much attention to the *imaginary* dimension of subject-constitution and of the subject itself. For Lacan, the imaginary is one of the indispensable elements of the subject; it is the foundation of the *fantasy*, which is the *imaginary* support of the *symbolic* subject as well as the subject’s final protection against the *real*. The theory of the fantasy is one of the reasons for the emphasis on the imaginary in the late Lacan (see Julien 1996).

^{xxv} “D’où une loi, de portée considérable: *le vrai n’a chance d’être distinguable du véridique* [Badiou’s term for knowledge in the common sense of the word] *que s’il est infini. Une vérité (si elle existe) est une partie infinie de la situation.*” (Badiou 1988 : 368). “Whence a law, of considerable weight: the only way truth can be distinguished from knowledge is that it is infinite. A truth (should it exist) is an infinite part of the situation.” On truth and immortality, see also Hallward, 2003: 156-159.

^{xxvi} Infinity characterizes being solely in its ontological dimension and is, therefore, the result of an “ontological decision”. Badiou 1988: 167: “D’où cet énoncé crucial: la thèse de l’infinité de l’être est nécessairement une décision ontologique, c’est-à-dire un axiome.” “Whence this crucial statement : the thesis of the infinity of being is necessarily an ontological decision, that’s to say, an axiom.”

^{xxvii} Cf. the passage in *L’être et l’événement* where he asserts that, at the ontological level, “being does not begin” (Badiou 1988: 233: “L’être ne commence pas.”).