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"SEE WHAT IS COMING TO PASS AND NOT ONLY WHAT
IS":

ALAIN BADIOU AND THE POSSIBILITY OF A
POSTMETAPHYSICAL THEOLOGY

I

In "God is Dead," the prologue to his work on transitory ontology, French philosopher Alain Badiou presents a summary of our post-theological situation:

Our times are undoubtedly those of the disappearance of the gods without return. But this disappearance stems from three distinct processes, for there have been three capital gods, namely, of religion, metaphysics, and the poets. Regarding the God of religions, its death must simply be declared. . . . Regarding the God of metaphysics, thought must accomplish its course in the infinite. . . . As for the God of poetry, the poem must cleanse language from within by slicing off the agency of loss and return. That is because we have lost nothing and nothing returns. . . . Committed to the triple destitution of the gods, we, inhabitants of the Earth's infinite sojourn, can assert that everything is here, always here, and that thought's reserve lies in the thoroughly informed and firmly declared egalitarian platitude of what befalls upon us here. Here is the place where truths come to be. Here we are infinite. Here nothing is promised to us, only to be faithful to what befalls upon us.¹

Badiou presents theology with a challenge: is it still possible to speak of God after "the disappearance of the gods"? Theologians today find themselves in a peculiar situation. Having already passed through the purgatorial fires of the "Death of God" movement in the 1960s and 1970s, many disregard Badiou's statement as passé. God may have "disappeared" for a previous generation, but God has returned stronger than ever. Today the topic of theological metaphysics is all the rage: whether in the "continental" vein of Radical Orthodoxy or in the "analytic" work of the burgeoning Analytic Theology movement. Moreover, the notion that the death of the "God of religions" must today "simply be declared" strikes many as simply incredible. There may be a

¹ Alain Badiou, *Briefings on Existence: A Short Treatise on Transitory Ontology*, trans. Norman Madarasz (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006; 1998), 30-31.

crisis in the established *institutions* of religion, but the *God* of religion is as healthy as ever. We live in an age of the proliferation of gods, not their demise.² For this reason, the whole conversation about God's death is now frequently viewed as simplistic and naïve. In our hubris, we only *thought* God was dead.

In the face of such concerns, it might perhaps be better to read Badiou's statement not as analytic but as programmatic. It is not a phenomenological or sociological statement about the status of God in modern society; it is instead a methodology for future philosophical work: we must *make* God "disappear." This, at least, is how Badiou sees his own task. He takes for granted the death of the God of religion. The once-living God *has* died—"God is finished," he says—so that "what subsists is no longer religion, but its theater."³ What remains then is not God, but rather the metaphysical *concept* of God, and this concept cannot die because it was never living in the first place. The metaphysical deity is a rational postulate, and therefore it is "inaccessible to death."⁴ The Aristotelian notion of the unmoved mover is a perfect example, since "who can declare this indifferent and immobile eternity to be living?"⁵ This leaves the philosopher with a task: to construct an ontology that overcomes or disappears the metaphysical God. This is what Badiou calls "finishing up with finitude" or enabling thought to "accomplish its course in the infinite."⁶ His own mathematical ontology, presented in *L'Être et l'événement* (ET *Being and Event*), accomplishes precisely this in its use of set theory to banalize (i.e., de-absolutize) the infinite and, conversely, to infinitize the mundane.⁷ In other words, if "God" simply names the infinite, then "God," according to Badiou's ontology, is now simply an element of the material world.

The question for Christian theology is whether Badiou is merely an antagonist, or whether he can serve as an ally in the task of contemporary theological reflection.⁸ And if the latter, under

² A 2002 *Atlantic Monthly* article quoted David Barrett, editor of the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, as stating, "We have identified nine thousand and nine hundred distinct and separate religions in the world, increasing by two or three new religions every day." Toby Lester, "Oh, Gods!" *Atlantic Monthly* (February 2002): 38.

³ Badiou, *Briefings on Existence*, 23–24.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁶ See *ibid.*, 29–31.

⁷ See Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (London: Continuum, 2005). Originally published as Alain Badiou, *L'Être et l'événement* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1988).

⁸ The persistent danger in engaging Badiou is that it will not take the atheism that is essential to his project seriously, that it will be what Adam Miller calls a "religious co-opting." In a 2005 interview with Miller, Badiou acknowledges that this co-opting exists, and yet he affirms it in a way: "It exists because when your work concerns the relation between truth and an event you are necessarily exposed to a religious interpretation. . . . And so, I have to deal with this sort of religious co-opting of my work and I have to propose a subtraction of

what conditions? The argument of this paper is that previous attempts to find an ally in Badiou for theology have located the alliance in the wrong places, or have at least engaged him under the wrong conditions and presuppositions. I will use the work of Frederiek Depoortere as my primary example. Whereas earlier theological engagements with Badiou have sought to reinscribe a metaphysical deity, this paper understands Badiou's challenge to theology to be: *how can we speak of God without metaphysics?* The bulk of the essay is then devoted to exploring the insights that ought to be drawn from Badiou for theology—insights related not to being but to appearing, incorporation, and subjectivation. It is not, or at least not only, Badiou's set-theoretic metaontology (theory of *being*), but rather his transcendental logic (theory of *appearing*) and his mature theory of the subject,⁹ that offers the most significant resources for Christian self-reflection. Rather than try to find a new way of fitting God within the general structure of being, theology should understand God as a contingent transontological event whose kerygmatic trace becomes the occasion for the subjectivation of a body. By engaging Badiou along these lines, it will be suggested that his philosophy dovetails well with the hermeneutical theology of Rudolf Bultmann.

II

Badiou's philosophical project, by way of a very complex mathematical ontology, has two basic goals: (a) liberate infinity from its abstract metaphysical connotations and make it to be descriptive of the concrete multiplicity of material reality;¹⁰ and

my work from it. But I accept the discussion. I accept the discussion because I think that in the present world the great and fundamental problem is not between the religious way and the non-religious way. . . . So, the discussion is, for me, a positive discussion." Adam S. Miller, "An Interview with Alain Badiou: 'Universal Truths and the Question of Religion,'" *Journal of Philosophy and Scripture* 3, no. 1 (2005): 41–42. This paper is born from the conviction that a certain kind of atheism is essential to Christian faith, if it is really faith in the God crucified in Christ. What Badiou rejects in his polemical claims about the infinite is only a notion of God as a metaphysical absolute. But Christian faith already has the resources to demythologize such a notion, so the engagement with Badiou is less a co-opting than a happy convergence. In a sense, Badiou functions for my project the way Heidegger functioned for Bultmann.

⁹ See Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event* 2, trans. Alberto Toscano (London: Continuum, 2009). Originally published as Alain Badiou, *Logiques des mondes: L'Être et l'événement*, 2 (Paris: Le Seuil, 2006).

¹⁰ Cf. Kenneth A. Reynhout, "Alain Badiou: Hidden Theologian of the Void?" *Heythrop Journal* 52 (2011): 226: "This rules out any qualitative understanding of the infinite; the infinite must be mathematical and quantitative. In Badiou's world, mathematics alone can speak of the infinite, and mathematics has spoken!" See also Badiou, *Briefings on Existence*, 30: "As for philosophy, the aim is to finish up with the motif of finitude and its hermeneutical escort. The key point is to unseal the

(b) still make it possible to speak about the occurrence of something new and surprising that arises out of immanence and does not depend upon a transcendent miracle. These two goals are captured in the title of his *magnum opus*: *Being and Event*. For Badiou, the concept of infinity is removed from theology and located within mathematics or ontology. What we encounter in the world is the presentation of infinite multiplicity, behind which there is no "One"—no absolute ground of being, no Parmenidean essence, no divine creator.

Badiou defines metaphysics at this stage in his philosophical career as "the *enframing* of Being by the One,"¹¹ that is to say, as the commandeering of multiplicity by an absolute infinite. Metaphysics posits a "one" that stands behind or above pure multiplicity. In the essay, "Metaphysics and the Critique of Metaphysics," he offers the following definition:

The name of "metaphysics" will then be given to that discursive disposition which claims that an undetermined being . . . that is, a being whose determination exceeds our cognitive power, is required to complete the edifice of rational knowledge. This undetermined being is classically given the name of God, but metaphysics lasts well beyond this name. It is enough, for metaphysics to retains its power, that it be able to place, within a discursive framework available to all . . . a point of indeterminacy that may, from that moment on, harbour any signifier of mastery whatsoever.¹²

The metaphysical placeholder of "God" serves as the condition for the possibility of rational knowledge. In one sense, it is the name given to the *ens necessarium* that satisfies Leibniz's principle of sufficient reason,¹³ or which secures the certainty of Descartes's *cogito ergo sum*.¹⁴ This God is the "suture of mathematical truths to their being," i.e., the ontological structure that binds together thinking and being.¹⁵ Badiou nuances this critique of metaphysics in his more recent work (a point to which I will return), but the

infinite from its millenary collusion with the One. It is to restitute the infinite to the banality of manifold-being, as mathematics has invited us to do since Cantor. For it is as a suture of the infinite and the One that the supposed transcendence of the metaphysical God is constructed. It is upon this suture that the surviving intra-subjective trace feeds."

¹¹ Cf. Badiou, *Briefings on Existence*, 34.

¹² Alain Badiou, "Metaphysics and the Critique of Metaphysics," *Pli* 10 (2000): 182.

¹³ For a full critique of this principle by a pupil of Badiou, see the brilliantly argued work of Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency* (London: Continuum, 2008).

¹⁴ For a theological critique of this Cartesian conception of God, see Eberhard Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, trans. Darrell L. Guder (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1983).

¹⁵ Badiou, *Briefings on Existence*, 23.

general thrust of his position remains consistent with the original axiom of *Being and Event*: "the one is not"—there is only infinite multiplicity in its utter contingency.¹⁶ If that is the case, what room is there for true talk about God? If Badiou defines metaphysics as the grounding of being in the one, whither theology when being is now grounded in the pure nothingness of the void (marked as \emptyset)?

In the face of this dilemma for theology, Kenneth Reynhout presents five possible theological responses to Badiou's philosophy. The first two are extreme positions: (1) ignore or reject Badiou entirely, or (2) fully accept Badiou's ontology, including the total denial of God. Assuming neither of these options are worth considering, he identifies three mediating positions: (3) reject Badiou's ontology in favor of an alternative, (4) accept Badiou's ontology for the most part, but demonstrate that his atheist conclusion does not follow from his axiomatic decisions regarding set theory, or (5) accept that Badiou's theory precludes a certain conception of the divine, "but then take this argument as a theological opportunity to creatively rethink our understanding of God."¹⁷ Reynhout finds all three moderate positions worthy of serious consideration, and he explores a version of the fifth option as a thought-experiment, suggesting the possibility that God is "hidden" in Badiou's set-theoretic ontology in the form of the void.¹⁸ While I have some misgivings about Reynhout's suggestion,¹⁹ I am more interested in examining the work of Frederiek Depoortere. His recent book, *Badiou and Theology*,²⁰ is a mixture of the third and fourth options. He rejects the atheist conclusion of Badiou, but to do so, he also must make a significant modification to Badiou's ontology.

¹⁶ Badiou, *Being and Event*, 23.

¹⁷ Reynhout, "Alain Badiou," 220.

¹⁸ Ibid., 229–31.

¹⁹ Reynhout appeals to Tillich's definition of God as being-itself or the ground of being, and since the void replaces the one-infinite as the new foundation for being in Badiou's ontology, Reynhout makes the bold move of identifying the no-thingness of the void as the location of God's being. Though creative and provocative, the problem I see with this approach is that it does not escape the metaphysical. Badiou defines the void as the subtractive "suture-to-being" in a situation, meaning that the void joins or sutures the truth of a situation to its being (Badiou, *Being and Event*, 55). At the same time, Badiou explicitly defines the metaphysical god as "the suture of mathematical truths to their being" (Badiou, *Briefings on Existence*, 23). In other words, he has intentionally replaced the metaphysical god with the void or null-set; the space once filled by metaphysics is now filled by mathematics. But this means any attempt to find God in the void is to bring back the dead god of metaphysics. While I am thus critical of Reynhout's attempt to engage Badiou theologically, I have also learned much from him through numerous personal conversations, for which I am immensely grateful.

²⁰ Frederiek Depoortere, *Badiou and Theology* (London: T & T Clark, 2009).

Whereas Reynhout at least intends to join Badiou in jettisoning metaphysics and thus tries to work within the framework of Badiou's metaontology, Depoortere actively argues *in favor of classical metaphysics* and advocates a major correction to Badiou's metaontology to reassert the validity of an absolute infinite being. In order to make sense of his argument, we have to examine the conditions within which he stages his appropriation of Badiou. First, Depoortere wholly rejects the fifth option's attempt to "rethink" God. As he states in his introduction, "the God of the Christian tradition *is* the metaphysical God of the philosophers."²¹ He goes on to say that "we take the historical consensus of classic theism as our starting point," because "it is not possible to turn back the hands of time." Any attempt in Christian theology to rethink the being of God "would have to drop the major part of its tradition and would have to reinvent itself almost from the very beginning."²² This paper does not share Depoortere's assumption that such reinvention and reinterpretation is necessarily problematic or undesirable, or that we must wait for a "new consensus . . . to replace the older one" before challenging the metaphysical conception of God.²³ Theology always has to start again from the beginning; it has to speak anew to the present situation. I therefore do not recognize "classic theism" as being in any way binding or normative for my project.

Second, and more importantly, Depoortere defines the theological task in apologetic terms. He argues, in fact, that faith in God is impossible unless theology can *prove* the existence of God apart from faith. In other words, natural theology precedes and grounds dogmatic theology. "*True* religion and *true* faith" require "a proof for the existence of God," he says, in order to avoid the "closed circle of faith presupposing faith."²⁴ And "the only way to escape from this closed circle is to prove the existence of God *without* presupposing faith."²⁵ In defending this position, Depoortere aligns himself with the First Vatican Council's statement that God's existence can "be known with certainty from the consideration of created things, by the natural power of human reason."²⁶ He claims that the *analogia entis* in Thomas Aquinas provides precisely this proof of God's existence.²⁷ The

²¹ Ibid., 24.

²² Ibid., 24–25.

²³ Ibid., 25. While it is beyond the scope of this argument, I would argue that such rethinking is not only a continual feature of the Christian church throughout history ever since the Jerusalem Council, but it is also basic to the gospel itself as a word that always demands (in correspondence to the incarnation) to be heard within the present historical context.

²⁴ Ibid., 22.

²⁵ Ibid., 38.

²⁶ Quoted in ibid., 37. He admits on the following page that this is contrary to the view of most Catholic theologians.

²⁷ Cf. ibid., 51–55. Depoortere assumes that Thomas Aquinas is a proponent of natural theology, and that the *analogia entis* functions in his work as a natural epistemological foundation for knowledge of

only problem is that Thomas's Aristotelian conception of nature is outdated. What is needed now is an analogy of being grounded in a modern scientific and mathematical ontology, and Badiou provides such an ontology. The primary defect of Badiou's system, according to Depoortere, is that it unnecessarily precludes a metaphysical absolute, so Depoortere returns to certain elements in Cantor's set theory that Badiou axiomatically rejects in order to reclaim the notion of an Absolute Infinite. Through this major revision of Badiou's ontology, a mathematical *analogia entis* is now possible.²⁸ Depoortere agrees with Badiou that material reality is ontologically infinite, but against Badiou he argues for God as the Absolute Infinite whose being is analogically disclosed through the infinity of nature.

A number of problems beset this study. In terms of actually understanding Badiou, the work falls far short of the mark. Out of four sections, only one is spent analyzing Badiou's philosophy, and this one chapter looks at "Badiou on Being." When the main text under discussion is *Being and Event*, it is ironic that there is not a single sustained discussion of the event or any related concepts (e.g., site, trace, genericity, forcing, subjectivation). But as Badiou makes clear throughout his works, the ontological analysis of being has no other purpose than to clarify what we mean by the event and its relation to the particular situation. A theory of the event, he says, "is what any contemporary philosophy worthy of the name takes as its veritable goal."²⁹ To isolate ontology from the problems of event and existence in a world is therefore to falsify the entire presentation of Badiou's project.

In terms of the book's theology, the results are no less disappointing. Depoortere concludes *Badiou and Theology* with a lengthy endnote wherein he identifies two presuppositions guiding the work.³⁰ The first is his identification of God with the infinite, as opposed to what he calls the "Augustinian" notion that God is beyond both finite and infinite. Corresponding to this is the second presupposition, referred to earlier, that "it is possible to say something about God starting from creation, that there is a way to follow from world to God." He explicitly sides with defenders of "natural theology," even though, he admits, it is entirely possible that "each attempt to reach God from below

God. He does not take into consideration the counter-arguments of scholars such as Victor Preller.

²⁸ Depoortere quotes Robert Russell's statement that "each of [the Absolute Infinite's] properties must be found in at least one transfinite number. The Absolute is disclosed through the relative, or transfinite, infinities, and yet it is through this disclosure that it remains hidden, ineffable, incomprehensible." *Ibid.*, 126.

²⁹ Alain Badiou, *Second Manifesto for Philosophy*, trans. Louise Burchill (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2011), 50. Originally published as Alain Badiou, *Second manifeste pour la philosophie* (Paris: Fayard, 2009).

³⁰ Depoortere, *Badiou and Theology*, 146–47n90. All quotes in the rest of this paragraph are taken from this note.

entangles one in the clutches of ontotheology in which God is reduced to a human projection." The Augustinian solution noted above is attractive because "the challenges posed by Badiou . . . simply disappear," since Badiou, like Depoortere, assumes the metaphysical identity of the concept of God with the infinite. Depoortere rejects this approach because

if we reject natural theology, we reject the possibility of a proof for the existence of God, but if we reject such a proof, we are condemned to remain locked up in the closed circle of faith presupposing faith and *to remain mute when militant atheists like Dawkins et al. proclaim their simplistic rebuttals of God.* However, that is a price I am not willing to pay.³¹

Depoortere wants a rational theological apologetic capable of mounting a defense of Christianity against its cultured despisers, even if this results in "God" being nothing more than a human projection. To attain his goal, he presupposes that the metaphysical absolute of the philosophers is identical with the living God of Christian faith.

Why, we ask, should we take these presuppositions for granted? Why should the rejection of natural theology render one mute before critics of Christian faith? Conversely, why should the acceptance of natural theology make a defense of the faith possible? Is the metaphysical absolute of the philosophers any more certain and provable than a God who is radically beyond the antimony between finite and infinite? Depoortere assumes that the only way to speak of God is to follow a rational line of analogical predication from world to God. But why should this be taken on—somewhat ironically—faith? Is it not equally possible—in fact, far more so if we really mean what we say—that it is not the *world* that comes to God, but rather *God* who comes to the world? Talk of God is not something we must make possible through the prior construction of an ontology; it is instead what God has already made possible as a divine event. In truth, Depoortere is actually the one trapped in a closed circle. He has to assume that the rational logic of the *analogia entis* actually refers to an existent being. He simply presupposes the validity *extra fidem* of the Thomistic "five ways" as arguments for God's existence, once transposed of course into a new ontological framework. But that is quite an assumption, to say the least. Depoortere is in fact confined within the closed circle of metaphysical logic: God-talk is here merely an extension of world-

³¹ Emphasis added. Depoortere seems to be under the impression that the only way to respond to atheists is to play according to their rules, viz. by acceding to the positivistic demand for neutral, objective, rational evidence for belief in God. But this is to cast pearls before swine, to replace the creative power of God's self-revealing word with the banality of a human datum. In pursuit of a God one *can* believe in (according to a scientific empiricism), one gives up the God one *must* believe in, if we are really to believe in God.

talk, and once one begins with the world, there is no guarantee that one will ever actually speak about God. The only guarantee of the veridicality of our God-talk must come from *God's side*, not from ours.³² The reality of God is not a *being* that one must prove but an *event* that one must encounter.³³

My contention in this paper is that theology must thoroughly resist the temptation to define God within the context of a philosophical ontology, much less a mathematical ontology, since this still leaves us in the throes of a spectral metaphysics.³⁴ This does not mean Badiou is lost to theology. On the contrary, theology must instead leave the question of being behind and redefine the "God of religion" in terms of the relation between event and subject.³⁵

III

In an important interview with Bruno Bosteels published in 2005, Badiou says that his philosophy comes down to one basic question: "what is the new in a situation?" More specifically, "can we think that there is something new in the situation, not outside

³² The theological position of this paper accepts what Meillassoux calls "strong correlationism," that is, "fideism," in the sense that the object of faith's knowledge is knowable only within the noetic correlation between subject and object. In agreement with Meillassoux's definition of strong correlationism, I affirm both (a) the rejection of metaphysics that he upholds and (b) the rejection of absolutes that he opposes. I differ only in claiming that this correlation is not constituted by the knowing subject, but is rather created by God's act of addressing us in the kerygma. Cf. Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 42–49.

³³ Put simply, I do not share Depoortere's concern with the problem of the "closed circle of faith." According to the Protestant tradition, in which I stand, the truly "closed circle" is that of sin, which leaves one trapped *incurvatus in se*. The divine gift of faith is what breaks one out of that circle and opens a person to God, the neighbor, and oneself in a new way. Faith is not a human assent to a rational proposition whose justification then depends on the verification of the object identified by this proposition; it is rather the response to the divine interruption of our isolated ego. Assuming Depoortere's presentation is accurate, my position would correspond closely to that of Taede Smedes, whom Depoortere presents as an example of the closed circle of faith (*Depoortere, Badiou and Theology*, 38–44). Faith is a matter of "seeing more, seeing differently" (*ibid.*, 42).

³⁴ Cf. Walther von Loewenich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, trans. Herbert J. A. Bouman (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1976), 150:

"Metaphysics stands in opposition to religion. Once the category of being becomes the one that controls everything, then the difference between God and man coincides with the difference between infinite and finite."

³⁵ The phrase "God of religion" refers to one of the three types of gods in Badiou's essay, "God is Dead," alongside the "God of metaphysics" and the "God of poetry." While this paper is not interested in sustaining or rehabilitating "religion," it is interested in rehabilitating the notions of revelation and faith. Badiou collapses these ideas into the category of religion, whereas I would differentiate them.

the situation nor the new somewhere else, but can we really think through novelty and treat it in the situation?"³⁶ Earlier in this same interview, Bosteels helpfully articulates the two extremes that Badiou's question tries to avoid:

On the one hand, there are those who would say that the event is absolutely pure, untainted by the situation, so that ultimately nothing really new takes place in terms of the consequences of the event for the situation itself; on the other, there are those who would deny that an event even occurred to begin with, so that all that really takes place is the placement of pure being as such.³⁷

As Bosteels goes on to state, the two extremes correspond, respectively, to the Left and the Right, anarchism and determinism, spontaneity and necessity. Badiou seeks to avoid both of these errors. His account of the event is immanent to the situation while being at the same time subtracted from—i.e., not reducible to—the structural possibilities of the situation. There is no pure event that transcends the situation (what he now calls a "world"),³⁸ but neither is the event native to it. The problem with most twentieth-century philosophy, according to Badiou, is the general failure to articulate the occurrence of an immanent event that can result in a universal truth-procedure. In this regard, Heidegger and Deleuze are his primary opponents: the former reinstated the gods of poetry and language, while the latter reduced everything to a univocal repetition of the same.³⁹ Badiou

³⁶ Bruno Bosteels, "Can Change Be Thought? A Dialogue with Alain Badiou," in *Alain Badiou: Philosophy and Its Conditions*, ed. Gabriel Riera (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 252–53.

³⁷ Ibid., 246.

³⁸ Whereas the term "situation" is an entirely ontological marker, the concept of "world" is constituted by both multiplicities (being) and transcendental indexations (appearing).

³⁹ Throughout his many writings, but especially in *Logics of Worlds*, Badiou identifies his understanding of the event as the exact reversal of Deleuze's. In a rather Platonic or Neoplatonic fashion, Deleuze argues, according to Badiou, that "Being" is one, while on the surface of presentation, there is indeed a multiplicity of forms and modalities of Being. But this formal multiplicity disguises the real univocity that unites all Being as one. The event for Deleuze thus occurs as the unlimited becoming of Being or the concentration of life's creative vitality. Being is event, for Deleuze, and thus "all is event." Hence, the event is simply the eternal return of the same, and all difference occurs within the "fate of the One" (Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 383–84).

Contrary to the univocal ontological becoming that he finds in Deleuze, Badiou's event is "never coextensive with becoming." The event is instead a "pure cut," an "upsurge," and an "excess" (ibid., 384). It is a radical break with the continuity of life. For both Heidegger and Deleuze, Badiou contends, the event is temporal—whether as the moment of decision for Heidegger, or as the being and continuity of time itself for Deleuze. Badiou's event, by contrast, is an "atemporal instant" that "extracts" a new time from the possibilities of another time. The event makes possible a "new present" that is neither past nor

wants to dispense with the (metaphysical) gods without abandoning the possibility of universal truths that "transcend" or are subtracted from the ontological order. It is the exceptional nature of the new and true that Badiou's work seeks to articulate and defend.

It was the burden of *Being and Event*—with its set-theoretic framework of belonging and inclusion, presentation and representation, situation and state—to give an account of how something new is possible within a materialist ontology. What remained, however, was the problem of how to articulate the actual *appearance* of this new reality. Though he was often misunderstood, Badiou's *Being and Event* (and related works, such as the first *Manifesto*) nevertheless ends up contrasting a *positive* multiplicity of being with a *negative* universality of truth. Being, according to this model, consists of a multiplicity of multiplicities (or "things"), founded on the void, and given formal articulation in terms of a Cantorian set theory. The event is entirely subtracted

future (*ibid.*), what he elsewhere calls the "evental present [*présent événementiel*]" (e.g., *ibid.*, 54, 62, 468, 485–87). For Heidegger, the event is an "openness for being"; for Deleuze, it is the vitality of Being in its becoming; for Badiou, the event is absolutely "trans-being." The event is that "point at which the ontological (i.e. mathematical) field is detotalized." See Alain Badiou, "The Event as Trans-Being," in *Theoretical Writings* (London: Continuum, 2004), 100. The event, in short, is "the advent of what subtracts itself from all experience: the ontologically un-founded and transcendentally discontinuous" (Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 387). Cf. Bruno Besana, "One or Several Events? The Knot between Event and Subject in the Work of Alain Badiou and Gilles Deleuze," *Polygraph* 17 (2005): 245–66.

The result of this fundamental impasse between Deleuze and Badiou is that each accuses the other of bringing back the God of metaphysics. Badiou claims that Deleuze, in positing a single eternal event and identifying Being with the One, has effectively asserted the existence of God; his philosophy has a "latent religiosity" and a "tendency to dogmatism" (Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 387). Defenders of Deleuze, by contrast, find Badiou's transontological definition of the event as the rechristianization of transcendence and the violation of the axiom of materialist immanence that Badiou claims to uphold over against all metaphysics. This paper's appropriation of Badiou's concept of event for the purpose of speaking of God would thus only confirm Deleuzian suspicions of Badiou. On that point, I plead guilty insofar as I do intend to locate divine transcendence within the transontological excess of the event, contrary of course to Badiou's own anti-theological intentions. But this move is not intended to contradict the immanence of grace, i.e., the fact that grace is a historical event. The theological event of grace comes neither from some supernatural place, nor from within the structure of nature; instead, it comes as an upsurge within history, a disruptive singularity within the situation. Cf. Adam Miller, *Badiou, Marion and St. Paul: Immanent Grace* (London: Continuum, 2008). Badiou speaks of a "materialism of grace" in his book on Paul. Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 66, 81. Originally published as Alain Badiou, *Saint-Paul, la fondation de l'universalisme* (Paris: PUF, 1997).

from this pluralist ontology as absolutely "trans-being."⁴⁰ It does not have a place within what Badiou calls the "state of the situation."⁴¹ The universality of truth is founded on the transontological nature of the event. The generic set (i.e., the being of a truth) is not confined to any particular situation because it originates in an occurrence that, in some sense, transcends or is subtracted from the coordinates of any and every situation. As Badiou confesses in his *Second Manifesto*, "the essence of a generic multiplicity is a *negative* universality (the absence of any predicative identity)."⁴²

This account has been unsatisfying to many because of the need to articulate a new occurrence that is neither reducible to what "is" nor an abstract idea apparently untethered to concrete, practical existence. Badiou never meant to present these as the two alternatives, but his battle against what he perceived to be the anti-philosophical consequences of post-Heideggerian deconstruction and cultural relativism led him to advocate a rather one-sided notion of generic, universal truth. Today, however, his opponent is "a poor dogmatism by way of analytical philosophy, cognitive science and the ideology of democracy and human rights. Namely, a sort of scientism stipulating the mind must be naturalized . . . reinforced, as always, by an inane moralism with a religious tinge."⁴³ As a result, his account of the occurrence of something new is now concerned with "its *effective* appearance [*apparition effective*] or observable action in the world since this is what scientism (which knows only the naturalness of objects, never the immortality of subjects) and moralism (which knows only the subject of laws and order, never that of radical choice and creative violence) seek to deny exists."⁴⁴ By turning to the questions of appearance and action and subjectivity, *Logiques des mondes* (ET *Logics of Worlds*) makes possible a truly *positive* and concrete understanding of universality. It is on this basis that a more productive conversation with theology arises, as I hope to make clear by the end of the paper.

We can describe the change in the following way. Through a constructive engagement with both Hegel and Heidegger—not to mention Kant, Kierkegaard, Derrida, and others—Badiou has shifted from a focus on being (*Sein, être*) to a focus on being-there (*Dasein, être-là*), i.e., to the notions of existence and appearance. Without dispensing with the insights associated with *Being and Event*, he has turned from ontology (as the science of being qua being) to phenomenology (as the science of being's appearance in

⁴⁰ See Badiou, "The Event as Trans-Being," 99–104. Cf. Badiou, *Being and Event*, 190: "It must be taken quite literally: ontology has nothing to say about the event. Or, to be more precise, ontology demonstrates that the event is not. . . . The axiom of foundation de-limits being by the prohibition of the event."

⁴¹ Badiou, *Being and Event*, §8.

⁴² Badiou, *Second Manifesto*, 126.

⁴³ Ibid., 118.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 119.

a world). His concern is no longer simply with multiplicity in itself as a "thing," but rather with the way multiplicity manifests itself in a particular world as an "object" and how a momentary change in this manifestation relates to the formation of a new subject. This coincides with a larger philosophical move from a mathematical metaontology to a transcendental logic, from a theory of being to a new theory of the subject.⁴⁵ The former determines whether something does or does not belong to the state of the situation, while the latter determines "degrees of appearance" or "degrees of existence" in a world.⁴⁶ The concern is not only with articulating the possibility of an immanent yet transontological event, but now it is also, and perhaps primarily, with articulating the formal conditions for a faithful subject of the event. Badiou has always been focused on the truth-procedures that give an event concrete form within a world.⁴⁷ What's changed is that he has now thoroughly reworked his approach to this problem in a way that casts a new light on his philosophical project.

Among other things, the phenomenological turn in Badiou allows for a more sophisticated account of the metaphysical problem. Whereas the earlier account defined metaphysics as the commandeering of being by the one, the more recent account defines it as either (a) the reduction of being to appearance or (b) the reduction of appearance to being:

Heidegger famously aligned the destiny of
metaphysics with a miscomprehension of

⁴⁵ As Bruno Bosteels has noted, and as Badiou confirmed, the recent phenomenological turn in *Logics of Worlds* has involved a recovery of insights from Badiou's much earlier work in *Théorie du sujet* (Paris, Le Seuil, 1982). See Alain Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, trans. Bruno Bosteels (London: Continuum, 2009).

⁴⁶ See Alain Badiou, *Pocket Pantheon: Figures of Postwar Philosophy*, trans. David Macey (London: Verso, 2009), 127–28. Cf. Badiou, *Second Manifesto*, 51: "In classical ontology, there are only two possibilities: either x is the same as y , or it is not at all identical to y . You have either strict identity or difference. Inversely, in a concrete world, as the place of multiplicities' being-there, we have a great variety of possibilities. A thing can be very similar to another, or similar in certain points and different by way of others, or somewhat identical, or very identical but not entirely the same, and so on. As a result, any element of a thing can be put into relation with others by what we call a degree of identity."

⁴⁷ Cf. Zachary Luke Fraser, "The Category of Formalization: From Epistemological Break to Truth Procedure," in Alain Badiou, *The Concept of Model: An Introduction to the Materialist Epistemology of Mathematics*, ed. and trans. Zachary Luke Fraser and Tzuchien Tho (Melbourne, AUS: re.press, 2007; 1969), xi–lxv, esp. xvi: "I would argue that the figure of the event is altogether secondary to the procedural conception of novelty that Badiou inherits from his teacher. Badiou's invocation of 'events,' over which a disproportionate amount of ink has already been spilled, is nothing but a fascinating and mystifying snare if it is left without a proper understanding of the arduous and protracted procedures through which the new pulls itself away from the old."

ontological difference, thought as the difference between being and beings. If we interpret beings as the 'there' of being, or as the mundane localization of a pure multiple, or again, as the appearing of multiple-being [*l'apparaître de l'être-multiple*]—which is entirely possible—then that which is in question in what Heidegger calls ontological difference can be said to be the immanent gap between mathematics and logic. It would be proper then . . . to call 'metaphysical' any orientation of thought confusing mathematics and logic under the same Idea. . . . As such, two metaphysics can be said to exist: the first dissolving being within appearing; the second denying that appearing is distinct from being. It is easy to recognize empiricism's variants in the first, dogmatism's variants in the second.⁴⁸

Metaphysics is here understood as the failure to differentiate between *Sein* and *Dasein*. Metaphysics forecloses on the possibility of an event that is *beyond* both being and appearing, i.e., a contingent event that cannot be inscribed within the confines of either mathematics or logic.

Such an event is both transontological or supernumerary and transcendentally discontinuous; it does not change the ontology of a world (because it is nonontological), yet it transforms how being *appears* or *exists* in a world (because it transgresses the laws of appearing without changing or nullifying them).⁴⁹ On this point, Badiou is retrieving material from *Theory of the Subject*, where he distinguishes between something in its "pure being" (A) and the same thing in its "being-placed" (A_p). He then notes parenthetically, "Heidegger would say: into its ontological being and its ontic being."⁵⁰ The postmetaphysical occurrence of something new thus means an event that is both ontologically immanent and existentially transcendent; it is a disruption of our ontic relation to a world, but not a change in a world's multiple-being.

Compared to *Being and Event*, *Logics of Worlds* develops a far more nuanced account of "change," or what he calls "mutation" in the *Second Manifesto*. In his earlier work, Badiou makes a sharp distinction between the ontological situation and the nonontological event. More specifically, he distinguishes between normal or natural multiplicities, where all the terms are both presented and represented (i.e., they both belong and are included in the structure of the state), and "abnormal" or "historical" multiplicities, where the terms belong to the situation without being included. The latter is the condition for a "singularity,"

⁴⁸ Badiou, *Second Manifesto*, 40–41.

⁴⁹ Cf. ibid., 53: "We must assume the existence of an infinity of different worlds, not simply on an ontological level (a multiplicity, a thing, is in a world and not another), but equally on a logical level—that of appearing and, thereby also, as we will see, of existence."

⁵⁰ Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, 7.

while the "evental site" is a *completely* abnormal or historical multiple.⁵¹ What is missing from this account, however, is the dialectic between being and existence, and it is on this basis in *Logics of Worlds* that Badiou develops his new "doctrine of change."⁵²

Central to this new articulation of mutation is the move from the ontological tension between belonging and inclusion to the logical tension between inexistence and existence. Two aspects are important: (1) the degree of existence, and (2) the power of its consequences. First, Badiou retains from *Being and Event* the claim that a site of real change has the ontological characteristic of "self-belonging," meaning that the site is an element of itself. But he now renders this more existentially to mean that a site is "a transitory cancellation [*annulation*] of the gap between being and being-there," that is to say, the "instantaneous revelation" of a site's multiple-being.⁵³ Second, and more importantly, Badiou introduces his theory of inexistent. For every multiple that appears in a world, there is one element that is "an inexistent of this world," whose existence in the world is nil.⁵⁴ He gives the example that "the proletariat is the inexistent peculiar to political multiplicities." This is not an ontological but rather an "existential distinction," by which he means the proletariat is invisible according to the rules of the political world.⁵⁵ The power of a site's consequences is determined by the extent to which it gives existence to the inexistent.

⁵¹ Badiou, *Being and Event*, 93–103, 173–75.

⁵² Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 361: "This play between being and existence (between ontology and logic) is obviously the principle innovation, in terms of the doctrine of change, with regard to *Being and Event*. At the time, having no theory of being-there at my disposal, I effectively thought that a purely ontological characterization of the event was possible. . . . As we shall see, I am now able fundamentally to equate 'site' and 'evental multiplicity' — thus avoiding all the banal aporias of the dialectic between structure and historicity — and that I do so without any recourse to a mysterious naming. Moreover, in place of the rigid opposition between situation and event, I unfold the nuances of transformation, from mobile-immobile modification all the way to the event properly so-called, by way of the neutrality of fact."

⁵³ Ibid., 369.

⁵⁴ Badiou describes the logic of the inexistent in *Logics of Worlds*, 341–43, where he gives it the logical symbol of \emptyset_A . He distinguishes the inexistent from the empty or null set, symbolized as \emptyset (also called the void), which he explains in *Being and Event*. The null set is nonbeing, while the inexistent is, effectively, nonexistence. The inexistent "is the mark, within objectivity, of the contingency of existence" (ibid., 341). He goes on to say: "We will also note that it can be said of \emptyset_A both that it is (in the ontological sense) — since it belongs to multiple A — and that it is not (in the logical sense), since its degree of existence in the world is nil. Adopting a Heideggerian terminology, it is then possible to say that \emptyset_A is in the world a being [*étant*] whose being [*être*] is attested, but whose existence is not. Or, a being whose beingness [*étantité*] is nil. Or again a being who happens 'there' as nothingness [*néant*]'" (ibid., 342–43).

⁵⁵ Badiou, *Second Manifesto*, 60–61.

We are now in a position to differentiate between the various forms of becoming: (1) simple *modification* is not real change and is thus not a site, because it is entirely internal to the transcendental laws of appearing; (2) a *fact* is a site "whose intensity of existence is not maximal"⁵⁶; (3) a *weak singularity* is a site with maximal existence whose consequences are not maximal, meaning it does not give the nonexistent maximum existence; and (4) a *strong singularity* or *event* is a site with maximal existence and maximal consequences. An event is marked by reflexivity, intensity, and power.⁵⁷ In its fleeting, contingent appearance, it makes possible the advent of a truth in a world, since "every truth is dependent upon something whose existence had been totally unapparent acceding to the flush of appearance."⁵⁸ By bringing the existential consequences into the very definition of an event, Badiou makes the doctrine of change inseparable from his theory of the subject.

IV

Logics of Worlds begins by distinguishing between two axiomatic convictions. The first is the conviction of postmodernity, which Badiou calls "democratic materialism": "There are only bodies and languages."⁵⁹ This is where he places people like Deleuze and Foucault, as well as those associated with the "linguistic turn" in contemporary discourse, such as Wittgenstein. Badiou's conviction makes a slight but crucial adjustment: "There are only bodies and languages, except that there are truths."⁶⁰ Here we find another variation of his earlier binary, "being and event." The exception that is truth is the excessive consequence of an event, that which is irreducible to being. What Badiou then goes on to argue is that "the 'except that' exists qua subject."⁶¹ His materialist dialectic is thus characterized by two terms: "truths as exceptions, and subjects as the active forms of these exceptions."⁶² There is no eventual exception—and thus no truth—without the creation of a new subject.

Like Heidegger's existentialist phenomenology, Badiou's theory of the subject is entirely formal in nature. That is to say, it describes the possible subjects that occur within a world, but not *what* a particular subject must concretely do. The simple reason for this is that Badiou as a philosopher cannot determine in advance what an event will authorize in a particular situation. Because the event is unanticipatable, the material content of a particular subject also cannot be anticipated. In *Being and Event*,

⁵⁶ Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 372.

⁵⁷ Cf. Badiou, *Second Manifesto*, 80–82.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 83.

⁵⁹ Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 1.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 4.

⁶¹ Ibid., 45.

⁶² Ibid., 299.

Badiou only states the need for a procedure of fidelity which discerns the consequences of an event within a situation. The faithful subject is the "active face" of a truth-procedure "whereby a truth changes the situation in which it is included."⁶³ This is the process that Badiou calls forcing, in which the subject actively relates the event to a particular situation or world. Badiou nuances his theory of the subject in *Logics of Worlds* by describing three figures of the subject, that is to say, three ways of relating to the "new present" inaugurated by the vanished event. The first is the *faithful* subject, which "realizes itself in the production of consequences."⁶⁴ The faithful subject "is constituted by the consequences drawn day after day from the event's course."⁶⁵ The *reactive* subject denies even the occurrence of an event. This is the posture of a conservative indifference that tries to contain the new so that it does not disturb the *status quo*. The reactive subject "maintains that the previous world can and should go on as it is."⁶⁶ Third, there is the *obscure* subject, which recognizes the event but violently opposes it and thus seeks to restore the state of the situation prior to the event. The obscure subject is the fascist antipode to the faithful subject. To give a political example, these three subjects are represented, according to Badiou, by Soviet Russia (faithful), the United States (reactive), and Nazi Germany (obscure).⁶⁷ Badiou adds a fourth possibility, *resurrection*, in which a subject becomes faithful again by reincorporating itself into the eventual present within the context of a new world.⁶⁸

Badiou's account of the creation of a faithful subject begins with the nonexistent made maximally existent in a world through the contingent upsurge of an event. Examples of nonexistents include the modern proletariat (politics), atonal or non-classically tonal music (art), the courageous experiment of two people in the face of social barriers (love), and transfinite mathematics (science).⁶⁹ In his *Second Manifesto* he calls this former nonexistent a "primordial statement" (*énoncé primordial*); in *Logics of Worlds*, he refers to it as a "trace" (*trace*), as in, the "trace of the event." This statement or trace is not so much a thing as it is a word of address, a calling and command:

[T]he term in question [i.e., primordial statement] is equivalent to a sort of commandment. It says to us, from the heights of the authority granted it by its having been raised up [*relève*]: "See what is coming to pass [*advent*] and not only what is. Work for the consequences of the new. Accept the discipline appropriate to these consequences' becoming. Make

⁶³ Peter Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 134–35.

⁶⁴ Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 53.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 51.

⁶⁶ Badiou, *Second Manifesto*, 94.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 92–97.

⁶⁸ Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 65–66.

⁶⁹ Cf. Badiou, *Second Manifesto*, 83–84.

of the whole multiple you are, bodies within a body,
the ineffaceable matter of the True."⁷⁰

Though the event disappears—since it is only a momentary interruption—it is represented by a trace, which functions as a “prescription” for the formation of a subject faithful to the originating event.⁷¹ A positive relation or affinity between the trace (or statement) and other elements in a world is the condition for the formation of a “body” that corresponds to the event.⁷² The body is the worldly or material site of a subject. The body is where a subject becomes visible in a world. Badiou calls such a body the “body-of-truth” (*corps de vérité*) or a “subjectivizable body” (*corps subjectivable*).⁷³ The body-of-truth is a multiple that has a maximal identity with the primordial statement; it is constituted around or in connection with the trace’s imperative (e.g., “see what is coming to pass”).⁷⁴ And the process of this body’s formation he calls “incorporation.”

According to Badiou, incorporation is the process by which a new subject is created, “a Subject who—even empirically—cannot be reduced to an individual.”⁷⁵ Badiou primarily understands the subject of a truth as a corporate entity engaged in carrying out the consequences of an event by joining or conforming elements of a world to the dictates of the primordial statement. In order for this corporate subject to exist in a world, however, there must be individual acts of incorporation. Particular persons must incorporate themselves into the body-of-truth by identifying themselves with the trace of the event. Badiou’s “theory of the point” is his way of understanding the process by which

⁷⁰ Ibid., 84–85. Jacques Derrida proposed the French words *relever*/*relève* as technical translations for Hegel’s *aufheben* and *Aufhebung*. Badiou’s use of the word follows Derrida, with certain added nuances due to his conception of the “inexistent.” For a discussion of this word and its role in Badiou’s work, see Louise Burchill, “Translator’s Preface: A Manifest Power of Elevation,” in Badiou, *Second Manifesto*, viii–xxiv.

⁷¹ Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 80.

⁷² We must not restrict the word to its biological meaning, since a body can be, *inter alia*, a poem, a mathematical theory, or a sociopolitical community.

⁷³ Badiou, *Second Manifesto*, 85. Notice that the language of body does the work that “generic set” performed in *Being and Event*, but it does so in a more concrete and positive sense. Whereas “generic set” strongly implied something abstract and disembodied, the language of “body” corrects this by emphasizing the rootedness of truth in the particularities of historical existence. I return to this point in more detail later.

⁷⁴ Badiou defines “body” in the following way: “A body, in its totality, is what gathers together those terms of the site which are maximally engaged in a kind of ontological alliance with the new appearance of an nonexistent, which acts as the trace of the event. A body is what is beckoned [*drainé*] and mobilized by the post-evental sublimation of the nonexistent” (Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 470).

⁷⁵ Alain Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis* (London; New York: Verso, 2010), 232.

individuals are incorporated into a truth-procedure. What makes this part of his recent philosophy especially interesting is that he develops it in conversation with Kierkegaard.⁷⁶ Badiou begins this discussion by noting the way Kierkegaard distinguishes himself from Hegel regarding the relation between time and eternity. For Hegel, God's eternal self-realization takes place through the mediation of time, whereas for Kierkegaard, the dialectic of time and eternity means that eternal truth confronts us as "a challenge addressed to the existence of each and everyone."⁷⁷ We encounter eternity within time in the form of a radical decision: either/or. Badiou calls this decision a "point" or an "absolute choice." To respond to this either/or is what he calls, variously, "treating a point," "holding a point," or "submit[ting] . . . to the test of a point."⁷⁸ It is out of this "contingent test of a point" (*épreuve contingente d'un point*) that a faithful subject is born.⁷⁹ Badiou attributes the possibility of responding to a point to the presence of what he calls an "organ" in a body. Organ is the term used to describe the "efficacious part of the body suited to this point"; it is the capacity for a decision.⁸⁰ Holding to the eternal challenge of a point is to become a subjectivated body (i.e., an element of the body-of-truth) in service to a truth-procedure. This "subjective connection" between time and eternity he defines as "truth."⁸¹ Responding faithfully to the evental point is to "incorporat[e] oneself into a process of truth."⁸²

At the conclusion of his discussion of Kierkegaard, Badiou identifies the key point of divergence between the two of them. For Kierkegaard, the free subject is caught in a state of despair "at having to become the absolute that I am, and thereby to become, point by point, other than myself."⁸³ Kierkegaard, as a Christian theologian, finds liberation from this despair in the intervening grace of God. It is the prevenience of God's grace that sustains the subject and makes it possible to hold a point. For Kierkegaard, "man is never anything but this creature who has been granted the possibility of travelling, point by point, the inverse path of God."⁸⁴ But for Badiou there is the simple problem: God is dead. The problem of sin that Kierkegaard discusses in terms of despair and anxiety is one that Badiou simply denies.

We can summarize Badiou's account as follows: *a subject that works on behalf of a truth originates in an event whose trace confronts persons in the either/or of a point and calls for individual bodies or elements in a world to incorporate themselves into a larger body-of-truth*

⁷⁶ Kierkegaard provides the decisive point of contact between Badiou and Bultmann.

⁷⁷ Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 426.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 451, 578, 427.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 427.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 590.

⁸¹ Ibid., 429.

⁸² Ibid., 432.

⁸³ Ibid., 434.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 435.

and thus to become militants of this truth in a world. In his book *The Communist Hypothesis*, which recounts his theory of the subject in the context of political truths, Badiou describes this process of incorporation and subjectivation in the following way:

What is at issue is the possibility for an individual, defined as a mere human animal, and clearly distinct from any Subject, to decide to become part of a political truth procedure. To become, in a nutshell, a militant of this truth. . . . I describe this decision as an incorporation: the individual body and all that it entails in terms of thought, affects, potentialities at work in it, and so forth, become one of the elements of another body, the body-of-truth, the material existence of a truth in the making in a given world. This is the moment when an individual declares that he or she can go beyond the bounds (of selfishness, competition, finitude . . .) set by individualism (or animality—they're one and the same thing). He or she can do so to the extent that, while remaining the individual that he or she is, he or she can also become, through incorporation, an active part of a new Subject. I call this decision, this will, a subjectivation. More generally speaking, a subjectivation is always the process whereby an individual determines the place of a truth with respect to his or her own vital existence and to the world in which this existence is lived out.⁸⁵

The individual is "saved" from her bondage to animality, finitude, and individualism, in order to become an agent in a new subjective community engaged in political, amorous, artistic, or scientific processes of truth. In short, subjectivation is Badiou's materialist translation of the Christian concept of salvation.

It becomes evident that Badiou is aiming at nothing less than a *systematic materialist theology*, grounded in a secular soteriology of immortality. Badiou makes this clear in the conclusion to *Logics of Worlds*, which answers the question, "What is it to live?" He begins by restating his logic of the eventual trace, this time describing the maximal appearance of the nonexistent as making possible the entrance into "true life." For this reason, "you can only put your hope in what inappears [*inappaissaït*]."⁸⁶ Placing one's hope in the nonexistent is to faithfully incorporate oneself into the truth-procedure authorized by the primordial statement. Following one's incorporation into a faithful subject, the primordial statement becomes an "Idea."⁸⁷ An Idea is that which

⁸⁵ Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis*, 233–35.

⁸⁶ Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 507.

⁸⁷ Badiou, *Second Manifesto*, 105: "I name 'Idea' that upon which an individual's representation of the world, including her- or himself, is based once s/he is bound to the faithful subject type through incorporation within the process of a truth. The Idea is that which

sustains and empowers the ongoing work of the new subject on behalf of a truth. The process of living in accordance with a truth is called "ideation," in the sense of experiencing or living for an Idea.⁸⁸ To live for an Idea, an eternal truth, is to live "as an Immortal," borrowing a phrase from Aristotle.⁸⁹ Because of the obvious theological parallels, Badiou clarifies the materialist nature of his project:

I believe in eternal truths and in their fragmented creation in the present of worlds. My position on this point is entirely isomorphic with that of Descartes: truths are eternal because they have been created and not because they have been there forever. For Descartes, "eternal truths" . . . depend on a free act of God . . . But I need neither God nor the divine. I believe that it is here and now that we rouse [*suscitons*] or resurrect [(*res*)*suscitons*] ourselves as Immortals. . . . The grace of living for an Idea, that is of living as such, is accorded to everyone and for several types of procedure. . . . We are open to the infinity of worlds. To live is possible.⁹⁰

In *Saint Paul* Badiou speaks of a "materialism of grace," while in *Logics of Worlds* he speaks, as expected, of a "purely logical grace."⁹¹ Either way the essential point remains the same. This is the grace of a chance encounter with what is new and true. We "overcome" (*relève*) the "dis-grace" of finitude when we "seize hold" of the opportunity of the moment.⁹² A site arises in which

makes the life of an individual, a human animal, orientate itself according to the True. Or, put another way: the Idea is the mediation between the individual and the Subject of a truth." Badiou derives this notion of Idea from Plato, and he calls his position "a materialist transposition of this Platonic vision" (*ibid.*, 107). Cf. Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis*, 235: "I call an 'Idea' an abstract totalization of the three basic elements: a truth procedure, a belonging to history, and an individual subjectivation. A formal definition of the Idea can immediately be given: an Idea is the subjectivation of an interplay between the singularity of a truth procedure and a representation of History."

The relation between the concepts of primordial statement (or trace), Idea, and truth can be hard to sort out. By piecing together several statements of his, we come up with the following: the primordial statement is the imperative left behind by the occurrence of an event which initiates the process of incorporation by confronting an individual in a point; the Idea is what the primordial statement becomes once an individual has been subjectivated in a body in order to sustain the work of the subject; and truth, as technically defined in *Logics of Worlds*, is the set of the productions of this body in its faithfulness to the Idea.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁸⁹ Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 507.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 512-14.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 513.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 514.

one hears the imperative to join oneself to a new subject in order to work for the consequences of an eternal truth.

V

If Badiou's philosophy is already a materialist translation of Christian theology into the sphere of a mathematical ontology and logical-transcendental phenomenology, is there a way to retranslate his philosophical project *back* into Christian theology? If so, the result will be a thoroughly postmetaphysical interpretation of the faith. The rest of this article will explore what that might look like. What becomes evident is that a Badiouan theology shares many similarities with Bultmann's dialectical-hermeneutical theology.⁹³

We begin with the event, rather than with being. I have already established that the attempt to locate God within Badiou's ontology is a misguided enterprise from the beginning. No matter how one goes about it, the result every time is a new ontotheological metaphysics that lacks any intrinsic connection to the mobilization of a new subject. Badiou's theory of the event, which integrates the creation of a subject into its internal logic, provides the philosophical framework for a postmetaphysical and theopolitical articulation of Christian faith.

The event, according to Badiou, is a paradoxical and dialectical occurrence: it is neither equivocal nor univocal, neither purely transcendent nor reductively immanent, neither supernatural nor

⁹³ I am not the first to suggest a similarity between Badiou and Bultmann. As an example, see the following comment by Carl Raschke in a 2009 post on the weblog for the *Journal of Cultural and Religious Theory*: "I've never been able to prove that Badiou all along has been reading Bultmann's theology of several generations ago about the 'Christ event' that is historical, though unintelligible to history itself. But these associations are not merely aleatory. It is not accidental that Badiou's well-received book on St. Paul really complements Bultmann, or that Badiou himself is a source of growing fascination among a newer generation of 'postmodern' academic theologians (though they all struggle to follow him half the time, as they once did with Derrida). Badiou is probably more instructive for latter day 'Bultmannians', since he has unshackled himself from Heidegger, which Bultmann couldn't." See Carl Raschke, "Specter and event," *JCRT Live*, May 16, 2009, http://jcrt.typepad.com/jcrt_live/2009/05/spectrality.html. Raschke is not the only one to notice an affinity between Badiou and Bultmann; others have noted the same in passing, but heretofore the connection has remained unexplored. Moreover, the connection is always made with respect to Badiou's book on Paul, and not with his larger philosophical system in mind. This paper is not a systematic exploration of the relation between them. That will have to wait for another occasion. Instead, the connections will remain more allusive in nature. I will employ Bultmannian terminology in my translation of Badiou into theological discourse, indicating places where they share similar insights and intuitions.

natural. It is a local, historical, and transontological-translogical intrusion into a world.⁹⁴ It has a certain place within ontology, but only as an uncountable nonplace. The event subtracts itself from what he calls the "local laws of appearing"⁹⁵ or the "regime of the count-as-one."⁹⁶ It is important to note Badiou's emphasis on the *locality* of the event. The event is a transgression of the laws within a particular world. "Whatever occurs is always local; the idea of a global exception makes no sense, for what would this be an exception to, given that everything is changed?"⁹⁷ There is no cosmic or universal event, but only the concrete specificity of a site marked by "a historicity [*historicité*] of exception."⁹⁸

Badiou provides his most succinct and mature account of the event in his treatment of Deleuze in *Logics of Worlds*.⁹⁹ Badiou lists four axioms describing Deleuze's conception of the event, and then he reverses them to present his own understanding. This second, constructive set of axioms is the one I will review. According to the first axiom, "an event . . . is never coextensive with becoming. On the contrary, it is a pure cut [*coupure*] in becoming made by an object of the world." But because the event is disruptively related not only to being but also to being-there, he adds that "it is also the supplementing of appearing through the upsurge [*surgissement*] of a trace."¹⁰⁰ The second axiom conceptualizes the temporality of the event. It is neither what has been nor what will be; it is instead an "atemporal instant" that "deserves the name of new present."¹⁰¹ The event "extracts" the possibility of a new, kairological present from the old, chronological present.¹⁰² The third axiom establishes the proper

⁹⁴ Cf. Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 513: "A creation [i.e., a truth] is trans-logical [*trans-logique*]."

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Badiou, *Being and Event*, 52.

⁹⁷ Badiou, *Second Manifesto*, 76.

⁹⁸ Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 513.

⁹⁹ See Badiou, "The Event According to Deleuze," in *Logics of Worlds*, 381–87. This section was translated earlier as Alain Badiou, "The Event in Deleuze," trans. Jon Roffe, *Parrhesia* 2 (2007): 37–44. I will not wade here into the heated debate over whether Badiou understands Deleuze's position accurately. My only concern is to see how Badiou uses Deleuze as a foil to articulate his own position. Regarding the debate, see Jon Roffe, *Badiou's Deleuze* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012); Clayton Crockett, *Deleuze beyond Badiou: Ontology, Multiplicity, and Event* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

¹⁰⁰ Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 384.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² I think here of Giorgio Agamben's notion of messianic time, in which the *kairos* of the messianic event "seizes" an instant of chronological time and consummates it. See Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, trans. Patricia Dailey (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 70–71: "[The *parousia*] does not mean the 'second coming' of Jesus, a second messianic event that would follow and subsume the first. In Greek, *parousia* simply means presence . . . *Parousia* does not signal a complement that is added on to something in order to complete it, nor

relation between the event and material existence. The event is not the "immanent result" of a body's actions and passions; on the contrary, "an active body adequate to the new present is an effect of the event." The event "magnetizes multiplicities" and makes them participants in the body-of-truth.¹⁰³ The fourth axiom rejects Deleuze's notion of a "single event" within the univocity of being by affirming that "truths are multiple and multiform." There is a multiplicity of events galvanizing a multiplicity of subjects and bodies. An event is thus marked by "contingent dissemination," that is, by its infinite, transhistorical displacement toward new situations, which involves a nonharmonizable heterogeneity; difference and dissonance is internal to the event and its consequences. This account of the event, Badiou states, is a "break with empiricism" since "the event [is] the advent of what subtracts itself from all experience," and it is a "break with dogmatism" in the sense that the event is removed "from the ascendancy of the One," that is to say, from the clutches of an ontotheological metaphysics.¹⁰⁴

While Badiou identifies many such events, Christian theology gives the event a proper name: Jesus of Nazareth understood as the messiah (i.e., Jesus Christ). More specifically, the event is Jesus the Christ as the one who is crucified and resurrected. In his book, *Saint Paul*, Badiou posits a disjunction between the cross and the resurrection: "the Christ-event is nothing but resurrection," while the death of Jesus is merely the evental site.¹⁰⁵ The cross is the worldly prerequisite for the occurrence of the event, but it is not part of the event itself. Badiou purports to make this claim based on the Pauline texts, but it is primarily driven (in my view) by his metaontological claim from *Being and Event* regarding the event's nonontological nature, which forces him to dichotomize between event and situation. As noted above, Badiou has since retracted this overly negative conception of the event by grounding it positively in an account of concrete appearance and subjective agency. The relation between the event and the evental site has been replaced by the relation between the event and the world where a new subject faithfully acts in relation to the evental trace.

a supplement, added on afterward, that never reaches fulfillment. Paul uses this term to highlight the innermost uni-dual structure of the messianic event, inasmuch as it is comprised of two heterogeneous times, one *kairos* and the other *chronos*, one an operational time and the other a represented time, which are coextensive but cannot be added together. Messianic presence lies beside itself, since, without ever coinciding with a chronological instant, and without ever adding itself onto it, it seizes hold of this instant and brings it forth to fulfillment. . . . The Messiah has already arrived, the messianic event has already happened, but its presence contains within itself another time, which stretches its *parousia*, not in order to defer it, but, on the contrary, to make it graspable. . . . The Messiah always already had his time, meaning he simultaneously makes time his and brings it to fulfillment."

¹⁰³ Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 385.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 387.

¹⁰⁵ Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 73.

This has decisive implications for how to appropriate Badiou theologically.

How then might Badiou's phenomenology aid the theological task of understanding the Christ-event? Returning to the doctrine of change in his *Second Manifesto*, we read that a local mutation occurs "when a multiple itself falls under the measurement of identities rendering the comparison of its elements possible. Or, put another way, when appearing's basis in being comes to appear locally."¹⁰⁶ A site "makes itself, in the world, the being-there of its own being."¹⁰⁷ Badiou's enigmatic description articulates something rather basic: a site, unlike an object, refers to itself and not only to its composite elements. As noted earlier, a site is marked by reflexivity. Badiou gives the example in *Logics of Worlds* of the Paris Commune, in which "March 18, 1871" is both a day (composed of numerous particular elements and occurrences) and a site. "March 18 is a site because, besides everything that appears within it under the evasive transcendental of the world 'Paris in Spring 1871,' it too appears, as the fulminant and entirely unpredictable beginning of a break with the very thing that regulates its appearance."¹⁰⁸ Henceforth, to speak of "March 18" is to speak not only of what took place on that particular day but, more importantly, of the singular truth that came into existence in that event. There is no bifurcation between the day-as-event and the day's specific elements. Instead, the truth of the event breaks with the laws of appearing in such a way that these elements have to be seen anew as a transtemporal singularity: March 18. In short, a site occurs when a multiple "comes to appear in a new way."¹⁰⁹

Applied christologically, we can speak of the cross of Jesus as a multiple in a world. The crucifixion of Jesus, treated objectively, is an uneventful element within the world of Palestine under Roman imperial rule. His death is one among many others, a multiple among other multiplicities. The church then names "resurrection" the occurrence that causes the multiple of the cross—including the elements of, *inter alia*, fearful disciples, religious leaders, Roman guards, and other crucified criminals—to "appear in a new way." The Easter event cannot be abstracted from the concrete object of the cross; it is instead the crucifixion of Jesus in its new appearance as a singular, reflexive, powerful, maximally existent site. Crucifixion and resurrection therefore paradoxically coincide. It might be helpful here to appropriate J. Louis Martyn's concept of "bifocal, simultaneous vision," in which the one impacted by the apocalyptically irruptive event "sees . . . both the evil age and the new creation simultaneously."¹¹⁰ Badiou's existential-phenomenological

¹⁰⁶ Badiou, *Second Manifesto*, 77. Original emphasis removed.

¹⁰⁷ Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 363.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 365.

¹⁰⁹ Badiou, *Second Manifesto*, 79.

¹¹⁰ J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 104.

account of the event enables the theologian to articulate a bifocal simultaneity of cross and resurrection. The resurrection means, in the words of Eberhard Jüngel, that "the cross of Jesus must . . . be interpreted as the cross of Christ, the cross of the Son of God."¹¹¹ Put another way, "the resurrection of Jesus from the dead means that God has identified himself with this dead man. . . . The kerygma of the Resurrected One proclaims the Crucified One as the self-definition of God."¹¹² In itself as a bare object in the world, "death is a non-happening [*geschieht nicht*]. It is eventless [*ereignislos*.]"¹¹³ From the perspective of faith, however, this very same death appears instead as the definitive event, the forceful disruption of a new age. The formerly eventless death is now the site of truth's creation in a world.

As we have noted, the creation of a truth cannot occur for Badiou without a faithful subject. An event not only has maximal existence (Easter), but it also has maximal consequences (Pentecost); both are aspects of one and the same site. To account for the existence of this new subject, we must first identify the nonexistent that becomes maximally existent in the event. At a basic level, the nonexistent is the person of Jesus himself, a marginal itinerant prophet in ancient Palestine who was one voice among many at the time and a rather insignificant one at that: "Is this not the carpenter?" (Mark 6.3). But like Spartacus leading the slave rebellion—a favorite example of Badiou's—we must include in the nonexistent of Jesus a much larger set of people comprising the ostracized and oppressed (e.g., "tax collectors and sinners" and "the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame") in his particular world. Like Jesus, his followers were invisible according to the religio-political laws of appearing. Their sudden visibility coincides with the carrying out of the consequences of an event within a process of truth.

The maximal existence of this concrete nonexistent is narrated as Jesus' resurrection and the pentecostal outpouring of the divine Spirit, but it comes to expression in the kerygma, the gospel (*euangelion*)—what Badiou calls the primordial statement or the trace.¹¹⁴ While the Christian tradition has tended to identify the

¹¹¹ Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 361.

¹¹² Ibid., 363–64.

¹¹³ Ibid., 363; translation revised. Cf. Eberhard Jüngel, *Gott als Geheimnis der Welt: Zur Begründung der Theologie des Gekreuzigten im Streit zwischen Theismus und Atheismus*, 6. Aufl. (Tübingen: Mohr, 1977), 497.

¹¹⁴ I use the term "kerygma" in the Bultmannian sense throughout this theological translation of Badiou. I do so for two reasons: first, because the kerygma for Bultmann confronts its hearers in the form of an existential decision, an either/or, a radical demand for faithful obedience; and, second, because the relation between Christ and kerygma for Bultmann closely parallels the relation between event and trace for Badiou. According to Bultmann, "the Christ-kerygma demands faith in the Jesus who is present in it" and thus "it represents him." To say that Jesus is risen in the kerygma "presupposes that the kerygma itself is an eschatological event, and it expresses the fact that

kerygma with certain indicative propositions, Badiou articulates the primordial statement in the form of an imperative. Numerous New Testament, especially Pauline, passages are potential imperatival forms of the kerygmatic trace: "Love one another" (John 13.34, 15.12; Rom 13.8); "do not be conformed to this world" (Rom 12.2); "live by the Spirit" (Gal 5.16); "stand firm and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery" (Gal 5.1). Perhaps the supreme primordial statement is Paul's famous declaration: "See, everything has become new! . . . See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation!" (2 Cor 5.17, 6.2).¹¹⁵ Even though these are indicative propositions, they have the force of imperatives since they confront the hearer with the decisional test of a point. To accept that now is the acceptable time and that all things are new is to incorporate oneself into the new universal subject of the Spirit.

The kerygma—the primordial statement that declares Jesus to be the messianic event of the new creation—confronts its hearers with an either/or.¹¹⁶ It asks whether we will identify ourselves

Jesus is really present in the kerygma, that it is *his* word which involves the hearer in the kerygma." Rudolf Bultmann, "The Primitive Christian Kerygma and the Historical Jesus," in *The Historical Jesus and the Kerygmatic Christ: Essays on the New Quest of the Historical Jesus*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Roy A. Harrisville (New York: Abingdon, 1964), 40–42. Similarly, for Badiou, the primordial statement or trace brings to expression (with a mobilizing power) the former nonexistent that constitutes the essence of the event.

¹¹⁵ Badiou makes the love-command the trace of the event in his book on Paul, though he does not use that terminology, since it precedes his phenomenological turn in *Logics of Worlds*. As he puts it in that book from 1997, love "inscribe[s] itself in the world, rallying subjects to the path of life." See Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 88.

¹¹⁶ The decisional nature of the kerygma is a key theme throughout Bultmann's theology, one that he—like Badiou—derives from Kierkegaard. Cf. Rudolf Bultmann, "The Concept of the Word of God in the New Testament [1933]," in *Faith and Understanding*, trans. Louise Pettibone Smith (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 286–312. Originally published in Rudolf Bultmann, *Glauben und Verstehen: Gesammelte Aufsätze*, 4 vols. (Tübingen: Mohr, 1933–1965), 1:268–93. In this essay, Bultmann writes: "The concept of the 'Word of God' . . . refers to . . . the Christian kerygma. It is a Word which has power, which acts with power [*wirksam ist*]. For this Word it is essential that it be spoken. It is proclaimed and it must be heard. It is prophecy, it is command; and it must be performed, it must be kept. . . . God's Word is always summons [*Anrede*] and . . . it demands recognition [*Anerkennung*]. . . . The event of the summons [*das Ereignis der Anrede*] discloses to the man [*Mensch*] a situation of existential self-understanding, a possibility of self-understanding which must be grasped in action [*in der Tat ergriffen*]. Such a summons does not give me a free choice of this or that in case I wish to make a choice. It requires decision [*Entscheidung*], it gives me the choice of myself, the choice of who I will be through the summons and my response to it. . . . In the instant [*Augenblick*] of the proclamation and the hearing of it, the way to life and the way to death are opened to me" (*Faith and Understanding*, 298–301). Bultmann captures in this essay many of the basic elements of Badiou's own account: the evental nature of the primordial statement, the decisional

with the former nonexistent now raised up (*relève*) to be maximally existent: specifically, Jesus, but with him, every neighbor and enemy, everyone who is ostracized and oppressed. This confrontation occurs in the dialectical-existential encounter between time and eternity in a concrete moment.¹¹⁷ The paradoxical encounter with the truth of the new age in Jesus Christ presents itself as a radical decision in a point. The proclamation of the gospel places an absolute claim on the hearer. The affirmative or faithful response to the kerygmatic point establishes a new relation (or affinity) between the individual body and the primordial statement. Insofar as one "declare[s] him- or herself, body and soul, on the side of this statement,"¹¹⁸ one incorporates oneself into the new subjective body as a militant of truth. This incorporation "into what the trace authorizes in terms of consequences" involves placing the body, point by point, "'under' the evental trace" («sous» la trace événementielle).¹¹⁹ The subject faithful to Jesus as the Christ must decide, again and again, in favor of this paschal-pentecostal event and thus continually work out its consequences within a particular situation. This militant working-out of the gospel is the process of Christian subjectivation. Through its contingent operation, point by point and moment by moment, the kerygma constitutes the body-of-truth that corresponds to the event. This "body-of-truth" is what Christians call the "church" or the community of faith. It is the material existence of the christic-pneumatic truth regarding the local inbreaking of the new.

As noted earlier, one of the advantageous consequences of Badiou's more concrete conception of the event is a revision of the very notion of universality and its relation to particularity. In *Saint Paul*, Badiou declares that "it is imperative that universality not present itself under the aspect of a particularity." Paul's conception of love, according to Badiou, is that of "an indifference that tolerates differences."¹²⁰ There is an abstractness and aloofness about this account of love and truth that renders it problematic for describing the historical and paradoxical nature of the Christ-event. Other passages in the book, it should be noted, speak of a more positive relation between universal truth and contingent, situational differences. He says that these customs and differences "are that to which universality is addressed; that toward which love is directed,"¹²¹ and he states that the event for Paul does not abolish particularity but instead "animat[es] it internally."¹²² But the distinction here between the universal and

test of a point that occurs in an atemporal instant, the fact that this point or summoning address confronts us with an either/or of life or death, and the emphasis on action and operation as the mode of fidelity to the event.

¹¹⁷ Cf. Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 428–29.

¹¹⁸ Badiou, *Second Manifesto*, 86.

¹¹⁹ Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 508.

¹²⁰ Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 99. Original emphasis removed.

¹²¹ Ibid., 98.

¹²² Ibid., 103.

the particular, even in the more nuanced statements, remains too sharply drawn. Moreover, at the time of writing *Saint Paul*, Badiou was still operating with an event-situation dichotomy in which the consequence of the event was termed "generic set" or "generic multiplicity," meaning a set without any specific predicates. The concept of genericity is Badiou's way of locating universal truth within his mathematical ontology, but the end result is a truth that is not dialectically related with the situation.

As we have seen, the new position set forth in *Logics of Worlds* and furthered in the *Second Manifesto* replaces the generic set with the concrete and existential concept of "body."¹²³ Whereas the generic identifies "what a truth *is* [est]," a body identifies "what a truth *does* [fait]"; the former is a "doctrine of being," while the latter is a "doctrine of doing"; the former is "an ontology of true-universality," the latter is "a pragmatic of its becoming."¹²⁴ The concept of body enables Badiou to emphasize truth's agential appearance within a specific situation in the form of a concrete subject. It is therefore a material body of some kind, with all the predicates that come with its location in a particular world, that is "beckoned and mobilized" by the eventual trace.¹²⁵ Universality now makes its appearance in what we might call the transcultural or transworldly movement of truth. "A truth is *trans-positional* [*trans-positionnelle*]," according to Badiou.¹²⁶ He speaks also of "a transtemporal availability of truths,"¹²⁷ which we can restate hermeneutically as the *translatability* of truth. Badiou still rightly affirms the capacity of an event to bring about a truly new situation, but now he has the resources to posit truth's ability to embed itself within a multiplicity of concrete predicates while still maintaining its universality (i.e., its transtemporal availability).

¹²³ *Logics of Worlds* still speaks of "generic procedures" (art, science, politics, and love) in stated agreement with his mathematical work in *Being and Event*, but he defines the "generic form" of the truth-procedure in terms of "the sequence world-points-site-body-efficacious part-organ" (Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 475). In other words, the generic is here given the material form of a body within a world. Badiou advances this even further in the *Second Manifesto*, where he drops the language of the generic altogether, which he associates with the first manifesto. He rejects its "absence of characteristics" because it results in a "negative universality" (Badiou, *Second Manifesto*, 125–26). "In this second Manifesto," he then writes, "the pivotal concept is that of the subjectivizable body. It is still a question of truths but what's important is no longer their being . . . but, rather, the material process of their appearing, existence and development in a given world" (*ibid.*, 126). By focusing on a body with specific characteristics, Badiou is able to present "an affirmative vision of universality" (*ibid.*, 127). For the discussion of genericity in the first manifesto, see Alain Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, trans. Norman Madarasz (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999; 1989), 103–9.

¹²⁴ Badiou, *Second Manifesto*, 128.

¹²⁵ Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 470.

¹²⁶ Alain Badiou, *Conditions*, trans. Steven Corcoran (London: Continuum, 2008; 1992), 185.

¹²⁷ Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis*, 233.

This new position addresses what has been the sharpest criticism of his philosophy since *Being and Event*. Prior to the appearance of *Logics of Worlds*, Peter Hallward argued that Badiou's work is marked by a "non-relational" and "anti-dialectical" abstraction, and that the generic needs to be replaced with an emphasis on the specific.¹²⁸ Similarly, Ernesto Laclau has argued that the "exteriority" between event and site is too abstract to inform moral deliberation. What we need, he says, is a "mutual contamination" between event and site, because "any event of universal significance is constructed out of a plurality of sites whose particularity is equivalently articulated but definitely not eliminated."¹²⁹ Finally, as a Christian interpreter, Bruce Ellis Benson has claimed that Badiou's philosophy results in a homogeneity where "differences have been effaced." By contrast, he argues, Christianity affirms polyphony and heterophony: not only multiplicity, but also real otherness.¹³⁰ All of these critiques are based on the metaontological claims of *Being and Event*. If they represented Badiou's final position, then the appropriation of his categories for theology would be a difficult task indeed. Christian theology must insist, over against Badiou's earlier work, that the event is not a predicateless universal but the particularity of the crucified Jesus, who is scandalously replete with predicates. Fortunately, in *Logics of Worlds*, he has adopted a fully relational and dialectical theory: the relations are now thematized as transcendental indexations (i.e., degrees of identity and existence). The exteriority of the event/site dichotomy is now the dialectical "torsion of interiority and exteriority"¹³¹ that takes place in the relation between event and subject. Consequently, Badiou can affirm true heterophony *within* the universality of truth.

As hermeneutical theologians insist, there is no acultural kerygma, no nonworldly trace. Badiou's materialist dialectic enables theology to articulate how the Christ-kerygma is irreducible to the immanent laws (historical, social, cultural, linguistic, ritual, genetic, etc.) of a world, and yet it remains fully worldly and immanent precisely *in its transcendent extrinsicality*. The kerygma is an interruption "from the outside"—namely, from outside of what already appears in the logic of a world—that is translatable from one world to another; it is open to a "mutual contamination" with each contingent historical situation. Insofar as the messianic message remains alien to every situation, it confronts an individual as an imperatival primordial statement in the radical decision of a point. The kerygma in this sense is always

¹²⁸ Peter Hallward, "Introduction: Consequences of Abstraction," in *Think Again: Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy*, ed. Peter Hallward (London: Continuum, 2004), 12. See also the section on "Generic or Specific?" in Hallward, *Badiou*, 271–91.

¹²⁹ Ernesto Laclau, "An Ethics of Militant Engagement," in *Think Again*, 131.

¹³⁰ Bruce Ellis Benson, "Radical Democracy and Radical Christianity," *Political Theology* 10, no. 2 (2009): 250.

¹³¹ Burchill, "Translator's Preface," in Badiou, *Second Manifesto*, xxviii.

an exception to a world: it breaks with every regime of knowledge and every law of appearing. Insofar as the messianic message authorizes and upholds the new subject within the particularity of a world, however, it functions as the Christian Idea. The "Idea" for Badiou is that which "both manifests itself in the world – what sets forth the being-there of a body – and is an exception to its transcendental logic."¹³² This is the paradox of Christian faith: the eternal truth of Christ both *appears* within history while remaining an *exception* to history. In their radical differentiation, time and eternity – humanity and divinity – paradoxically coincide within a singular historical event, viz. the Christ who is present to us in the kerygma. Badiou's philosophy allows one to articulate this paradoxical identity in a way that retains the transcultural and transpositional universality, while affirming that the kerygma always takes a concrete form in the communal body of a faithful subject. The kerygma mobilizes a body without directly identifying itself with any particular worldly manifestation. With Badiou, theology seeks "to account for this *migration*" of truth as it crosses from one world to another.¹³³ The kerygmatic trace of the messianic event presents itself to a multiplicity of situations, contextually indigenizing itself within the predicates of this or that context in order to rupture each context with the force of a new future. It is in this very way that Christ remains free for ever new subjective appearances. The kerygma is perpetually open to an infinity of new manifestations of faith.¹³⁴

This dialectical and paradoxical account of the messianic event and its consequences is, by necessity, a mostly formal description of Christian fidelity. While the historical event of Jesus is the material center of this theological proposal, the way this event impinges upon the present through the kerygma cannot be defined in advance of its contingent subjectivating manifestations.

¹³² Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 510. It is important to note that Badiou also says that "[an Idea] is better understood as an operation than as a concept" (Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis*, 237).

¹³³ Badiou, *Second Manifesto*, 129; emphasis added. Theology sides with Badiou in affirming the migratory nature of truth, yet it insists on grounding this in the migratory nature of *God*.

¹³⁴ The gospel, in other words, stands over against each particular church, each creed, each religious institution – even against religion itself. This critical standing-over-against does not undermine its creative and sustaining power as the mobilizing force of the faithful subject, but is rather the condition for its proper creativity. The gospel beckons and empowers concrete fidelity, yet it does so always with the caveat that there must be new modes of fidelity tomorrow. There is an eschatological horizon that places all present forms of faithfulness in a provisional light. Missiologist Andrew Walls characterizes this double aspect of the gospel in terms of the "indigenizing principle" and the "pilgrim principle." The message about Christ is translatable into – i.e., Christ translates himself into – new indigenous contexts, but this translation is never a collapse into or a flat identification with this new context. Instead, the gospel reorients that context (or world) toward an eschatological (or universal) goal. In short, my claim is that a Badiouan theology is fundamentally *missionary* in character.

The fact that the kerygma is irreducible to any particular world, and thus universal or catholic in scope, means that there is no predetermined sphere of Christian fidelity (e.g., "religion"). The original Christ-event does not initiate a religious truth-procedure alongside the truth-procedures of politics, art, science, and love. Badiou is right to reject Slavoj Žižek's suggestion that religion effectively operates as a *fifth* generic procedure in Badiou's philosophy, though he is right for different reasons than the ones he gives. According to Žižek, "Badiou's ultimate example of the Event is *religion* (Christianity from St Paul to Pascal)" but "this event . . . does not fit any of the four *génériques* of the event he enumerates."¹³⁵ While it is true that the Christian faith does not fit into any *one* of the procedures, it does not follow that it ought to be added to the list as merely one *more*, especially when that involves reducing it to a general category of "religion." Badiou's response to Žižek is that Paul does not provide "a new type of truth . . . but a new way of conceiving truth. . . . My reading of Paul is that he offers a new conception of truth in general."¹³⁶ This is equally problematic: instead of making religion one category among others, Badiou turns it into a formal description of all categories in general. We must resist both options. On the one hand, faith insists on the radical particularity of the crucified Christ; on the other hand, this singular event is open to all possible contexts and worlds. The consequences of the Christ-event do not appear in a predetermined universal form. Instead, the kerygmatic event of Christ manifests itself *within* other forms; it is *hidden* in its revelation. Christian fidelity occurs within the procedures of art, science, politics, and love—not as religion (which is a pseudo-fidelity), but rather as a *transfiguration* of every truth-procedure in order that each might bear witness to the messianic incursion within history.¹³⁷

To complete this theological translation of Badiou's philosophical logic, we must speak, finally, of what this account means for the being of God. A postmetaphysical theology must satisfy the following *negative* conditions:

- (1) God is not an ontological "one" or an *ens necessarium* that sutures together thinking and being according to the regime of representation;
- (2) God is not a logical appearance according to the transcendental laws of a world, meaning that God does not appear in a world alongside of and according to the same general laws as other objects.

As an exception to both being and appearing—that is, as both transontological and transphenomenological—God is an event. A

¹³⁵ Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London: Verso, 2008; 1999), 141.

¹³⁶ Miller, "Interview with Alain Badiou," 40.

¹³⁷ For a discussion of this fidelity with respect to politics, see Paul Lehmann, *The Transfiguration of Politics: The Presence and Power of Jesus of Nazareth in and over Human Affairs* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975).

postmetaphysical theology of God as an event thus has the following *positive* consequences:

- (3) God is *trans-being*: God is neither an element within being nor a modification in becoming,¹³⁸ but rather a "cut" in the midst of a world that breaks with every state or regime within nature;
- (4) God invades the world of appearance as the sublative *upsurge* of a trace: what was once nonexistent (or invisible) in a world now has maximal existence, such that everything appears in a new light;
- (5) God happens in a world as a *local* exception to (or disruption of) being and appearing, not as a cosmic change of the very categories of being and appearing, in which case God would no longer be an event but instead an ontological or phenomenological datum;
- (6) God is neither past nor future but always occurs in a *new present* which "presents us with the present"¹³⁹ and so changes our relation to time itself;
- (7) God confronts the individual as an *imperative* demanding a *decision* of fidelity, and in doing so God calls into existence a new communal subject and mobilizes it for faithful action in a world;
- (8) God is *infinitely translatable* from one world to another;
- (9) God is *infinitely repeatable* as a singular event that manifests itself as a mobilizing trace in a multiplicity of worlds.

A Badiouan account of theology thus understands God to be an unanticipatable event that dialectically unites in Godself both object (site, nonexistent, point) and subject (trace, body), without being directly identified with either. God takes place as a local disruption whose singularity embraces ever new situations and new subjective forms. God's being, we might say, is ontologically located in a transontological event that is transposed into and repeated within the infinite multiplicity of contingent historical worlds. In other words, the above account of the kerygma is here understood as an account of God's very being – a being that is, in fact, wholly beyond being, beyond the antimony of finite and infinite. God cannot be inscribed within the limits of ontology. The truth of God cannot be described as something that *is*, but only as something that *does*. Theology is not a doctrine of being but a doctrine of doing, that is, a doctrine of a kenotic, communal praxis. God is not a nature or a substance or an idea, but an action, a migration, a proclamation. God *happens* in the kerygmatic event of Christ as the interruption of a situation, *calls* forth a new faithful subject to carry out the consequences of this messianic truth, and repeatedly *translates* this truth into new contexts. In other words, the transhistorical movement of this christic-pneumatic event is the self-translation of God. The subjectivating power of the kerygma is God's own *self-mobilization* and *self-repetition*.

VI

¹³⁸ Contra, for example, pan(en)theistic and process conceptions of God, where God's being is, or includes, or is involved in the being and becoming of the world.

¹³⁹ Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 384.

Theological appropriations and translations of philosophical accounts of being and existence are always hazardous endeavors. They continually run the risk of violently conforming each philosophy to fit a presupposed theological paradigm. On some level, this danger is never entirely avoidable, hence the need to critically retranslate and reappropriate each concept anew, or dispense with them altogether in order to start again on a different footing. The goal of this paper has been to demonstrate that Alain Badiou's mature philosophy is especially congenial to the task of formative Christian theology in the present situation. Badiou provides theology with the terms and ideas to articulate an emancipatory, pluralistic, and postmetaphysical account of Christian fidelity to Jesus the Christ. The kerygma mobilizes a multiplicity of new communities for the sake of a messianic theopolitical witness in the world. Responsible talk of God is thus a consequence of this concrete fidelity and always speaks to the ongoing work of subjectivation within a particular situation.

A positive theological engagement with philosophy, and with Badiou in particular, confronts one insurmountable barrier—namely, soteriology. Here we return to the point of divide between Badiou and his theological interlocutors, such as Kierkegaard, Pascal, and Paul. With respect to Kierkegaard, for example, Badiou dismisses his emphasis on sin and anxiety. At the end of *Logics of Worlds*, he declares: "I need neither God nor the divine. I believe that it is here and now that we rouse or resurrect ourselves as Immortals."¹⁴⁰ Badiou posits the inherent possibility of incorporating oneself into the new present of the event—that is, the possibility of living an authentic existence, or becoming immortal as he puts it. We have the power, he says, to resurrect ourselves. Grace belongs to everyone by nature.

It is at this point that someone like Bultmann would have to demur, and here the example of his relation to Heidegger is instructive. As much as he appreciated and appropriated Heidegger, Bultmann always placed this fruitful partnership under the critical qualification that, from the standpoint of faith, we are wholly incapable of saving ourselves:

Both philosophy and faith are aware of human limits . . . The difference is that faith denies that a person can achieve authenticity through taking over the situation in a resolve for death. . . . God wills to have the person otherwise. *Faith* cannot possibly engage in discussion with *philosophy* at this point . . . Faith can judge the choice of philosophical existence only as an act of the self-creating freedom of the person who denies being bound to God.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 513.

¹⁴¹ Rudolf Bultmann, *What Is Theology?*, trans. Roy A. Harrisville (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 96.

For Bultmann, there is no "self-creating" or "self-incorporating" freedom of the individual. There is only the individual who receives her freedom as part of her newly created identity that occurs in the hearing of God's word in the kerygma.¹⁴² To be sure, Bultmann rejects any magical or supernatural explanation of this kerygmatic encounter, but neither is he willing to say that the condition of possibility for authentic existence is native to the creature as such. Such a response will be unsatisfying to those who are unable to think dialectically and so conclude that, if the event of grace is not supernatural, then it is not truly transcendent or *extra nos*, or conversely if it comes from outside ourselves then it must be supernatural. However one addresses this matter, the point of tension between philosophy and theology is found not in ontology but in *soteriology*—that is, in the ontic relation between event and subject that this article has thematized.

¹⁴² Does this mean theology, as articulated by Bultmann, rejects the concept of the "organ" that Badiou posits as "the capacity [of a body] to treat the point" (Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 433)? Yes and no. In his 1933 essay on "The Problem of 'Natural Theology,'" Bultmann addresses this issue, albeit in a way that has been the cause of much misunderstanding. See Bultmann, *Faith and Understanding*, 313–31; Bultmann, *Glauben und Verstehen*, 1:294–312. He argues in this essay that human beings have a "preunderstanding" (*Vorverständnis*) of revelation, i.e., the understanding of revelation "presupposes a coherent life-complex [*Lebenszusammenhang*] in which the one who understands and what is understood belong together" (Bultmann, *Faith and Understanding*, 315). Lest people misunderstand him, he goes on to clarify his (negative) position on natural theology: "All this does not mean that man carries within himself a special 'organ' [*Organ*] responsive to the divine, that a 'better self' is alive in him and serves as a point of contact [*Anknüpfungspunkt*] for the revelation, or anything of that sort. Faith denies that absolutely" (*ibid.*, 316). This is the basis for rejecting a theological counterpart to Badiou's notion of organ, insofar as it would mean an intrinsic point of contact for revelation, a religious *a priori*. However, Bultmann goes on to complicate matters. There is indeed a "preunderstanding" of revelation, but it concerns our entire existence as human beings in the world and cannot be isolated as some "thing" that we possess (e.g., soul, reason, conscience, etc.). "Faith is understood only when the man understands *himself* anew in it," he says. "The possibility for man to come to God lies in precisely the fact that he is a sinner. *The revelation can put in question only what is already questionable*" (*ibid.*, 316–17). Bultmann means this in a strictly hermeneutical, and not soteriological, sense. He does not mean, as he elsewhere clarifies, that the sinner knows herself to be a sinner apart from God's word. He rules out that possibility. But it is nevertheless the case that God's word comes to a person who already exists within history, whose existence is already shaped by various forces and contexts. And while the theologian insists that her self-understanding as a sinner justified by grace is something only the divine kerygma makes possible, this word still confronts us in our particular history and is only understandable as a word that addresses me in the whole context of my existence. In short, we can affirm Badiou's notion of "organ" for theology *only if* we assert that this organ is (a) not a "thing" that one can isolate from the whole existence of a body and (b) not something we know of prior to or apart from the encounter with the event's kerygmatic trace.

Regardless of the soteriological issue, Christian theology joins Badiou in opposing metaphysics and pursuing an emancipatory politics. Theology can learn from Badiou how to speak of a God who is *not* necessary, who is beyond all necessity.¹⁴³ At the same time, theology learns how to speak of God from within the multiplicity of worlds. Perhaps most importantly, Badiou provides theological discourse with a way of surpassing the traditional bifurcation between subject and object. The object of faith is an unanticipatable divine event in the contingent historical occurrence of Jesus the Christ, but this occurrence cannot be articulated or interpreted apart from the subjective consequences that are bound up within the event itself. Not only are these consequences irreducibly theopolitical in nature, but they operate locally as contextual manifestations of fidelity within a particular world.

Christian faith proclaims with Badiou the mobilizing word: "See what is coming to pass and not only what is." If metaphysics concerns "what is," then "what is coming to pass" refers to the impossible possibility of an event that puts an end to the old regime of being and appearing and inaugurates something decisive and new. It is in this ongoing pursuit of something new in the situation that theology will find Badiou to be a provocative and fruitful dialogue partner.

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¹⁴³ The "nonnecessity of God" is the basic thesis of Jüngel's work in *God as the Mystery of the World*. God, he argues, is not necessary but "more than necessary" (*mehr als notwendig*). See Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 14–35; Jüngel, *Gott als Geheimnis der Welt*, 16–44.