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Original Sin

Divine and Symbolic Violence in the Turn to the Apostle Paul

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B.D., M.Litt.

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Abstract

When we take a step back from the imposing figure of physical violence, it becomes possible to examine other structurally violent forces that constantly shape our cultural and political landscapes. One of the driving interests in the “turn to Paul” in recent continental philosophy stems from wrestling with questions about the real nature of contemporary violence. Paul is positioned as a thinker whose messianic experience began to cut through the violent masquerade of the existing order. The crucifixion and resurrection of the Messiah (a slave and a God co-existing in one body) exposed the empty grounding upon which power resided. The Christ-event signifies a moment of violent interruption in the existing order which Paul enjoins the Gentiles to participate in through a dedication of love for the neighbour. This divine violence aims to reveal and subvert the “powers,” epitomised in the Roman Empire, in order to fulfil the labour of the Messianic now-time which had arrived.

The impetus behind this research comes from a typically enigmatic and provocative section of text by the Slovene philosopher, cultural critic, and Christian atheist Slavoj Žižek. He claims that ‘the notion of love should be given here all its Paulinian weight: the domain of pure violence... is the domain of love’ (2008a, 173). In this move he links Paul’s idea of love to that of Walter Benjamin’s divine violence; the sublime and the cataclysmic come together in this seemingly perverse notion. At stake here is the way in which uncovering violent forces in the “zero-level” of our narrative worldviews aids the diagnosis of contemporary political and ethical issues.

It is not enough to imagine Paul’s encounter with the Christ-event as non-violent. This Jewish apocalyptic movement was engaged in a violent struggle within an existing order that God’s wrath will soon dismantle. Paul’s weak violence, inspired by his fidelity to the Christ-event, places all responsibility over creation in the role of the individual within the collective body. The centre piece of this re-imagined construction of the Pauline narrative comes in Romans 13: the violent dedication to love understood in the radical nature of the now-time.

This research examines the role that narratives play in the creation and diagnosis of these violent forces. In order to construct a new genealogy of violence in Christianity it is crucial to understand the role of the slave of Christ (the revolutionary messianic subject). This turn in the Symbolic is examined through creating a literary structure in which we can approach a radical Nietzschean shift in Pauline thought. The claim here, a claim which is also central to Paul's letters, is that when the symbolic violence which manipulates our worldviews is undone by a divine violence, if even for a moment, new possibilities are created in the opening for a transvaluation of values.

Through this we uncover the nature of original sin: the consequences of the interconnected reality of our actions. The role of literature is vital in the construction of this narrative; starting with Cormac McCarthy's *No Country for Old Men*, and continuing through works such as Melville's *Bartleby the Scrivener*, this thesis draws upon the power of literature in the shaping of our narrative worlds. Typical of the continental philosophy at the heart of this work, a diverse range of illustrations and inspirations from fiction is pulled into its narrative to reflect the symbolic universe that this work was forged through.

What this work attempts to do is give this theory a greater grounding in Paul's letters by demonstrating this radical kenotic power at the heart of the Christ-event. Romans 13 reveals, in a way that has not yet been picked up by Critchley, Žižek, and others, that Paul opposed the biopolitical power of the Roman Empire through the weak violence of love that is the labour of the slaves of Christ on the "now-time" that had arrived.

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Introduction

Violence and Truth

There is an inherent violence at play in the construction of narratives which form our perspectives on reality. This insight is central to the legacy that arises from the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche. His work *On the Genealogy of Morals* exemplifies this through relating the creation of the categories “good,” “bad,” and “evil” to forces that manipulate the way in which the world is experienced and understood. Within such manipulations of reality, as he relates to the apostle Paul in *The Antichrist*, the potential exists to do ‘violence to the truth’ (1888, 158). Yet this potential does not begin with the actions of independently positioned individuals. To put this in a Biblical context: Eve does not violently rupture creation through eating the fruit; rather, she participates in the violence which already exists. The serpent, the tree, and God are implicated in the violence which has already formed Eve’s experience of truth. Eating the fruit is the Event which reveals this violence, not the act which creates it. This is what links original sin to divine violence: the trauma of a sudden rupture in the Symbolic world of representations caused by its inability to continue to reproduce its conditions.¹

This particular theory of violence is examined in this thesis through narratives evolving out of recent continental philosophy which position Paul as an insurrectionist who inspired a shift in the balance of power of his own theologico-political context.² Paul is a figure whose messianic

¹The idea of the Symbolic is understood generically in this context. Appearing primarily out of French philosophical discourses of the last century, it names the basic idea that mediators of representation, such as language, media, and art, are responsible for the creation of meaning. The Symbolic Order represents the totality of the worldview of an individual; the world of language and symbols that makes this totality intelligible.

²Since Jacob Taubes brought Paul back to the attention of continental philosophy, the apostle has received renewed and sustained interest. See De Vries (2013) for an overview. Ward Blanton discusses this “turn to Paul” in continental philosophy in his introduction to Breton’s *A Radical Philosophy of Saint Paul*, arguing that it ‘may turn out to be one of the most significant political gestures of recent academic labour’ (2011, 1).

experience cut through the violent forces hidden in the Symbolic (the level of reality that produces representations and meaning). The Christ-event signifies a moment of violent interruption in the existing order which Paul enjoins the Gentiles to participate in through a dedication of love for the neighbour. This connects to a theory of divine violence; a force which contains the potential to reveal the empty truth at the centre of authority. For Paul this meant undermining the theologico-political structures and symbols of the Roman Empire, allowing the labour of the Messianic “now-time” to be fulfilled.

In this context the attention is placed upon the connections between moments of violent transgression; including jarring instances of physical violence which intrude onto the scene *and* the violence, lurking beneath the surface, which is constantly participated in. Indeed, this work is oriented around the idea that when we take a step back from the imposing figure of physical violence, it becomes possible to examine other structurally and symbolically violent forces which constantly shape cultural and political landscapes. Central to this theory is the continual return to stories that challenge the way in which violence is understood. This, essentially literary turn, focusses attention on the way that the legacy of Paul can be understood within a framework of narratives which helps to shape the way his encounter with the Christ-event is interpreted.

The initial impetus behind this research was provided by reading *No Country for Old Men* (a grim tale that challenges preconceptions about the nature of violence) alongside a typically enigmatic declaration by the Slovene philosopher, cultural critic, and “Christian atheist” Slavoj Žižek.

Sometimes hatred is the only proof that I really love you. The notion of love should be given here all its Paulinian weight: *the domain of pure violence*, the domain outside law (legal power), the domain of violence which is neither law-founding nor law sustaining, *is the domain of love*. (2008a, 173)

Paul's revolutionary theory of love becomes entangled here with Walter Benjamin's theory of divine violence. The perversity of this notion links in with Žižek's double-kenotic reading of Paul's epistles. Paul's proclamation of the death and resurrection of a slave and a God that co-existed in one body exposes the empty grounding upon which power resides; allowing, if even for a moment, a rupture in the Symbolic Order which creates the potential for something new to emerge. Love is the force that carries this truth of the Christ-event into actuality; a weak (hermeneutic) violence that disrupts the mechanisms that structurally and symbolically oppose the promises of God.

It is against this background that this research traces Žižek's idea that foundational acts of violence exist in the way that the symbolic nature of reality is shaped through dominant cultural narratives. The primary site of this interpretative battleground is found in the re-evaluation or de-legitimation of the way in which reality has been constituted through such narratives. As Ward Blanton exemplifies this violence:

on being corralled and sequestered and rendered generally ineffectual during our protests in New York City against the invasion of Iraq (can you still remember?), should we have not started to throw rocks? Or, perhaps, once I heard the politicians' dismissive speech about our place in the political liturgy of the spectacle ("isn't it wonderful that our proud spirit of protest is alive...nevertheless in the real world..."), I should not have organised a group of people to return to the streets with rocks in hand. (2014, xv)

Non-violent protests, in this sense, can become implicated in the "silent" symbolic violence of that which they oppose; an unintended participation in this violence that should be felt as a crushing blow to such protests. This is the point that Blanton makes in relation to Paul being disguised, indeed buried, within his own legacy, asking: 'why, at any rate, would we participate in this crime, this madness?' (2014, 189). This problem, so

accurately related to the way in which “Paul” is dragged into other, often competing, narratives, is visible in the diagnosis of violence which is all around us but scarcely acknowledged. Buried and re-buried in the systemic organisation and symbolic parlour tricks, its violence, even when not completely hidden, is obscured or rendered benign in the dominant narratives.

At stake here is the potential of that which Simon Critchley places at the foundations of our political, philosophical, and theological discourses: disappointment. Bound up with the existence of disappointment in the foundations of our thinking is the reality of our impotency. It is in this same way, to bring this example closer to Critchley, that one million protesters on the streets of London were not only unable to prevent a Labour government led by Tony Blair from cajoling the United Kingdom into military action in Iraq, but to compound their inability to halt military action they were also unable to avoid being swallowed up in the power mechanisms, and by extension the narrative, of that which they so passionately opposed (“the spirit of protest is alive and well, but in the real world...”). This level of disconnect between the ethical and political will of protesters and the dominant narratives they oppose is maintained in the violence orchestrated, in the Nietzschean sense, in the domain of truth. Is this not precisely the condition of Paul’s discovery of Christ, in the captivity of the promises of God culminating in the Messiah shattering the boundaries of the Symbolic?

At what point then, and in what way, does the theory of counter-violence begin to be evaluated under these circumstances? This is a question that tugs at the intellectual left, from Žižek to Butler, Hardt to Agamben: in what ways is it possible to strike back against the inability to act in line with a political and ethical conscience, collectively and individually, without reducing the response to striking out physically against the bare life of perceived enemies of such causes? How does the rebel move from ineffective protest to an effective movement without being obstructed, humiliated, or reduced to a mere spirit of protest or pointlessly destructive terrorist? Paul emerges as an important figure in

breaking this deadlock between those inscribed as the spirited protester and unruly anarchist, but not as a theologian or religious figure, or even as a philosopher, but as, in Badiou's words, "a poet-thinker of the Event" (2003, 2). As such, Paul is a figure who inspires new narratives and fictions that help, sometimes violently, to reshape the symbolic boundaries of reality. Or, as Paul would put it, the role of the "slave of Christ" (*doulos christou*) is to engage in this radical weakness in order to subvert 'the rulers of this age' (1 Cor. 2.8) as weak militants inspired by the Messiah to do violence to their truth.

At the heart of this move towards being a slave of Christ is a theory of original sin. Understood here as the condition of the consequences of our inability to cope with the interconnected reality of our actions, original sin is the very nature of our fallen state. Yet, as Žižek points out, this is not the condition of a fall from a perfect creation, but the very conditions of creation itself (2014a, 125-132). If tied within systems of metaphysical thought, original sin becomes the condition that serves as the justification for violent dominance which keeps this deficiency in check; it is the fact of humankind's guilt. This, however, is the very cruel mechanism of dominance which Paul attempted to reveal in the violence of Roman Imperial power. To give this a perverse Žižekian twist:

God did not only die, He was always already dead, He only did not always know about it, and the sense of man's "original sin" is precisely to spare Him from experiencing His "inexistence" (inconsistency, impotence) by assuming guilt. The logic of "original sin" is therefore again: better for me to be throughout guilty than for Him to learn about his death. (1992, 47-48)

What dies on the cross is the possibility of claiming power over humankind on the basis of its predetermined guilt. Paul thoroughly accepted the reality of original sin, but it was not earthly power or dominance that could keep it in check, but living in service to the crucified God who

revealed a new genealogy of truth through the resurrection. Simon Critchley gives this idea in proper Pauline reading in the light of love:

To be is to be in debt, I owe therefore I am. If original sin is the theological name for the essential ontological indebtedness of the self, then love is the experience of a counter-movement to sin that is orientated around an infinite demand that exceeds the projective potentiality of the self. (2012, 250-251)

This work, however, does not attempt to deny the concept of original sin. Instead it seeks to align it with creation itself. In other words, to understand the potential of love, we need to understand its violent struggle against the forces inherent to creation from the beginning.

What this work attempts to do is give this theory a greater grounding in Paul's letters by demonstrating this radical kenotic power at the heart of the Christ-event. Romans 13 reveals, in a way that has not yet been picked up by Critchley, Žižek, and others, that Paul opposed the biopolitical power of the Roman Empire through the weak violence of love that is the labour of the slaves of Christ on the now-time that had arrived.

An Overview

Violence finds its roots in transgressions. It might appear directly and forcefully in a physical encounter, or in the manipulation of the image of the Other, or it might be rooted in economic structures that create inequality and discrimination. In each case it relies on acts of violation. **Chapter One** begins by examining the literature of an author fascinated by violence: Cormac McCarthy. In *No Country for Old Men*, the brutal mercenary Anton Chigurh appears as an irreducibly violent god-like figure. His destructive actions threaten, however, to disguise the violence that occurs at a deeper level: the transgressive acts in the Symbolic that guides this demonic figure. The consequences of which demonstrate our infinite

responsibility within a volatile and unpredictable divine economy of cause and effect.

This leads to a questioning of the way in which such violence influences the direction of events. One of the central cogs that Žižek's work on violence revolves around is the idea that violent forces are habitually obfuscated by their position within the Symbolic Order. These "objective" forms of violence, systemic and symbolic in their functioning, become hidden in the "zero-level" of reality.³ While systemic violence relates to the systems that maintain and facilitate exploitation, inequality, and eruptions of physical violence, symbolic violence can be found in the foundations of identities and ideas that create and sustain worldviews. Attempting to analyse this level of violence can reveal the ways in which it can become covered-up within the symbolic nature of social relations but also, more hauntingly, can create an awareness of the ways in which we are already inevitably implicated in the creation and perpetuation of violent activity.

This violence, which Žižek argues is fundamental to the reality of capitalism, finds a counter force in divine violence; which he ties to Paul's radical formulation of love. In understanding this overturning of power, Žižek directs us towards the crucified God. The impact of double kenosis (the self-emptying of Christ in his reception of a God in the form of a slave) based on readings of Job and of Paul's letter to the Philippians, calls into question the nature of power. God Himself was subject to the nature of violence in His creation; violence that refuses deeper meaning in relation to any guilt of the victim. God therefore 'comes to share Job's astonishment at the chaotic madness of the created universe' (2009c, 48); and therein exists the foundations of a materialist theology that places even God's fate in the hands of this divine economy.

This divine economy is the domain to which secularisation owes its possibility. As Agamben puts it: 'the theological signature operates here as

³Žižek exemplifies the idea of the zero-level of reality in the way that in Europe buildings start with the "ground floor" rather than the "first." He notes that, 'before we start counting, there has to be a "ground"' (2009b, 91). It is in this sense that the zero-level exists, before the count (what we usually acknowledge) begins.

a sort of *trompe l'oeil* in which the very secularisation of the world becomes the mark that identifies it as belonging to a divine *oikonomia*' (2011, 5). This economy is directed, but never consciously controlled, by the actions of those He created; it is God and history in synchronicity. There is no guarantee of cosmic justice, no divine authority in charge of fate, only the outcomes of individual and collective activity. Put differently, there is no true authority that is extrinsic to the collective. Yet the very Pauline paradox here is that this authority relies on something external to it: that which is no longer under its control, immediately given up in an act of faith.

This collective has no direct way of claiming power without first exposing the empty claims to power of the authorities. **Chapter Two** is constructed around a theory of divine violence. It examines the potential influence over a force that can radically disrupt the stability of the Symbolic Order. The volatility of what is created in the divine economy cannot escape exposure to the divine; or in Žižek's language, the "untruth" of the Symbolic is exposed to the overwhelming presence of the Real. This theory plays a significant role in Žižek's work and is crucial in his reading of Paul. This violent intervention of the "divine" within the Symbolic - or as Hent de Vries (2001, 281) puts it, the 'divine unwriting' of the law - describes a moment of uncalculated rebellion. This force, allied to our actions but outside of our control, strikes against the inconsistencies of the represented world. It forces an excess onto the Symbolic Order that exposes the falsehood of the dominant narratives to the Real (the divine realm beyond our sphere of comprehension).

In assessing the influence that can be exerted over the divine, Žižek evokes Bartleby the scrivener. Herman Melville's character famed for the single spoken line of resistance "I would prefer not to" is used by Žižek to exemplify the foundations of this influence over the divine. Bartleby has also been the subject of attention from thinkers such as Deleuze, Rancière, and Agamben, who all share a fascination with the way in which he negates the world around him (a fascination which is echoed in many of their interactions with Paul's letters). Žižek's claim that we should follow

Bartleby in “preferring not to” participate in the mechanisms of capitalism, and Agamben’s positioning of Bartleby’s resistance as the return of potentiality in his world, point towards a type of messianic moment in which the illusory power of the current ideological stranglehold disintegrates. Bartleby represents a type of potentiality that Paul grasped in the unfolding of the Christ-event in the release of God’s promises from their captivity in the symbolic and systemic stranglehold of the ruling powers.

This type of force is prefigured in Paul’s epistle to the Romans. **Chapter Three** develops the ideas presented in the first two chapters in the context of this work’s own turn to Paul. The focus of this chapter is a problematic section of his letter to the Church in Rome: Romans 13. In this passage, Paul sets out the paradox of a God who grants authority to any despotic ruler, yet claims that only love towards the neighbour can fulfil the law. The crux of the matter is thus: Paul proposes that love is the only truly revolutionary action. It is only in fulfilling the law through love for the neighbour that we can participate in the wrath of God which has the power to shatter the violence of the Symbolic Order cultivated under the Roman Empire. Paul’s wrestling with the conflicting ideas of God as the director of history and God as a participant in history allow him to articulate a Messiah who bypasses the logics of the Roman Empire and of the local authorities who supported it.

This potentially violent text contains a theologically and politically charged narrative which is about the community of Christ dedicated to love (and not about a metaphysical pronouncement on the goodness of the ruling authorities). Paul was dealing with the abstract reality of the messianic intrusion into his world in the very concrete reality of his theologico-political context: within a violent empire and hostile local religious situations. The symbolism of the Roman Empire dominated the region, impinging upon cultural, social, and economic identities and possibilities. Paul’s encounter with Christ forced him to radically re-diagnose the condition of his identity and tradition. The Messiah’s resurrection after subjection to death at the hands of the Roman Empire

and the ruling elite revealed that they had no real power over life and death. The real power, as testified to through the Christ-event, was in the fulfilment of the law in the “now-time” that followed the resurrection of Christ. *The* revolutionary action, therefore, of the community of believers was that which was propelled by the love for the neighbour.

This takes us to the potential of the Christ-event to break down the privatisation that negates the possibility for a common force - in this case the community of believers that constituted the body of Christ - to transgress the system of authority which holds the commons captive. **Chapter Four** examines the way that Paul imagines identity and how this impacts upon violence in the Symbolic. For Paul it was through becoming a slave of Christ that a believer became part of this common body. By way of Badiou’s play *The Incident at Antioch*, this chapter explores one of the crucial themes of the turn to Paul and also a prominent theme in the diagnosis of violence in contemporary political and cultural spheres: Paul’s universal address.

Christianity, in the Pauline sense, ‘represents the synthesis of universalism and particularism’ (Žižek 2009a, 87); this synthesis occurs in the idea of God emptied into creation. Traditional markers of identity are irreversibly altered in their meaning; Paul became a slave of Christ and apostle to the gentiles (while all the time remaining, in some aspects at least, a Jew). Imagining the interconnected aspects of these identities, at some points universal in their address (the call to be a slave of Christ) and at other points ethnically or politically particular (Roman citizen and Jew), is found buried in the foundations of Christianity.

The Event of Christ’s death and resurrection caused a short circuit in Paul’s perception of the Symbolic Order. He now knew that there was *no longer slave or free, male or female, Jew or Greek*. All such differences had been reduced in the encounter with Christ (and formally through the act of baptism). This encounter with the subversion of his perceived logic of religion and empire radically redirected Paul’s already zealous passion for serving the promises of God.

Through the loss of the big Other, or the ability to justify our acts under the cover of divine authority, what remains is a debt of love to the neighbour. In light of this responsibility, Paul's calls the believers to be slaves of Christ through the infinite demand to love the neighbour. This reverses the claim of human authority: while they claim they are given authority from God, the subjects of the Christ-event are given responsibility over the divine only through their debt of love. As a hermeneutics underpinned by Paul's militant understanding of love, it emerges to challenge mechanisms of ideological dominance propagated by the Roman Empire. In the messianic era which had begun, Paul was forced to interpret situations in the context of what it meant to be a slave of Christ. This identity, which underpinned his role as an apostle, is what Giorgio Agamben calls the 'messianic vocation,' understood as the 'revocation of every vocation' (2005b, 23). He worked not as a Christian as such, but as a messianic Jew compelled to apply the unfolding of the truth of the Christ-event to the particularities of the gentile communities that he encountered: as a slave and apostle of Christ to the Gentiles.

Žižek has demonstrated a will to recapture a radical element of Christianity that evades the logics of both its fundamentalist and liberal readings; one violent in its refusal to acknowledge alternative truths, the other anaemic in its refusal to consider Jesus as being much more than merely a "good man." **Chapter Five** examines the centrality of original sin in Paul's interpretation of the Christ-event. It is in this context that Žižek would begin to make Paul feel uncomfortable, through taking away perceived theological certainties of his own context.

Through a reading of Paul's famous passage of text in Romans 7, we find the idea of the violent imagination that Paul already perceived in the early moments of this cult. This condition of creation, as exemplified through the figure of Eve in Genesis 2-3, is one of susceptibility to the manipulation of reality. This apparent weakness of the flesh, however, also demonstrates the strength (or weak violence) of the slave of Christ that strives to actualise the potential of the Christ-event. It is here that

the centrality to the Christ-event of narratives inherent to our shaping of the world becomes apparent.

The idea of the revolutionary weak violence extracted from Paul comes from this site; the Bartlebian refusal to participate in the Symbolic Order as it has been constructed. A responsibility that not only demands an ethical response, as Critchley has posited, but also a narrative response in this dismantling of the violent forces at the heart of political and economic forces that determine power. This is the transvaluation of values made possible through the Christ-event; through a dedication to telling the new stories made possible in the wake of the death of God. The responsibility of showing fidelity to the Christ-event, and committing to the love for the neighbour that this demands, is to follow Paul's example in radically re-evaluating our situations in this light. It is in the formation of this narrative of (weak) violent resistance that an important legacy of Pauline love emerges.

Violence, the Turn to Paul, and Literature

The methodology of this work follows is influenced by the hyperactive interdisciplinary traversal of thought so often associated with continental philosophy (and so forcefully exemplified in figures such as Žižek and Nietzsche). This is New Testament theology carried out in a sphere which wishes to declare God as dead and words as fallible, and, as recent works from those such as Ward Blanton, Clayton Crocket, and Peter Rollins have demonstrated, it is all the stronger for this shift. It draws on works of fiction from literature and film, upon history and culture, and is openly indebted to theory as it draws upon forms of hermeneutics and poetics necessary for its readings. There is an acknowledgement that this work is a participation in the symbolic world through which its creation was made possible. The novel *No Country for Old Men*, for example, plays a significant role in this work simply because it played a significant role in inspiring the development of its foundations. It is this type of openness

that makes the writings of a figure like Žižek so compelling; we are seeing the work develop directly out of his symbolic universe.

This work is defined by its knitting together of Pauline theory. Each aspect is woven into a narrative that seeks to build a theory of weak violence, propelled by literature and fiction, relating to the apostle Paul. This thesis contends with a theory of Pauline violence in the same manner that Žižek, Badiou, Agamben, and Critchley, in their own ways, weave philosophy, theology, film, theatre, literature, contemporary events, and history through their works.

In order to continue, there are three main areas of clarification that will be useful to the reader regarding the way in which different disciplines are approached. Principally of concern here: the theory of violence that is evoked, the relevancy of the apostle Paul, and the reason why literature is significant in unlocking and re-working a theory of violence in the zero-level of the symbolic formation of reality.

Violence

Žižek provides a sharp critique of the symbolic and systemic forms of violence which masquerade at the zero-level of reality.⁴ Put differently, the violence inherent to language, symbols, organisations, structures, and so forth, through which worldviews are constructed. The primary focus of this work is not on physical violence, though it remains a vital aspect, but on symbolic violence. Understood as the violent impact of signifiers and representation, symbolic violence is found in the creation and perpetuation of dominant cultural and political narratives. This is evident

⁴These terms allow for a careful qualification of violence which avoids its trivialisation. Supplementing “violence,” with terms such as “structural,” “systemic,” or “symbolic,” allows distinctions to be made between the different domains to which this theory is being applied. Systemic and structural violence relate to violence inherent to systems and structures which manipulate, coerce, and harm people and objects within that system or structure. Symbolic violence, which includes hermeneutic and poetic violence, acts through influencing perceptions of reality. Symbolic and systemic violence belong to the category of objective violence which, Žižek argues, ‘is invisible since it sustains the very zero-level standard against which we perceive something as subjectively violent’ (2008a, 2).

in such areas as the legitimisation of political oppression of subsets of society, the terrorism of religious fundamentalisms against the “other,” and the justification of economic models which promote exploitation and inequality. Each has an underpinning in symbolic forms which (on the level of ideas, representations, and language) is violent in the force it exerts.

Violence is a theory that is evoked in the creation of narratives explaining traumatic, disrupting, and damaging phenomena. This work resists a common understanding that violence simply refers to ‘injurious or lethal harm deliberately intended’ (Wink 2002, 333). As such, and in the way of clarifying the importance of understanding this idea in symbolic and systemic contexts, there are criticisms which should be acknowledged.⁵ What will be constructed here, however, is a theory of violence based upon forceful violation that occurs in systemic and symbolic forms as well as in physical acts.

Several examples of such violence can be rooted in New Testament writings. Paul, the self-proclaimed apostle, wrote in a letter to Gentile converts of a Corinthian sect of a fledgling Jewish apocalyptic cult:

women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. (1 Cor. 14.34-35)

A surface reading of this apparent chastising of women in the Corinth proto-Christian community would suggest that it perpetuates the image (and widely held belief, still to this day) of the female as inferior to her male counterpart. Her silence is required to maintain order in the community.

⁵It would be counterproductive in certain contexts for the theory of violence to be diluted in such a way that it could refer to any force. In psychology, for example, it might not be useful for the word to become synonymous with other words such as ‘harm,’ ‘misery,’ ‘alienation,’ or ‘repression’ (Keane 2004, 35). Furthermore it would be counterproductive, and an interpretive mistake, ‘to spread the term violence across all interpersonal and solitary actions of which we disapprove’ (Tilly 2003, 4).

The Italian philosopher and “half-believer” Gianni Vattimo describes violence as ‘the fact of shutting down, silencing, breaking off the dialogue of questions and answers,’ he continues, ‘violence, then, is the fact of no longer permitting the other to ask questions’ (2007, 93-94). In this context it we can understand Paul’s letter as containing an act of violence. The “women” are silenced; their reality is replaced, as is inevitable of language, by a representation of something inferior to men. Identified as a member of the gender which must succumb to the dominance of the dominant gender of the community, their potential is radically disrupted. The primary site of this violence is not found in a physical outburst which would typically be associated with the term, but in language itself. This violence originates in the symbolic constructions of reality that define the world as it is understood.

Symbolic violence does not arise as a simple pathway from speech acts, or any other act of representation, to violence; it depends on context, consequence, and on interpretation. In the above example we cannot be certain whether Paul actually wrote the particular passage or the extent to which the context of its writing disguises the point that was being put across. There is also a stark difference between reprehensible writings contained in sections of a first century letter (which can be strongly critiqued) and the infallible texts of Holy Scripture (which cannot be openly critiqued at all). Context is important. This is, though, one of the many ways in which violence is perpetrated and perpetuated within the Symbolic Order, and Paul is not innocent in this regard. The symbolic violence inherent to the portrayal of an image of women as inferior to men, in this case through their silencing in the Corinthian church, is extended in any attempt to block a proper interrogation of this passage. Vattimo claims that ‘claims of truth are also claims of political power’ and therefore, since one truth cannot be exchanged for another, ‘truth and violence become interchangeable’ in the silencing of the Other (2011, 18-19).

Prominent examples of this violence can be found at the heart of fundamental religious movements which have turned ‘the name of God into

the name of terror' (Caputo 2001, 107). Žižek warns of this twisting of the Pauline narrative of love in the monster of fundamentalism. He writes:

In the absence of any ethical standards external to your belief in and love for God, the danger is always lurking that you will use your love of God as a legitimisation for the most horrible deeds. (2008a, 116)

He links this danger to sacred causes that rely on a figure of the 'Absolute upon whom to off-load our ultimate responsibility' (2012, 45). Religious fanatics, through this fight for an ultimate cause, can become, 'anaesthetized against their elementary sensitivity to the other's suffering' (45). Yet Žižek does not dismiss the value of a connection between love and violence in itself. Indeed, this work is premised on that connection. It is, however, vital in this context to pay a demanding attention to the effects wrought on the symbolic and systemic creations of reality through this violent love.

Terry Eagleton aptly describes religious fundamentalism as 'the house-of-cards view of life; flick away the one at the bottom and the whole structure comes fluttering down' (2007, 77). In defending the fragile elements that define their religious beliefs, the integrity of their own interpretation of God moves to a sphere that is beyond reproach. Žižek articulates the problem in that while it is ordinary for those with some form of faith to believe, fundamentalists through their own conviction *know* the truth. He writes:

[they] erect in panic the shield of 'fundamentalism,' the psychotic-delirious-incestuous reassertion of religion as direct insight into the divine Real, with all the terrifying consequences that such a reassertion entails, and including the return with a vengeance of the obscene superego divinity demanding sacrifices. (2008a, 70)

In the roots of this violence are constructions of symbolic reality. Žižek continues, 'they lost their (symbolic) ground without time to establish a new (symbolic) balance' (70).

To call it symbolic violence is not to belittle its significance or the reality of its impact, but an indication that this violence occurs through the way in which ideas are created and disseminated. As Paul W. Kahn puts it: 'the forces that knit us together - language, religion, family, morality, politics - are no less strong for the fact that they are symbolic' (2011, 62). Violence is also no less strong because it is symbolic. As Regina M. Schwartz, in *The Curse of Cain*, argues: 'violence is not only what we do to the other. It is prior to that. Violence is the very construction of the other.' She continues, 'acts of identity formation are themselves acts of violence' (1997, 5).

Key to this appropriation of violence is the idea that the line between what is violent and what is not violent should not be drawn exclusively on physical terms. Drawing upon the idea of violence as an emotive way of explaining a rupture in the stability of life, the terms symbolic and systemic violence make a more powerful point about these forces without trivialising the term. With this in mind, Hent de Vries makes a useful working definition of violence in his work *Religion and violence: philosophical perspectives from Kant to Derrida*. He writes:

(violence) in both the widest possible and the most elementary senses of the word, entails any cause, any justified or illegitimate force that is exerted - physically or otherwise - by one thing (event or instance, group or person, and, perhaps, word and object) on another. (2002, 1)

This work holds to this definition of violence with a significant caution: the greatest instances of violence are not always the most visible. We should

be wary of declarations such as, “we will know violence when we see it.”⁶ The decision to declare something as violent is heavily influenced by cultural, political, and social contexts. Violence already exists before we see it.

The most powerful violence related to the Shoah was not found in the death camps. It was found in the violation, manipulation, and destruction wrought in the construction of the victimisation and hatred that allowed the smooth functioning of mechanisms crucial to the catalogue of catastrophic atrocities which would tear so mercilessly through the centre of Europe. Without scarcely thinkable violence carried out at the most basic level of reality, what Hannah Arendt would call “the banality of evil,” the processing and murder of more than six million human beings would have been impossible.

The influence of Walter Benjamin’s essay *Critique of Violence* (*Zur Kritik der Gewalt*) is crucial in this work, and its title indicates something which is at stake in the formation of the theory of violence in this work. As Derrida pointed out, the translated title does not do justice to its title in its original language. He argues that the French and English translations, ‘while not unjust, and not so entirely violent, are very active translations that do not do justice to the fact that *gewalt* also signifies, for Germans, legitimate power, authority, public force’ (2001, 234).⁷ *Gewalt* is distinct from *gewalttätigkeit*, which is closely connected to the idea of physical

⁶The psychologist James Gilligan argues that, ‘Where violence is defined as criminal, many people see it and care about it. When it is simply a by-product of our social and economic structure, many do not see it; and it is hard to care about something one cannot see’ (Bufacchi 2010, 1).

⁷ The roots of the English word “violence” are found in the Latin word *vis*: a physical or mental strength or power, related to qualities such as energy and vigour. It is a term which is connected to the strength of conquering military forces. From this root come words such as *violatio* (violation, profanation) and *violentia* (violence, vehemence, ferocity). At stake here is the idea of violation; to conquer, to violate with a force related to a vigorous strength which contains a measure of ferocity. These are the ideas in the nucleus of the word that would become “violence.”

violence.⁸ In the decision to translate *gewalt* as violence rather than force there is an acknowledgement of the violent forces which exist outside of physical actions (relating to signs, language, law, politics, and so on).

Dealing with New Testament texts, it is already evident that there is no straight-forward way of defining violence.⁹ The language of Koine Greek coloured the world in a different way to that of the English language. For example, *zoe* and *bios*, both translated as life, split its understanding into either a bare or qualified existence. Agamben reminds us of this when he evokes Aristotle's belief that man is a 'living animal with the additional capacity for political existence' - *zoe* (living animal) and *bios* (political being) (1998, 5). Agamben provides an important reminder about the non-static nature of language but also the way it remains tied to a long history that deeply impacts the way in which worldviews are shaped. In this way it is important to use this word that signifies a powerful idea, violence, in a way which can radically shift our perceptions of the forces that shape history.

Therefore, in a nutshell, violence is understood in this work as an emotive term used in the analysis of a force that violates or disrupts a subject(s) or object(s) in a way which disturbs, damages, or changes the situation in which it appears. In doing so, it forcefully impacts upon the way in which the world is understood. Violence might occur in any instance where there has been a measure of undue coercion, violation, disruption, damage, or destruction to subjects and/or objects. This includes physical outbursts of violence, but also forms of symbolic, systemic, and structural

⁸ Beatrice Hanssen in *Critique of Violence: Between Poststructuralism and Critical Theory*, charts the history of violence (*gewalt*) in contemporary theory. She claims that using the idea *gewalt* helps inform our understanding of violence: 'Violence now includes such phenomenologically elusive categories as psychological, symbolic, structural, epistemic, hermeneutical, and aesthetic violence' (2000, 9).

⁹ In New Testament texts the words violence, violent, and violently are used to denote poetic, physical, and metaphorical meanings. They are used to describe weather, physical force, unpleasant demeanour, terror, and excessiveness. There is a negative weight carried by a word such as *ὕβρις* (arrogance, haughtiness, violence, offence, abuse) in 1 Tim 1.13, as opposed to the more descriptive *βία* (force or strength) in Matt 11.12 and Acts 12.35. Paul describes his persecution of the church as *ὑπερβολήν*; translated as "excessively" or "violently" it is similar in root to the word hyperbole (1 Gal 3.1). There is also *φοβηθεῖς* (horror) in Acts 23.10 and *πλήκτην* (to strike) in 1 Tim 3:3.

violence which constantly shape our perception and experience of reality. Richard Horsley makes the point that violence is ‘not only descriptive but also evaluative’ (2000, 21). He is not the only figure in areas of New Testament studies to realise the importance of being attentive to the way in which we understand violence.¹⁰ This brings us to the second qualification in the context of this work: the apostle Paul.

The Turn to Paul

Nietzsche accused Paul of ‘doing violence to the truth’ (1888, 158), and he was right. Paul’s proclamation of a crucified Messiah that defeated death announced a violent rupture in the “truth” (or untruth) of his theologico-political situation. The Roman Empire established order and control on the basis of their power over life and death – Paul’s Christ disrupted that order. Nietzsche’s criticism might have been correct in this regard, but he failed to acknowledge that Paul’s project was very much like his own. It was concerned with the transvaluation of values; a rebalancing of power out of the hands of the ruling elite and into the hands of the community of believers. This connection between Paul and Nietzsche is not lost on many writers in recent continental philosophy, as Simon Critchley puts it: ‘Nietzsche’s call for a revaluation of values is based on a sheer jealousy of Paul’s achievement in bringing about such a revaluation’ (2012, 155-156).

Paul’s message was delivered from the margins; subversive to authority and based on weakness. Yet its legacy is fractured, paradoxically found as much in power and control as it is in weakness and subversion. This splintered legacy is hindered by the framing of his letters within

¹⁰ Horsley, in reflecting upon the violence of the subjugation of the Jews as a people, wrote: ‘once we begin reflecting upon our basic sense of values and the “real” world of socio-political affairs, it is virtually mandatory to keep expanding and deepening our understanding of violence’ (2000, 20). This deepening sense of understanding can be seen through the way that he inserts the language of structural violence into the world of the New Testament writings. Thomas Yoder Neufeld also acknowledges a similar point, writing: ‘what counts as violence has widened dramatically, with significant implications for how the New Testament relates to violence’ (2011, 2).

Biblical canon and history that disguise their situational and cultural particularities. Paul's messages are not readily comprehended through the few historically remote and often vague letters that have survived, yet Paul has at many times been promoted as a bearer of clear and simple messages. A significant danger exists in this assumption of simplicity. Once we stop interpreting (having faith), and begin *knowing*, the texts take on a violently oppressive potential. Authority that is based on absolute assertions creates new possibilities for abuse and cruelty. In this sense, Christianity fails to break free from being a religion prone to such violence when it refuses to give up its claims on ultimate authority and absolute truth. The Christ-event created a power vacuum pregnant with hope that was also exploited by the re-establishment of mythic violence, giving rise to the monstrous Real of the Hebrew Bible's fiction. The turn to Paul attempts to redeem something radical that became buried in the symbolic rubble of this catastrophe.

It is here that we can situate a convergence between the works of continental philosophers such as Alain Badiou, Simon Critchley, and Slavoj Žižek and Biblical scholars such as Brigitte Kahl, Neil Elliot and Ward Blanton; each charting their own, often very distinctive, way through an imagining of Paul outside some of his traditional Christian shackles. It is precisely the way in which he shifted the groundings of truth in his situation that makes him such a compelling figure in these readings.

Within this context Paul has re-appeared as a significant figure in the diagnosis and critique of cultural and political forms of violence, and as a guidepost on the path to articulating forms of resistance beyond the sacrificial logics of physical violence. Imagining violence which is not merely sacrificial is an essential feature of this interest in Paul; violence which is utilised in the transformation of a situation through targeting the mechanisms which create injustice rather than striking blindly at physical representations of those mechanisms. For many, however, this remains a

peculiar, puzzling, or even unwelcome intrusion into work focussed on Paul.¹¹

There has been, after all, enough fighting within more familiar domains over Paul's legacy - in perspectives old and new. In introducing *The Apostle to the Conquered*, Davina C. Lopez makes the appeal that 'it is crucial to re-read, re-situate, and re-imagine the Apostle Paul' (2008, xi). The drive to re-imagine this first century figure, known primarily through a small collection of letters, has seen the rise of a plethora of new perspectives. Paul's letters, as forceful and revolutionary yet inconsistent and vague, have provided a site of re-reading and re-situating; not only of the apostle, but of religious, cultural, and political movements. As some have moved away from the old Luther-centred interpretations at a frightful pace, others have cautioned not to forget the importance and diligence of such readings (see Westerholm 2004, for example).

Re-imaginings or radical appropriations of the apostle stemming from the broad area of continental philosophy are not entirely novel. The apostle's legacy has a long-standing, if strained, relationship with philosophy.¹² This aspect of what has been called the "return of religion," 'perhaps the dominant cliché of contemporary theory' (Critchley 2012, 8), is adding to rejuvenated interest in Paul and his theologico-political context from within more traditional areas of Biblical scholarship. If nothing else these thinkers have added fresh provocation to those concerned with the first century apostle. In many cases they offer invigorated insights which expose the study of Paul to contemporary political, cultural, and philosophical concerns.

There is, however, uneasiness from some quarters in accepting that this provocation has much to offer in the way of insight into Paul's letters. Paula Fredriksen typifies this criticism in her essay on Badiou's Paul,

¹¹ Stephen Fowl describes how he is struck by the variety of reactions 'to having philosophers and other unauthorized types romp in our playground' (2010: 119).

¹² Included in this history is the impact of Nietzsche and Kierkegaard evident in theologians and Biblical scholars such as Karl Barth and Albert Schweitzer, as well as Paul's peculiar influence on Heidegger's early work.

pointedly titled *Historical Integrity, Interpretive Freedom*.¹³ She argues that Badiou ‘has presented us not with a study of Paul and his concerns, but with an oblique self-portrait, and an investigation of concerns and ideas that are irreducibly Badiou’s’ (2009, 72). At the core of Fredriksen’s criticism is the point that ‘the frame of reference for historical interpretation is not and cannot be the present...our frame of reference is the past’ (2009, 61-62).

Frederiek Depoortere, in his book on Badiou and Theology, also points out that ‘Badiou is not presenting the historical Paul, but his own version of the apostle’ (2009, 164). This is less of a problem for the theologian than it is for the historian. To an extent this criticism is not without justification. Thinkers such as Badiou and Žižek have wilfully ignored a great deal of scholarship on Paul. Their primary concerns revolve around contemporary issues rather than any historical integrity of Paul. Predominantly, at least, the aim of Fredriksen and other critics has not been to silence these voices, but to elicit honesty about the ‘oblique self-portrait’ that is represented in their work on Paul.¹⁴ The problem with this though, indeed its failure, is in the lack of any real attempt to contend with the issues and ideas that can help to further our understanding of Paul without sacrificing historical integrity. The frame of reference for any investigation cannot solely exist in an isolated context.¹⁵

The attempt to detach all possible “anachronisms,” as Fredriksen puts it, in the pursuit of a purely historical Paul ignores the significant questions posed about the implications of the proto-Christian or radical Jewish message found in Paul’s epistles. G.K. Chesterton, whose work has

¹³ Ward Blanton remarks on the ‘remarkable awkwardness’ with which Pauline scholars like Fredriksen have engaged with recent philosophical works interested in the apostle. Theodore Jennings and Larry Welborn are among those who have engaged in a more open, astute, and at times critical manner.

¹⁴ E.P. Sanders (2009) is also among a number of Biblical scholars who have shown scepticism towards the content of this interest in Paul.

¹⁵ Depoortere cautions that ‘we should not limit our reading of Badiou to his book on Paul’ and that ‘his interpretation of Paul is only an illustration’ (2009, 9). He argues that while Badiou’s interest in Paul has helped reinvigorate the charting of Paul’s legacy, it belongs as part of Badiou’s larger corpus of work. In this way it is also crucial that Badiou’s illustration is allowed to gain influence within the contexts of historical approaches to the apostle.

an important influence on Žižek's theology, articulated this type of criticism well when he wrote, 'either criticism is no good at all (a very defensible position) or else criticism means saying about an author the very things that would have made him jump out of his boots' (1989, 272). Indeed, Badiou, as well as Žižek, Agamben, and others, have not only used the Pauline texts as illustrations in their contemporary discourses, but have challenged the implications, as well as the intentions, of these writings. Many other Pauline scholars, including Dale Martin, Larry Welborn, and Ward Blanton, have noted this ability to ask critical questions of the apostle. The assertion here is that Paul is not merely a figure ripped from his own context as an example of a revolutionary figure (which at some turns he undoubtedly is), but is also a crucial figure in within his own context, as a thinker who encountered and participated in the rupturing of the Symbolic Order.

As we conduct historical investigations we are propelled by our own contexts and by many other contexts between us and the sites of our investigations. To interpret the possible psychological, psycho-analytical, or political intentions of the historical Paul, we require a meeting of frames of reference. Even the way in which we conduct historical investigation requires a reference of how history is transmitted in the present (which implies a different mode of transmission to Paul's context). This is not to take away from the often rich pictures which Fredriksen, and other historians who have at times maintained a distance from the philosophers' turn to Paul, paint of Paul's historical context. Such investigations are vital tools in the battle against violent misappropriations of texts, yet history and theory are not so distinct that one should not fully embrace the challenges of the other.

It is not the intention here to rip Paul out of his context. In the same way that we should not assume that Paul understood literature, philosophy, or psychology in the same way as Conrad, Nietzsche, or Freud understood their respective fields of thought, we should not assume that developments in these fields (whether artistically or scientifically) do not fundamentally alter the ways in which we should interpret Paul's

theologico-political interventions in fragile proto-Christian communities. The important point here is that thinkers such as Taubes, Agamben, Žižek, Critchley, and Badiou have provided insightful, meaningful, and also varying interpretations and appropriations of Paul's letters in a way that can add to and enhance our historical *and* contemporary understanding of Paul.

Badiou, echoing Barth's famous statement on the continuing relevancy of Paul, addresses the apostle as 'our contemporary' (2003: 5).¹⁶¹⁷ Indeed, in the foreword to the recently published outline of Pier Paolo Pasolini's unmade film about Paul, Badiou notes the shift in contexts that Paul's message transcends. He remarks that, in many of our contemporary situations, 'Paul's text crosses all these circumstances intact, as if he had foreseen them all' (2014, xi). This should not be used to obfuscate the considerable extent of the separation between Paul's context and our own. We should not mistake Paul's social, cultural, or even perceived eschatological, context for any other. Time and time again, however, Paul's provocation reappears with acute relevance to contemporary situations, and with an uncanny ability to prompt re-examinations of the apostle's primary context. It is a provocation which arrives to us from Paul that is also read back into Paul.

Inherent to this feature is a growing interest in the significance of a religious tradition like Paulinism in terms of the diagnosis and critique of on-going cultural and political violence. The particular assertion of this work is that violence is a pivotal feature of the turn to Paul. These reflections on this early "Christian" figure have aided the pursuit of significant contemporary questions. These thinkers, unconventional in their connection to Paul and to theology - in a variety of, often conflicting, ways - utilise the apostle's radical break in his worldview instigated by the Christ-event in order to think about possible resistance to the violence that is fundamental to capitalism.

¹⁶ 'If we rightly understand ourselves, our problems are the problems of Paul; and if we be enlightened by the brightness of his answers, those answers must be ours' (Barth 1933, 1).

¹⁷ De Vries links Adorno together with Barth in acknowledging the theologian's impact on aspects of continental philosophy. This is epitomised in Barth's reading of Romans 12-13 and his agreement with Paul that evil can only be overcome through good (De Vries 2013).

Badiou links our thinking of the universal to the particular in a way that cuts through the traditional theological divisions between liberalism and fundamentalism in order to show the way in which subjects are created in the unfolding of a Truth-Event (with Paul's emphasis on the power of love, this a particularly important example for Badiou). Agamben, in a way that conflicts with Badiou's reading of Paul on key points, understands Paul as a crucial thinker of the messianic; specifically how Paul envisages messianic time as disrupting the mechanisms of the law which blocks the potential for something truly novel to occur. Critchley uses Paul to think through the importance of fidelity to a cause; in this case thinking of love for the neighbour as an infinite demand that breaks beyond the confines of liberalism into a mode of anarchist thought. Vattimo uses the Pauline themes of kenosis and love, while retaining a certain measure of wariness with regards to mentioning an apostle so linked with social conservatism, to help in the construction of his post-metaphysical "weak thought." Žižek sees Paul as something more violent than all of this: as a thinker whose theory of love propelled by the rupture of the Christ-event helps us to think of a divine violence that breaks down the Symbolic Order.

Each of these interconnected, yet (sometimes bitterly) conflicting, approaches to the apostle could be the subject of a work such as this one. It is Žižek's approach, however, that propels this work, with the others used to create either some depth to Žižek's approach or add tensions and variations on the controversial approach of the Slovene cultural critic.

Through these approaches, Paul has become a significant figure in the search for answers to questions about the possibility for leftist revolutionary action beyond the catastrophes of the last century. Questions such as: is there a violence that is perhaps *not* linked to such sacrificial logics, not linked to what Badiou described as modernity's devastating "passion for the real" (as revealed through terrorist attacks, death camps, show trials, and staged executions)? The key here is that such rituals fail to touch the Real, but instead remain entrenched in an obsession caused by their own Symbolic reality. The type

of violent force that Žižek wills is that which reveals such actions for what they really are; physical brutality that is empty of the “real” transformative power they wish to have. To put this differently, terrorists and violent militants, as seen with Islamic State, may pretend to be doing God’s will but only ever serve an illusion (to quite devastating ends).

The radical resistance of Paul stands in this place. As Brigitte Kahl puts it with regards to the Pauline group in Galatia dedicated to the body of Christ:

They shared the bread and a new corporeality that symbolised and celebrated life, rather than death, that came from the resurrected body of a crucified Jew. Profoundly nonviolent yet unconquerable, this was the negation and abrogation of the idolatrous *eidolon* of triumph and defeat: Messianic peacemaking in the image of the One God other than Caesar, and of the Messiah Jesus. (2010, 302)

What Žižek adds to this is a measure of violence. That we must be critically attuned to the violence that we participate in all the time and find a way to violently interrupt its ability to reproduce itself. This is the violence of Pauline love.

Literature

An important piece of the puzzle, in terms of contextualising and explaining the methodology of this work, is the presence of literature (especially in establishing the themes and theories that drive this thesis). Prevalent among the philosophers prominent in the framework of this thesis is their employment of the classic literary genres (poetry, drama, and prose) as essential aspects of the process of communicating their thought. By this I mean the stories, narratives, and poetic diction that allow their work to function in the acknowledgement that access to any

divine language, in other words an immediacy of truth, is out of reach. It is in this sense that Nietzsche wrote of *Zarathustra*:

I allow no one to pass muster as knowing that book, unless every single word therein has at some time wrought in him a profound wound, and at some time exercised on him a profound enchantment. (1981, 7)

This work relies on biblical narratives such as found in the Book of Job or in Genesis 2-3, on writers including Cormac McCarthy and Herman Melville, and also on works from theatre and film, including Badiou's play *The Incident at Antioch*. It relies on them not merely as illustrations which contribute towards the "greater meaning" of this work, but as anchors that continually reassert that this work is, as T.S. Eliot famously put it with regards to his own poetry, "a raid on the inarticulate." Novels such as *No Country for Old Men* and *The Last of the Just* dramatize not only representations of violence but also the symbolism and structures inherent to what creates their violence.

What thinkers within the broad area of continental philosophy manage to do with the gap between the Word and *words* (this very essence of the connection between literature and theology) is draw in the power of literature to demonstrate the gap between what we are attempting to communicate and the path back to their origin in the "divine," or, as Žižek would put it, in demonstrating the gap between the Symbolic and the Real.

Rex Butler, in his introduction to Žižek, describes this way of communication as an attempt to 'take in the entirety of Western philosophy, both low and high: from Schoenberg to sci-fi, from quantum mechanics to the latest Hollywood Blockbuster' (2005, 2). Introductions to Žižek's work cannot fail to pick up on this tendency towards an amalgamation of sources in his apparently chaotic writings. All of these elements are crucial to his work; indeed, what makes Žižek "Žižek" is tied to his method. The films, literature, scientific, and cultural references

employed in his writings provide a critique of both dominant and obscure references within his audience's perception of reality. In examining what shapes their ideological landscapes, he is also influencing the thought of his readers through contributing to the little symbolic building blocks that create the gaze that filters the material properties of existence. The crux of the matter is that these illustrations, references, and jokes form a staging post between the Symbolic and the Real. To put it in a different way, Žižek acts as a theologian searching for the Word among the forms of revelation in the postlapsarian world.

This work follows Žižek and a host of thinkers from continental philosophy who draw upon works of fiction not only for their provocation, illustration, and explanation, but also in the inherent role they play in shifting the lens on the world which shapes the worldview of the subject. The works of Badiou, Žižek, Agamben, Rancière, Critchley, and many others, is incomplete without some reference to the play of narratives that helps to shape interaction with reality. They all demonstrate, in one way or another, that such narratives are an integral part of the creation and interpretation of our narrative contexts.

Such works do not only carry a weighty influence in the construction of our realities, they also have the power to disseminate crucial elements of these constructions. As Rancière put it,

the unique power of literature finds its source in that zone of indeterminacy where former individuations are undone, where the eternal dance of atoms composes new figures and intensities every moment. (2004, 149)

The literature used in this work is not only there to illustrate points being made; in many cases it becomes before a point is being made, it haunts them, breaking apart individuations that characterise previous assumptions.

Žižek's references to G.K. Chesterton, Herman Melville, or Alfred Hitchcock reflect one of the ways in which his narratives are constructed.

It can highlight the “shit” (the leftover but nevertheless revealing substance) of contemporary culture and ideologies, demonstrate the intangible nature of our realities, or it can even serve as an illusion which covers up another meaning. This strikes at the heart of theological investigation; the truth exists in the God emptied into the world rather than in metaphysics set apart from symbolic substance of our world. In admitting that interpretations are never perfect, an aspect of the purpose of the literature throughout this work is to create a zone of paradox or uncertainty.

Two contrasting figures of violence are given prominent positions in the unfolding of this thesis: Cormac McCarthy’s Anton Chigurh and Herman Melville’s Bartleby. These figures exist in the foundations of the ideas that have come to form this work. Standing alongside Biblical figures such as Job and Eve, they help to construct the canon of works that have inspired this thesis. They are all vital to the matrix from which this work has been forged, and they are all significant to the rhetorical cohesion therein. Put differently, such works wrought a profound wound without which this thesis would not exist.

Chapter One

Symbolic Violence in a Divine Economy

1.1 No Country for Old Men

In order to move towards the connection that Žižek makes between violence and Paul's conception of love, we must first examine a particular conceptualisation of violence which is traced beyond readily apparent explosions of physical violence. This chapter begins with a reflection on the violent figure of Anton Chigurh from Cormac McCarthy's novel *No Country for Old Men*. This narrative acts as an illustration of the nature of violence and also acts to advance a theory of the condition of original sin within a divine economy. This novel, along Žižek's *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, provided the foundations of the theory of violence at play in this work. It prompted the question: where is the real violence?

The purpose of this chapter is to develop this theory of violence that goes beyond its physical or material appearance (or what Žižek refers to as "subjective" violence).¹⁸ Symbolic violence ('embodied in language') and systemic violence ('the often catastrophic consequences of the smooth functioning of our economic and political systems') are the 'objective' forms of violence that lurk in the background; not only as the foundations of physical violence but also already acting as violent ruptures in the stability of our life-worlds (2008a, 1). These ideas are then advanced in the theological context that Žižek roots in the idea of double kenosis.

Attentive to the narrative of the Book of Job and the letters of Paul, Žižek's theologico-political narrative pulls us away from the spectre of ultimate meanings guaranteed in the big Other and towards a divine violence that can only be generated in the interconnected actions that take place within creation.

¹⁸Žižek writes, 'subjective violence is just the most visible portion of a triumvirate that also includes two kinds of objective violence' (2008a, 1). The opening chapter of Žižek's work provides an overview of objective and subjective forms of violence.

1.1.1 Cormac McCarthy and the Nature of Violence

Blood and liquor sprayed and the man's knees buckled and his eyes rolled. The kid had already let go the bottleneck and he pitched the second bottle into his right hand in a roadagent's pass before it even reached the floor and he backhanded the second bottle across the barman's skull and crammed the jagged remnant into his eye as he went down. (*Blood Meridian or The Evening Redness in the West*)

This chapter opens by situating itself in the violent worlds of Cormac McCarthy's fiction. This might seem to be an unusual starting point for a work that weaves its way to the apostle Paul. It might, though, seem less peculiar for those familiar with Žižek's hyperactive theory which is interwoven with illustrations from literature and film. The jarring nature of McCarthy's violent fiction is utilised here as a staging post between the worlds of Paul and Žižek, providing a context from which we can begin to explore the ways in which violence operates.

McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* is written with an imminent brutality that makes the reader feel uncomfortable when confronted with its remorseless depictions of violence. Of his initial encounter with the novel, Harold Bloom recalled, in an interview with Peter Josyph, 'I read about half of it, and although I was very impressed, I couldn't go on because I started to have nightmares' (Josyph 2010, 78). As difficult as his violent prose might be to read, it is entirely appropriate for the subject matter. We *should* feel uneasy when encountering pages of fiction which describe such abuse and defilement of the flesh and spirit. It is with this in mind that a theory of violence is approached in this work. It is not an easy task to investigate the roots of this idea without trivialising the reasons this theory is evoked, but it is a task that is vital to this project.

Essential to Žižek's work on violence, with a typical blend of insight and provocation, is the determination to examine violent forces that are hidden within the symbolic structure of reality. He writes:

At the forefront of our minds, the obvious signals of violence are acts of crime and terror... But we should learn to step back, to disentangle ourselves from the fascinating lure of the directly visible 'subjective' violence. (2008a, 1)

Violence is enacted beyond, indeed beneath, the luring horror of physical violence. Žižek questions the impulse that we must confront violence directly in our thinking. His incitement here is that 'the overpowering horror of violent acts and empathy with the victims inexorably function as a lure that prevents us from thinking' (2008, 3). Yet we provoke the name of violence *because* of its horror and the empathy it elicits for its victims. Violence is as such *because* it gives us nightmares; this, in many cases, does compel us to think. The violent world of McCarthy's old west portrayed in *Blood Meridian* is both compelling and horrifying on account of its violence. Not simply for its skilful articulation, but also due to the way it lures us into thinking of violence in the real world.

There is little glamour to McCarthy's portrayals of violence. This type of prose has the ability to make us feel at our eye sockets as we read of their fragility at the mercy of the jagged edge of a broken bottle. Beyond this initial reflex there is a deeper provocation in the way that this violence is accepted by the characters of this novel. Such violence does not always disturb the world in the way we might expect. It is normalised in the zero-level of their existence. As the body is dragged out of sight without a wince, and the blood is wiped away like any other spilled drink, the question that should haunt us here is: what violence has been normalised into our experience of everyday life?

This journey into the mystery of violence is strikingly relevant to recent reflections upon Paul's writings and legacy. Indeed, one of the driving interests in the turn to Paul in recent continental philosophy stems from wrestling with questions about the real nature of contemporary violence. Embedded in the background of this interest are thinkers with a deep unease about violence that is hidden in the political, economic, and

social mechanisms that dominate life. There is a perverted parallel here with the works of Steven Pinker, and others, who argue that the prevalence of coverage of stories reporting instances of violence in the media prevents us from realising that the world is becoming less violent with every generation.¹⁹ Žižek argues, however, that the lure of the horror of violent acts prevents us not from seeing that the world is less violent, but from seeing the mechanisms of violence hidden from view.

This provocation should be kept in mind not because it is correct - empathy with the victims of violence is a crucial part of thinking - but because it draws our attention towards violence that we fail to acknowledge. Central to this thesis, and to Žižek's understanding of violence, is this idea that by the time that a physical act of violence occurs there have already been violent forces at work. The physical manifestation, therefore, is a continuation and re-situation of violence which already exists.

1.1.2 The Violence behind Anton Chigurh

This brings us back to violent stories of the past, present, and future told by McCarthy. In *No Country for Old Men*, a tale that breathes a bloody life into our literary encounters with violence, McCarthy introduces the figure of Anton Chigurh - whose potential for violence does not appear to be bound by any ethical or moral horizon. Chigurh is a figure given life in this novel as an unrelenting and disturbing force.

Chigurh could see the doubt come into his eyes at this bloodstained figure before him but it came too late. He placed his hand on the man's head like a faith healer. The pneumatic hiss and click of the plunger sounded like a door closing. The man slid soundlessly to the ground, a round hole in his forehead

¹⁹ Pinker (2011) warns against moralising the word violence in such a way that it can refer to any bad thing. Focussing on violence defined within a strictly physical framework (murder, rape, assault, and so on), and through utilising numerous statistics and anecdotes, he argues that humankind has become increasingly less violent.

from which blood bubbled and ran down into his eyes carrying with it his slowly uncoupling world visible to see. Chigurh wiped his hand with his handkerchief. I just didn't want you to get blood on the car, he said. (7)

Chigurh's violence is bare and without any pretence of moral justification. It is not a means or an end in-itself, but the coincidence of both. In his eyes there is a sign of a force that is not bound to any typical desires. He appears to be amoral in nature, with a potential for destruction not bound by any conscience. He assumes a role in the service of previous actions; as a type of excess beyond the expected consequences of an act. Read in this way, it is not a story about a deranged violent individual, but the infinite responsibility of the other participants in this world.

No Country for Old Men follows the story of Llewellyn Moss, who, when out hunting near the Rio Grande, encounters the scene of a botched drug deal. With every potential witness already riddled with bullet holes, all dead apart from one fatally injured man, Moss decides to take the money left in the remnants of this chaotic scene. It was an opportunistic moment of greed that he knew would have far reaching consequences. In that bag, 'his whole life was sitting there in front of him' (18). The consequences of this act would chase him to his death, and have dire repercussions for many others.

Chigurh, a mercenary hired to retrieve the money, embodies the irreducibly violent consequences of Moss's act. In an explanation of why he retired from service, Ed Tom Bell, the local sheriff tasked with tracking Chigurh, recalls:

they say the eyes are the windows to the soul. I don't know what them eyes was the window to and I'd guess I'd soon as not know.... I know he's real. I have seen his work. I walked in front of those eyes once. I won't do it again. (4)

It is Bell who makes the most astute critique of Chigurh in this novel. The horror of looking directly into the violence in the eyes of Chigurh destroyed the potential for him to continue in his role as law-keeper. He encountered a moment of revelation through the contact with those eyes - a moment that shocked his whole being and radically changed his situation. He came to the realisation that the forces operating behind the violence of Chigurh could not be explained away by reducing him to an isolated “evil” subject. Although it would be tempting to read this character as merely as an evil person making the decision to kill, that is not how Bell understands him. Instead he sees him as a reflection of the multiplicity of actions that reveal not only the depth of wrongdoing in the world but also bewilderment as to the consequences this brings with it.

Chigurh’s soulless eyes provide a piercing gaze into a world of violence. This is what happens when Bell gazes into, and through, Chigurh’s eyes. Those eyes of Chigurh reveal the evil in the world with no agenda but in the revelation itself. They were a sign of a moral abyss that reached fulfilment in Chigurh. Bell muses, ‘you can’t have a dope business without dopers. A lot of ‘em are well dressed and holdin’ down goodpayin’ jobs too. I said: You might even know some yourself’ (304). This is what troubled Bell; it was the actions taken in everyday life, both mundane and jarring, that directed this violence. The attempt to put an end to this violence by stopping Chigurh became a futile thought for Bell. He came to see him as an object bound to a fate created by the world; as Jay Ellis describes it, Chigurh ‘brings people to account in a hard cosmos of chance and choice’ (2011, 101). It was too much for an old sheriff to contend with. This was no country for old men.²⁰

1.1.3 The Transgression

[the idea] that violence is enacted by social agents, evil individuals, disciplined repressive apparatuses, fanatical

²⁰ McCarthy takes his title from the opening line of Yeats’ poem *Sailing to Byzantium*. This poem reflects Sheriff Bell’s position in the novel; on the bewilderment caused by a world he no longer feels fit for.

crowds...doesn't it desperately try to distract our attention from the true locus of trouble? (Žižek 2008a, 11)

It had somehow become possible for the dusty world of *No Country for Old Men* to facilitate the existence of such a violent figure. The assertion here is that the violence - an idea typically associated with disturbance to peaceful existence (riots, assaults, military action, and so on) - was already operating within what seemed like that nonviolent state. The violence that consumes this novel initially occurs through Moss's taking of the bag filled with the money. This is similar to the backdrop behind Žižek's interpretation of violence. He explains:

when we perceive something as an act of violence, we measure it by a presupposed standard of what the 'normal' non-violent situation is - and the highest form of violence is the imposition of this standard with reference to which some events appear as 'violent.' (2008a, 55)

When Chigurh, posing as a police officer, pulls over the man whose car he wishes to procure, he intrudes into his life with a ruthless violation of not only the man's physical body but also of the stability of the world around him. This was what was produced in the act of unleashing a physical force which punctured a hole through the man's head.

Daily routine is threatened, disturbed, and violated by such forces. Violence rips through the fragile sinews holding together peace and stability. This violence, however, already exists at a more elementary level of Chigurh's reality; found in the forces, actions, and decisions that set his course. Chigurh's intrusion only occurs through the displacing of an invitation made to him to enter the world. Unnervingly, of course, it is also seemingly non-violent or neutral movements, and even decisions made with the best moral or ethical will, that set his course. It is precisely this amoral violence that is particularly unnerving. Violence already exists in that which facilitates Chigurh's movements, but even more forcefully in

those actions, decisions, and structures that traumatically jolt this figure into action.

It is because of this that the greatest act of violence within the context of this novel does not belong to Chigurh. The violence must be traced further back to Moss's decision to exploit the violent carnage of the failed drug deal and take the blood stained money. It was not an act carried out blindly. He knew that the consequences of this act would be catastrophic. Yet it was not only the act of greed that sealed this fate, it was also bound up in an act of mercy and also one of ignorance (in failing to check for an electronic tracer in the bag). While returning in the early hours of the following morning with a jug of water for the last remaining witness (it is not clear if he even knew what his own intentions were), Moss is spotted by some of the people looking to reclaim the money (who have already killed the man that Moss felt compelled to return to). The violent consequences of his act only materialised because of his return to the scene. Moss was a man compelled beyond his own reason; on account of both taking the money and his return to check on the wounded man. He is divided between what he knows he should not do and what he is compelled to do all the same. There is a deeper violence here. A deeper wound that is intrinsically tied to Moss's initial compulsion to take the money.

In this sense, we are talking about the violence that is all around but scarcely acknowledged for how disturbing it is; in the same way as in the world of *Blood Meridian*, where a man can be killed and it is no more acknowledged than the spilling of a drink. Moss's decision is less immediately disturbing, perhaps morally dubious and dangerous in the eyes of the reader, but does not strike with the immediacy that epitomises Chigurh. The crucial element is how this shifting of symbolic substance (the money), undoubtedly an act of greed, tears a hole in the fabric of his world. Chigurh is not a man with his own being; his actions are controlled by others, which begs the question, where are the roots of his violence? He is the mercenary par excellence. He only exists as a violent force because other subjects decide the course in which his body is propelled.

It was the curiosity, greed, and desire of Llewellyn Moss that initiated this hiring of Chigurh, yet for all the bodies that Chigurh left in his wake, Moss was killed by a Mexican drug gang. There is no deeper meaning that could justify this violence or bind it to any ethical or moral source. There is no divine justice or testing that reconciles the damage wrought in this world. It is the force with which he moves which is the most terrifying aspect of his character. There is no reason beyond coincidence of temporal and geographical site why many of his victims meet with this fate. He decides the fate of a shopkeeper and Carla Jean Moss, the wife of Llewellyn, on the toss of a coin; as if, in the absence or inconsistency of any other factors, the continuance of their lives must depend on something (akin to the chance which any movement of any object is accompanied by).

He acknowledges that it was bad luck that got Carla into this and finds it to be fair, in a greatly ironic gesture, to give her this final toss of the coin. Chigurh's coin toss serves as a reminder of this lack of cosmic justice that he exploits. He makes it clear that there is no tribunal here that will make a moral judgement on guilt or innocence. Carla is killed because of a promise Chigurh made to her husband: if he did not return the money and offer up his life she would die. As if to emphasise the lack of justice in this scenario, all Chigurh offers for the hope of her life is the chance of a coin toss (a coin toss that replaces Moss's eventual bargaining to save her life). After the coin toss decides her fate, she converses with Chigurh.

You make it like it was the coin. But you're the one.

It could have gone either way.

The coin didn't have no say. It was just you.

Perhaps. But look at it my way. I got here the same way the coin did. (258, emphasis added for Chigurh)

Chigurh's movement is like that of the coin. Even more unsettling than his brutal intrusions of physical violence is this lack of justice that surrounds

his actions. He is compelled to kill in the most efficient ways for no kind of tangible personal gain. Fellow mercenary Carson Wells attempts to explain: '[Chigurh] has principles, principles that transcend money or drugs or anything like that' (153). There is nothing personal in his violence, no subject-in-itself which desires love, vengeance, happiness, or any other typical human desire which drives behaviour. He will come to possess the money because that is where the actions of others have led him.

He reveals his nature to Carla Jean before killing her. In explaining his apparent ruthlessness he explains, 'even a nonbeliever might find it useful to model himself after God' (256). He is not the moral God that is often imagined in Christianity. He is not impervious to injury or the consequences of the actions of others. When violence is used as a force in the pursuit of justice or personal gain it is done through a belief that the suspension of order is worth such action. Chigurh has no such interests. He suspends order simply because he is modelled after an *amoral* god. This draws him towards the figure of Yahweh. We can argue with Yahweh - bargain with Him as Abraham did over Sodom and Gomorrah - but in the end, as he makes known to Job and his accusers, he is beyond questioning.

It is with this same force that when God entered Jonah's life, his life ended. The circumstances were not of his making. We know of nothing that Jonah did to deserve this call. From that point onwards Jonah could not avoid his bad luck, no matter how hard he tried.²¹ Attempts to run landed him in the belly of a fish and attempts to bemoan his luck left him burning in the desert beside his destroyed vine. This tale of the profundity of luck and the troubling nature of divine "justice" has been told many times. Jonah shared the luck of Carla Jean. Chigurh explains the jagged edge of this reality:

when I came into your life your life was over. It had a beginning,
a middle, and an end. This is the end. You can say things could
have turned out differently. They could have been some other

²¹ By "luck" here I mean the way in which Martha Nussbaum employs this term: 'what happens to a person by luck will be just what does not happen through his or her own agency' (1986: 3).

way. But what does that mean? They are not some other way.
 You're asking that I second say the world. Do you see? (260)

There is nothing you can do when this force enters your life, except perhaps hope that the coin falls in your favour. Being caught up in the narrative of some divine (or demonic) figure has no necessary relationship with any notion of justice.

The boy that Ed Tom Bell had sent to the gas-chamber for killing his 14 year old girlfriend was an anomaly; an empty vessel that no goodness could touch. He was a subject capable of such violence out of a simple desire to know what it was like to kill. Chigurh was more. A story told through the eyes of others and fully dependant on the bearers of those eyes. This is why he so often insisted that those he killed should look into his eyes. He had no personal desire to kill or not to kill, only to bring things to completion. A body of amorality set on a course by the actions of others. This should not be reduced to pure determinism; Chigurh does not kill Moss, there is always an alternative outcome. The decision, to be taken with a great burden of responsibility, takes place in a world of choice and chance. The question here relates to how much responsibility Moss has over his act of taking the money. Put differently, in what ways do we participate in violence?

1.2 Symbolic Violence

Lurking in the depths of *No Country for Old Men* is symbolic violence inherent to language that maintains a profound influence over the world. Even beyond the systemic violence that directs Chigurh's force, there is the symbolic violence that creates and manipulates desire. A question at the heart of this investigation is: how do we acknowledge and subvert such violence? To begin to unpick this question we turn to a typical Žižekian provocation.

When Žižek claims that 'Gandhi was more violent than Hitler' (2013, 122; 2008b, 475), there can be little doubt that he knows the game which

he is playing. The insistence on this evaluation of violent force is designed to alert the masses of would-be revolutionaries to the power that resides in their collective force. He argues:

Hitler staged a spectacle of Revolution so that the capitalist order could survive, in contrast to Gandhi, whose movement endeavoured to interrupt the basic functions of the British colonial state. (2008b, 475)

Gandhi's violence resisted involvement in physical outbursts of violence that would have attempted to destroy the bare life of the enemy. Instead he organised the subversion of the signs and systems which continued to support the functioning of the enemies of the cause he became caught up in. Gandhi's revolutionary violence, in this sense, revealed the truth of British Imperialism: the image of the limit of its power was a masquerade that covered up its weaknesses. Gandhi sought to create a radical transformation within the Symbolic, while Hitler was merely propelled by the hideous underside of a wounded mentality that already existed.

The problem, as Žižek well knows and as stated precisely by Jacques Ellul: 'put Gandhi into the Russia of 1925 or the Germany of 1933. The solution would be simple: after a few days he would be arrested and nothing more would be heard of him' (1969, 15). The situation was not dissimilar in the lands which Paul traversed in the century of the Christ-event. Instead of disappearing, those who were subversive to authority were made into public spectacle. These warnings were a display of physical strength and a powerful symbol of domination. Žižek is playing with a distinctly Christian theme here; he is attempting to turn weakness into strength.

A further problem with Žižek's claim is that it is undermined by what he has written about the nature of violence. The violence carried out under the name of Hitler might not have been revolutionary in the same way as India's movement for independence under Gandhi, but the extraordinary level of violence required in maintaining the status quo

cannot be ignored. His insistence that Hitler only operated reactively misses the point of how creative his violence had to be in order to assert his ideological dominance. It might have only exploited and upheld what already existed within the existing order, but the violence (systemic, symbolic, and subjective) that occurred between the early 1930s and mid-1940s, centred in the Germanic regions and perpetrated under Nazi influence, cannot be matched by in terms of its destruction of life, twisting of identity, and machinery of control.

1.2.1 Violence as a Work of Love

Therefore it is important to clarify what is meant by claiming that the greatest representation of violence in *No Country for Old Men* is Moss's decision to take the money. It is the chief moment of violent propulsion in the context of the novel and its effect on the symbolic and systemic mechanisms of its world. Otherwise, Chigurh or Mexican drug cartels could lay claim to this dubious honour. In this same way, Gandhi can only be considered to be more violent than Hitler in the context of revolutionary violence that occurs *within the Symbolic Order* - that is all (and it is even a disputable point in terms of his social attitudes). He managed to introduce a little bit of chaos into the existing order, revealing that it was not as powerful as it claimed.

Žižek's concern is with the forcing of a transformation within the Symbolic Order which revolutionises the situation. An idea that constantly re-appears in his work is that of the revolutionary who understands violence as a 'work of love' (2014b, 198). This idea is characterised in figures such as Christ and Che Guevara, who preached a connection between love and hatred. Citing Luke 14.26, Žižek uses the words of Jesus to demonstrate the violent necessity at the heart of a revolutionary fidelity: 'whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple.' Guevara's belief that 'a people without hatred cannot vanquish a

brutal enemy,’ is coupled with Žižek’s idea that, ‘the true revolutionary is guided by strong feelings of love’ (2014b, 198-199).

At this juncture Žižek draws us towards a figure of violence in popular culture: Bane. As the main villain in Christopher Nolan’s *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012), the final of his trilogy of Batman films, Bane, a terrorist holding Gotham City to ransom, encapsulates this ‘authentic revolutionary love.’

It is violence as such (the violent gesture of discarding, of establishing a difference, of drawing lines of separation) which liberates. Freedom is not a blissful neutral state of harmony and balance, but the very violent act which disturbs this balance. This is why, back to *The Dark Knight Rises*, the only authentic love in the film is that expressed by Bane, the ‘terrorist,’ in clear contrast to Batman. (2014b, 200)

Bane, a towering and brutish figure whose face is partly hidden behind a breathing apparatus which keeps him alive, is a murderer and a terrorist. The dedication to his cause of correcting humanity’s course leads him to indiscriminately kill not only the enemies of his cause but also any required collateral damage.

This example further reiterates the problem in Žižek’s comparison between Hitler and Gandhi. The “correction” that Bane, inspired by a clandestine group called “The League of Shadows,” embarks upon is to return the world to a natural balance through disturbing its distortion. Violence is the means through which this correction, this return of natural order or justice, can occur. This, though, is the very same type of violence epitomised in the monstrous figure of Hitler. Despite his will to align Batman (Bruce Wayne) with the force that merely attempts to retain the existing order by violence if necessary, Bane is no more than a puppet of a similar will. He is interested in constructing a new world to replace the old world, which nevertheless is trapped within the same constraints. The interest is merely in a correction, not a transformation. This is the problem

with Žižek's analysis: how can this type of love be defined in a way that avoids the logics of the dedication to Nazism? Žižek is not yet close enough to Paul here. As Brigitte Kahl points out, Paul was not interested in merely replacing 'the Kingdom of Caesar with a counter Kingdom of God' (2010, 266). Paul's love was in the service of a cause that would dissolve all such power.

This still leaves us with a problem of the physical brutality that defends the symbolic violence behind its force. Ghandi's revolutionary (symbolic) violence was remarkable, yet there have been many other nonviolent revolutionaries who have been silenced by physical force or swallowed into the mechanisms of a more powerful narrative. Nonviolence as an ethical stance has been a vital component of emancipatory movements, including in civil rights movements and struggles against political oppression. It is not a force that descends from outside, but a force involved within the very struggle for emancipation; it separates movements which actively seek to damage and destroy property and lives from those that participate in struggles where such physical damage is rejected in principle. Walter Wink says of Jesus' direction to turn the other cheek, 'the last thing the master wants is for the slave to assert equality' (2002, 330). An important question is how do we develop this activity within this Symbolic frame? Is it possible, as Žižek argues, to participate in a nonviolent violence that is physically nonviolent but violent through its impact within the Symbolic Order?

1.2.2 The Joker

It should be of no surprise that Žižek chooses the grotesque figure of the Joker as the figure of truth in *The Dark Knight* (2008). The 'supreme villain' is also the only figure of truth (2011, 59). The resistance to any backstory, any reasoning why the Joker appeared as if out of nowhere, appeals to Žižek. In referring to the Joker's mocking of the idea that there is some deeper trauma that caused his appearance, Žižek fully identifies the Joker with the mask he puts on: 'there is no "ordinary guy" beneath it,

he is a man who *is* his mask' (2011, 60). It is this absence of pretence that is attractive in the Joker. He is not interested in what a new world may look like; instead he only wishes to create chaos.

In explaining the way in which he understands his role, the Joker tells a disfigured Harvey Dent, the District Attorney who was determined to rid Gotham City of its organised crime, the idea is to "introduce a little anarchy. Upset the established order, and everything becomes chaos. I'm an agent of chaos. Oh, and you know the thing about chaos? It's fair." It is here that Žižek locates the (un)truth of the situation. Against Bruce Wayne/Batman and police commissioner Jim Gordon, who base their new-found order on lies (covering up Harvey Dent's descent into the murderous "Two-Face," hiding the identity of Batman, and so on), the Joker wants to reveal the world *as it is*, without the façade that underpins order.

The Dark Knight Trilogy illustrates a basic tension in Žižek's work. This tension arises from Žižek's particular analysis of the idea that, 'one has to accept that the big Other doesn't exist, and act upon it' (2008b, 299). In other words, the big Other, the totality of the Symbolic Order as understood by a subject, is not a metaphysically constituted order that defines truth. Indeed, it is only in the fleeting moments of chaos that truth "as such" can really exist. In this, Žižek creates the image of the 'ethical monster without empathy' as the true adherent of love (299). Bane acts out of a distorted and manipulated love propelling him towards an alternative established order. The Joker is demonstrating a purer version of this violence; he is a figure of pure anarchy. He simply wants to reveal the untruth of the Symbolic Order.

It is in this sense that Žižek wishes us to see beyond the basic battle established by the heroes in Nolan's Gotham City. The blame for that which Bruce Wayne wants to eradicate (crime, wrongdoing, and suffering) is pinned on individuals. It is the petty criminals, mob bosses, corrupt officials, and so on, that are responsible. Yet, as Žižek points out, the uncomfortable reality is that Wayne is a billionaire. The true secret behind Batman's mask is that he is an 'arms dealer and speculator' (2014b, 197). In this way the films are 'resuscitating the archetypal Dickensian trope of a

good capitalist who engages in financing orphanage homes (Wayne) versus a bad greedy capitalist' (197). It does not question inequality behind crime; or, indeed, the likelihood that imprisoning every single criminal and corrupt official would simply allow others to rise in their place. The ideology is clear: only the morally righteous mega-rich can save the poor and the needy.

There is something equally troubling in Žižek's analysis. While *The Dark Knight* overplays the significance of the individual in ignorance of systemic violence, Žižek's rhetoric runs the risk of downplaying the sanctity of the individual. This is epitomised in *The Monstrosity of Christ*, where he claims that given a particular situation he, 'would be ready, without any moral qualms, to murder someone in cold blood' (2009a, 302). As an example he claims he could murder discreetly the repulsive 'figure of a doctor who helped the actual torturers conduct their business in the most efficient way'. In this case he could kill, 'without a vestige of remorse,' 'knowing that there was little chance of bringing him to legal justice.' Yet what is at stake here is the emphasis on what impact is wrought within the Symbolic Order - to not be distracted from that 'true locus of trouble' (2008a, 11).

1.2.3 Zero-Level Violence

In the introduction to Mark Juergensmeyer's exploration of Religious Violence *Terror in the Mind of God*, the scene of the aftermath of a suicide bombing by a Hamas militant in Jerusalem is described. This anarchic scene is contrasted with the almost surreal image of the symbol representing a McDonald's restaurant in the background; bringing the religious extremism home as an 'attack not only on Israel but on normal life as most people know it' (2001, 3). What does it really mean for violence to strike normal life as most people know it? Can we read this scene against Žižek's claim that our tendency to judge violence in a situation against a stable, "normal," understanding of a situation distracts us from the violence which exists at the zero-level? In this case there is an

attempt, through violent rage and terror, to change the co-ordinates of the situation in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict (or at least to strike out at the current situation). In this sense, violence already exists in what is perceived as this normal, non-violent level. Even in times of ceasefire the Israeli/Palestinian conflict is violent within the symbolic and systemic mechanisms that sustain the conflict. As well as acting as an escalation of violence (and tremendous crimes in-themselves), explosions of physical force serve as a reminder of the violence that already exists. It is a reminder of that which already humiliates, violates, and sustains hatred. If this zero-level violence cannot be acknowledged and subverted can such a conflict be resolved (in any way that does not merely resort to an unprecedented escalation of physical violence)?

It can be easy to ignore the symbols of violence which hang above our lives as we look in terror at brutal acts of physical violence.²² This is the dangerous but important rhetorical game that Žižek plays with regards to violence. It is forcibly made easy to ignore the conflict minerals which pervade electronic devices, the inequalities that exist in the manufacturing of children's toys, and the child trafficking involved in the production of confectionery. The immediacy of the suffering of others is hidden within systems that have little interest in making spectacles of these violations of basic human rights. As Stanley Hauerwas puts it, 'our wealth makes us stupid just because it allows us to live in the world without learning the pain our wealth creates in our neighbours' (2002, 247). Violence which functions systemically relies on the manipulation of the signs and symbols that pervade our daily lives, proliferating its smooth functioning through attempting to disguise the injustices it produces.

Jacques Ellul refused to acknowledge what he called 'the classic distinction between violence and force,' arguing, 'it must be recognised that violence is to be found everywhere and at all times, even where people pretend it does not exist' (1969, 84). Indeed, Žižek is already implicitly conjuring a spirit of Ellul in his analysis (who is merely attesting

²² In the case of McDonalds's restaurants, the often brutal treatment of animals, humans, and resources are covered up in a haze of well-produced advertising campaigns.

to a tension which has already existed within Christianity). Both make an appeal to the idea of the sword which Christ spoke of in Matthew 10.34: this violence 'is not a contention against flesh and blood, but against the powers' (Ellul 1969, 161).

Ellul promoted a theory of the violence of love - a spiritual violence which denounced physical and psychological forms of violence. One cannot fail to see a trace of Paul's force in Ellul's words; no less so because his words make us feel uneasy, dragging us towards death in the path of Christ. To fight against injustice means to accept suffering, and to have faith in the promise of God to bring about the Kingdom of God (which cannot be directly instituted through our own means - there is no replacing Caesar with a representative of God). Ellul argues: 'faith in the resurrection - which is the supreme spiritual violence because it is victory over the necessity of death - excludes the use of every other violence' (1969, 171). In other words, like Paul, our faith in Christ is a type of violence against that which opposes the promises of God. For Ellul this means resisting the totalising power of the state and any form of participation in its mechanisms; his discourse is one of an anarchist Christianity. For Žižek it is a type of materialist communism. The connection between the two is found in the weak violence that appears from an appeal to Pauline love.

1.2.4 The Symbolic

At the heart of this discussion is the idea of the Symbolic. What draws together Moss's decision to take the money, Gandhi's nonviolent resistance, and the Joker's attempted anarchy is the way in which the world around their action is transformed. Paul's articulation of the Christ-event is bound up with a similar transformation of the Symbolic through transgressing the very idea of order that was propagated by the governing authorities. In order to move further into this question, of determining our influence over violent acts, we must look more closely at the relationship between the Symbolic and violence.

This idea of the Symbolic is perhaps most associated with Lacan's triad of the Imaginary (that which deceives), the Real (the "impossible" that is prior to language), and the Symbolic (the net cast over the material world that determines perceptions of reality). Essential in this idea is the Symbolic Order - the totality of the representation that establishes value.

Warren Breckman examines the "symbolic turn" in *Adventures of the Symbolic*. Charting this idea primarily through French and post-Marxist thought, he explains:

I would propose the term symbolic turn as a better description of the loose set of affiliated ideas and approaches that characterise a broad range of thinkers who have stressed the noncorrespondence of words and things, the nontransparency of language, and the power of signs to constitute the things they purportedly represent. (2014, 11)

Fundamental to this symbolic turn is the idea that the Real is always mediated by the Symbolic in the construction of language. In other words, signs and signifiers stand in for the objects, subjects, events, and so on, in the creation and manipulation of meaning. One way of relating this would be through Nietzsche's famous assertion: "there are no facts, only interpretations." Alternatively it could be related to the distinction between the noumenal (relating to the object-in-itself, its Real substance) and the phenomenal (the way in which an object is experienced, the Symbolic). Such theories, in their differing positions, converge on the idea that signifiers and that which they signify can never be fully reconciled.

The symbolic turn emerges through Lacan's Symbolic, Real, Imaginary triad, but also in Derrida's deconstruction and difference (deconstruction *is* the Symbolic, in this sense). Ernst Cassirer, whose work revolved around this idea of the Symbolic, understood Symbolic activity as, 'the properly human mode of life' (Breckman 2013, 20). It describes the way in which, 'human beings construct reality through language, art, myth, religion, and science' (Barash 2008, xii). Within perceptions of

reality there exist systems of signs and signifiers that allow interpretations to be constructed through mediums such as language and art. The way the world is deconstructed (through an automatic process) is different for each individual. In other words, everyone has their own symbolic universe.

There are cultural, political, social, and religious markers which have a significant bearing on the creation of particular worldviews. The Bible is one such influence on symbolic fields of reference; others include the works of Plato, Augustine, Hegel, Marx, and Freud. Also, not forgetting, *The Simpsons*, the BBC, social media circles, and so on, which construct and manipulate the shaping of worldviews. Such historical and cultural artefacts have a profound impact on the construction of symbolic value, as do an infinite amount of other sources. The Symbolic Order and deconstruction are intrinsically, and sometimes violently, connected. Symbolic violence at its most powerful resides in that which we automatically process - the violence we do not even realise we participate in.

There is discord between what is encountered and the meaning that it is given, and that discord is exploited. Symbolic violence can be situated in this exploitation, in the very way that perceptions are twisted. The Real represents events and objects outside, or prior to, their interpretation, while the Symbolic is created in the act of interpretation and manipulation. The tension between the Real and the Symbolic - or even what has yet to be realised, or inscribed, into the Symbolic (the Imaginary) - provides the space in which the potential for symbolic violence originates.

The world is symbolically constituted. The Symbolic Order represents all that is within the symbolic world which is formed around us and through us. Meaning and power is formed therein, as Žižek exemplifies it:

when we name gold 'gold,' we violently extract a metal from its natural texture, investing into it our dreams of wealth, power, spiritual purity and so on, which have nothing to do with the immediate reality of gold. (2008a, 52)

Breckman elaborates on this point, he writes: ‘even gold, often thought of as more ‘real’ than paper species, is already symbolic’ (2013, 21). We are bound to the ideas with which such resources are permeated. What the case of gold exemplifies is that the link to any intrinsic usefulness does not directly equate with the value it is given. Gold is a material which has some valuable purposes, including in medicine, but its market value is found in the representational nature of its value. The ways in which such practical uses are realised are less significant in the market than what purposes can be artificially generated. Cultural and historical imprints attached to popular consciousness generate a monstrous image of gold that goes far beyond its physical practicality. What we might term the link between the noumenal and phenomenal in “gold” - that is, the object-in-itself and the way in which the object is experienced - is essential in understanding the way in which symbolic meaning and value is generated.

This not overwhelmingly useful, albeit shiny, chemical element underscores the peculiar and volatile fault lines upon which monetary value, and with it the power over life, is based. Badiou, in *The Century*, makes this point, writing:

how long can we accept the fact that what is needed for running water, schools, hospitals, and food for all humanity is a sum that corresponds to the amount spent by wealthy Western countries on perfume in a year? (2001, 8)

The way in which value is attributed is based upon the image it can produce within the market economies. What we understand in gold is not only its yellow-green appearance or its chemical properties and practical usefulness, but to its symbolic value. Political discourses can become drawn into narratives that reflect the value of such farcical representations. The master-signifier “money,” in this way, has power over the processes of democracy.

This creation of a new object out of another subject or object may be done with malicious intent, or, on the other hand, its effects on others may be completely unintentional. Its dissemination may be a founding point of injustice (as is, arguably, the case with “gold,” which only becomes malicious in its position within an economy) or it may be far more malicious in its intent; for example, the transformation of the Jewish subject into the image of “the Jew” that would become an object of legitimatised sacrifice. Each, though, originates from a position that is far removed from where it moves, tangled in a web from the original sin in which this creation derives.

Žižek argues the consequences of the anti-Semitic image is that it becomes no longer possible to ‘distinguish between real Jews and their anti-Semitic image: this image overdetermines the way I experience real Jews themselves and, therefore, it affects the way Jews experience themselves’ (2008a, 57). This example, which is painfully pertinent example to Christianity and its relationship with “the Jews,” underlines the way in which symbolism inherent to language can have a dangerous influence on the Symbolic Order.

This, in a very concrete way, is something in which we actively participate in (knowingly or otherwise). Examples of Symbolic violence are as wide ranging as propaganda that creates the image of the immigrant as the violent intruder, dolls which portray ethnically “African” males as sub-human, the legal sanctioning of forced child marriages, and the perpetuation of language that marginalises sections of society, but also in the ideologies of economics and politics that might not immediately appear to have anything to do with what is usually imagined as violent.

Symbolic violence occurs in the normalisation of that which oppresses and violates; political, societal, religious, and cultural pressures help to form this force. It also exists in the counter-violence of groups fighting to be free from oppression; in the art, language, and narratives created to strike out against their oppressors; the lasting impression of the language of the protests of May 1968 in France on Badiou’s thought, for example. This battle that constantly takes place within the Symbolic.

This is the violent tension between the Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic: between the world prior to interpretation, the world as it affects us, and the world as we give it meaning. Language, conventions, laws, and even architecture and art weigh upon the Symbolic Order and the potential for violence therein. Such artefacts become violent when they create or propagate conditions and situations that fuel conflict, division, exploitation, or revolutionary action. In the same sense that language can bring agreement and understanding, it can also create division and conflict. This violence is not merely something that is benign until actualised in a physical act - it is already destructing, corroding, and violating. Symbolic violence is to the Symbolic what physical violence is to the material world, yet they are interconnected, each affecting the other.

Returning to *No Country for Old Men*, it is in this same way that there is no justification that underpins the violence of Chigurh. His purpose is not to direct action through corrective punishment or to test resolve in any way; he acts purely on the impulse created by what called him into the world (propelled by Moss's transgression). The explanation of Carla Jean's death is not that she deserved it or that it taught her some sort of lesson. She cannot call her fate into question or bargain for her life. All Chigurh can offer is the toss of a coin - there is no deeper meaning that can sway his hand. He kills Carla for no moral purpose. He brought a conclusion to what he saw as a collection of "small things." Previous actions created the potential for Chigurh to strike. This potential could be negated at any point but not through any moral logic. Chigurh kills because the opportunity has been presented to him by the unfolding of creation. It is in this sense that Žižek states: 'everything, every small thing that is, is a miraculous exception; viewed from the proper perspective, every normal thing is a monstrosity' (2009c, 50). Everything given meaning in the Symbolic is a miraculous exception. There is no grand scheme holding meaning together. It is held together and torn and apart in the unfolding of creation. This creation *is* original sin.

1.3 Job and the Divine Economy

This chapter exists between the boundaries of two narratives: one is *No Country for Old Men*, and the other is Job. Herbert Schneidau appropriately calls the Book of Job, ‘in many ways the climax of the Old Testament’ (1976, 6). There is a move here away from the Hebrew Scriptures which signals a shift in the characterisation of Yahweh. The narrative moves away from any discernible justification of suffering in moral terms (which many of its characters attempt to force onto Job’s suffering).

In this narrative, which has a jarring presence in the Old Testament canon between the earlier narratives and the following wisdom books, a ‘blameless and upright’ (1.1) man called Job endures torment because the Lord declared its possibility. The theological explanations of his friends and accusers, who express ideas and themes that endure in Christian thought, are rejected by the Lord. The Lord, the monstrous yet beautiful Yahweh, informs Job that there is no reason for his suffering – at least, none that can be inscribed into his symbolic sphere of comprehension. There is no justification for the misery that befalls his life that he can understand, and he is correct to assert this against the accusations of his theological friends. Yahweh explains nothing beyond the fact that He is indeed God. Yahweh denies the legitimacy of the attempts to explain his suffering. In response to Yahweh’s bewildering but emphatic response (‘out of a whirlwind’) to his suffering, Job replies with unquestioning acceptance: ‘I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted’ (42.2). Job acknowledges and accepts divine order.

These categories of chaos and order are essential in Paul’s articulation of the Christ-event. Chaos is the nothingness from which creation appears; therefore it is only chaos, from a human perspective, that exists beyond the Symbolic (or, at least, chaos is what surrounds its boundaries). While order is established out of this emptiness, it can only ever pretend at divine order; which, from the human perspective, can only appear as chaos or mystery.

In this way, the end of this story, the epilogue in which Job's fortunes are restored, should also be read as the return to the beginning of its narrative. Job once again awaits the destruction of all he knows, and that descent into suffering once more. Yet it is in the epilogue that Davis Hankins situates a hopeful message within this 'fragmented and heterogeneous' narrative (2015, 225). In this reading, through grasping a type of wisdom that is imminent but not merely human, Job is able to 'reorient himself out of an individual and toward a collective struggle' (226). In this way, Hankins argues: 'the legacy of Job is fundamentally a rejection of transcendence that nonetheless does not abandon all reference to transcendence' (6). Job accepts that there is no explanation for the calamities that befell him; such is the separation between the divine and fallen worlds. He is only tasked continuing in the struggle of the collective.

Žižek returns time and time again to Job, not as a story that reaffirms sovereign power but one which undercuts it. Job's refusal to accept the explanations of the reasons behind his suffering is met by God confirming this lack of truth. Yet it also forces God to reveal His own position - he is forced to justify Himself through this rebuke. It is here that we should locate the foundations of this divine economy - creation which is predicated not on the rule of God's rule but His participation and vulnerability. God's powerful response to Job is a cover for His impotency. God is trapped between forcing His power as a puppet master and watching the suffering of his creation knowing that His intervention would undermine the whole project of creation.

Žižek latches onto this point in his Pauline reading of Job: 'what if the horror of being an impotent witness to an event like the Holocaust, in which the world falls apart, is divine kenosis at its purest' (2009b, 268). This reading of Yahweh's reply to Job situates Him as the impotent onlooker who testifies to his power and transcendence only as a cover for his lack of relevance to Job's suffering. It is precisely His denial of the accusations that situates Him outside of their world.

This follows René Girard in treating the prologue of Job with suspicion; as a later addition that attempts to make sense of Job's suffering. In Girard's reading Job is the victim and the scapegoat. His community has turned against him; he is 'a statesman whose career has been destroyed' (1987, 12) and God is powerless to do anything about it except restore Job's fortunes. The ridiculous ending of narrative describes the Lord blessing Job with, 'fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand donkeys' (42.12). The cycle is reset and Job is returned to the beginning of the narrative as if nothing happened.

Whether Girard's particular narrative overlaying to imagine a story of a master turned scapegoat is faithful to the original narrative is less important than the crux of his point: Job is innocent of the accusations charged against him by Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. Girard concludes: 'Job proves that justice does not hold sway in the world' (1987, 155). The ending of Job reiterates this point. The divine attempt to redress the balance, after Job accepts that there was no reason for his suffering, only reasserts that His power can only appear as impotent. Žižek makes a similar point in the documentary *The Pervert's Guide to the Cinema* (2006) in a theory of the way in which female sexual fantasies are better than their male counterparts. The male attempt to physically assert dominance is only a sign of weakness; he does not have the influence he actually desires. Therefore, in this sense, it is only through his full submission to the physical dominance of the female that he has any real power. The female now has the power only because it has been gifted to her (at least in the mind of the male).

This is what God achieves in his participation in creation through Christ. He takes on the weak position in order to claim a position of power; rather like the submissive sexual partner who is only weak because he chooses to be weak. It is this choice which ultimately gives him the control over the situation - even if it is a perversity.

Sandor Goodhart's reading of the Job follows Girard who, he claims, understands this story more as a Greek tragedy than holding to the

‘scriptural dynamics of the Hebrew Bible’ (2011, 329). Making the observation, ‘what the book of Job reveals to us is simply that there is no rational way of explaining evil’ (335), Goodhart takes an ethical lesson from this narrative: it is not about a God who punishes but instead, ‘a God who confers complete responsibility for our own actions... the individual who gives up the perspective of a child and assumes upon his shoulders the responsibility for full consciousness’ (351). There is an echo here of Paul’s words to the Church in Corinth about putting an end to childish ways (1 Cor 13:11). With such a revelation of truth comes an almost overpowering sense of responsibility. Goodhart picks this up, in a similar way to Critchley’s Levinasian reading of Paul, when he writes of the message of *Job*:

yes I have to be responsible for what I never did, what I could not have done, what I never consented to, what was even beyond my power to do. I have to be responsible, in other words, infinitely. (2011, 339)

Paul’s God suffered with us in Christ. This was the moment when Paul realised the same thing as Job: the God who gives blessing to one and not the other is not his God. Ultimately the calamities that befall Job are the consequences of creation revealed in double kenosis. As Žižek puts it, ‘God doesn’t give what he has, he gives what he is, his very being....his whole wealth is already out there, in creation’ (2009a, 59).

1.3.1 The Man Who Was Thursday

This link between a mysterious divine figure, which is both present and absent, and the infinite responsibility of the individual in the collective brings us to G.K. Chesterton’s *The Man Who Was Thursday: A Nightmare*. This is a story that feeds upon connections between violence and distorted perceptions of truth. Set in the early twentieth century, this tale of anarchists and secret policemen explores the confusion and angst

experienced by those who search for truth in the midst of a world in which chaos and order struggle to find a harmonious balance. Gabriel Syme, the protagonist experiencing this tumultuous battle between chaos and order, is thrown into an adventure where he is both (and neither) an anarchist and a policeman at the same time (propelled by a meeting with a poet in London's Saffron Park). The poet and apparent anarchist, Lucian Gregory, turns his attention to the straight-laced Syme:

"An artist is identical with an anarchist," he cried. "You might transpose the words anywhere. An artist is an artist. The man who throws a bomb is an artist, because he prefers a great moment to everything. He sees how more valuable is one burst of blazing light, one peal of perfect thunder, than the mere common bodies of a few shapeless policemen. An artist disregards all governments, abolishes all conventions. The poet delights in disorder only. If it not so, the most poetical thing in the world would be the Underground Railway." (6-7)

Syme retorts: "every time a train comes in I feel that it has broken past batteries of besiegers, and that man has won a battle against chaos." (17) This is the battle between the forging of the Symbolic and the chaos that threatens to interrupt its functioning.

Recruited by a mysterious figure at Scotland Yard, Syme believes he is a secret policeman who has infiltrated a group of anarchists led by the equally mysterious figure "Sunday" (Gregory, as it happens, is unknowingly part of the same ruse). Each member of the anarchist group is given the name of a day of the week. Syme is assigned the name Thursday and embarks upon his secret mission to uncover the other members of the group and their destructive plans. The twist is that each member believes they are on this very same mission, each attempting to uncover the truth behind the schemes of the others.

What they discover is that this truth does not exist. As they traverse northern Europe, chasing one another, they are manipulated by the

“grotesque yet beautiful” Sunday. Beginning to realise the nature of the ruse, their attention turns to this enigmatic leader. Upon tracking him down he again disrupts their expectations. Their names are revealed to represent the days of creation, with the imperious figure of Sunday as creation itself (God at rest). The puppet master pulling the strings is revealed as the figurehead of both chaos and order who threw himself into His own creation. The frantic search for truth only ends in a mystery which is paradoxically reassuring in its reception. The truth, in the end, Syme ‘could not remember having come to at all,’ yet he felt ‘an unnatural buoyancy in his body and a crystal simplicity in his mind’ (114). He does not know exactly what it is, but he knows he played his part in it. He comes to consciousness as a subject on the other side of the same coin as Llewelyn Moss; as part of an interconnected creation between order and chaos.

Summarising what is expressed in this novel is not an easy task. The dream-state conclusion will surely perplex anyone who has not experienced what Syme and the others experienced. What they discovered was that truth cannot be expressed; it can only be experienced, grasped, and accepted. The sense of bewildered clarity that Syme feels is only gained through accepting his uncertainty. In taking the doubt expressed by Chesterton in this novel a step further, this melding of doubt and faith is precisely the atheist Christian position that Žižek takes up.

God is no longer the miraculous exception which guarantees the normality of the universe, the unexplainable X who enables us to explain everything else. On the contrary, He Himself is overwhelmed by the over brimming miracle of creation. (2009c, 50)

With a striking resonance here with the Book of Job, the search for ultimate truth ends in God being God. God’s revelation of truth is also a negation of truth. Therefore, ultimately, the search for truth can only take us back to the chaos of the created world. Sunday reminds the group of his

participation in what he created. Echoing Christ's challenge to his disciples, Chesterton places on the lips of Sunday the words: 'Can ye drink of the cup I drink of' (114). Even God understood that the truth was only that which he participated in.

Violence, therefore, is forced in the imposition of truth, or natural law, which does not realise its own untruth. The Symbolic Order maintains violence through assimilating ideas of absolute truth into the reception of reality. This, as Syme discovered, belies the "truth" of the situation: absolute truth cannot exist in the world as we understand it. Truth can only be participated in through the particularity of the situation.

Žižek argues that by the end of this novel we realise that 'the highest crime is law itself' (2009c, 41). The "universalised crime," including property itself, goes unnoticed under the law itself. This is what Žižek understands as the revelation at the heart of Christianity.

Only by falling into His own creation and wandering around in it as an impassive observer can God perceive the horror of His creation and the fact that He, the highest law-giver, is Himself the supreme criminal. (2014a, 27)

It was only through this participation in the world that Christ reversed the violence that is inherent to claims of natural truth (and inherent to "God" as such). This is why Christ dies in the lowest place in the order of law - the Roman cross. Christ undermines the Roman legal order that aligned truth and justice with the highest governing authority. The nature of this authority is undermined. Ultimate meaning, the narrative that holds sway over even life and death, is only an illusion. No king or emperor has ever been a God, and no truth has ever been absolute, but their power is real. Here is the difficulty: can the idea of kenosis that Žižek takes from Paul ever be more than a trick that occurs within the Symbolic?

1.3.2 Philippians 2.6-11: Christ's Self-emptying

And thus only, “wo Es war, soll Ich werden,” that is, an eschatic Adam all the more beyond old or new for being without precedent in the light of that eschatic wording of the world and worlding of the word whose kenotic event is called the Christ. And who – if it is true that God gave his only Son only because he so loved the world – speaks and thus entrusts the world with God. (Vahanian 2012, 52)

Gabriel Vahanian's articulation of kenosis, the flesh becoming Word in the 'self-emptying design of the divine into the human' (2012, 40), puts the weight of responsibility onto those who have the ability to participate in language. Vahanian puts it this way:

linguists do talk of the primacy of the signifier over the signified. Could it be that Paul has already discovered this, yet without understanding it as implying any eclipse of the Other by the other in terms of which the self comes into its own? (2012, 50)

The significance of God is taken away from attempting to break through to some true understanding of the signified (God) and given to the signifier (Christ), who does not merely reveal God's nature but reveals that God can only be related to through participation in creation. God could only reveal himself in His self-emptying of his own divinity through human flesh. In Philippians 2.6-11, Paul outlines his 'master story' (Gorman 2009, 2). In this passage he reveals the underpinning of the messianic narrative that has consumed his being.²³

The death of Christ on the cross, the centre point in Paul's narrative, 'repeats Job's stance, it refuses any deeper “meaning” that obfuscates the

²³This work follows the chiasmic structure of the portion of text (see Fisk 2006), verses 9-11 provide a 'measure of balance' to 6-8 (49). These ideas of God and divine economy intersect in the idea of Christ on the cross.

brutal reality of historical catastrophes' (Žižek 2009a, 54-55). Christ's emptying out of his divinity, taking on the form of a slave, was taken to a point of obedience to the point of execution at the hands of that which he created. Christ signifies the God in rags who took on the lowest form in order to suffer with His creation. In this we are left with 'Christ as a weak God, a God reduced to a compassionate observer of human misery' (55). God participates in creation through Christ, subverting the law through becoming a curse. God submits himself to His creation; retaining his power yet changing the way in which that power is understood. The greater point of division between Žižek and Paul can be found here. While Žižek sees God as doubting His own existence, essentially leading to Christian atheism, Paul has no problem with the paradox of the God who gave up his power (Paul is a faithful slave of both Yahweh and the Messiah, which he summarises in the statement "Christ is Lord").²⁴ Yet they converge on this same point: the power of the divine comes through undermining order itself (chaos colliding with order).

Philippians 2.6-11 forms the centre of what Paul now understands as the nature of the divine economy. Stephen Fowl aligns this passage with, 'God's plan for the world' (2005, 90) that had been revealed through the Christ-event. Paul believed, as with the way in which the Christ-event transformed his life, this should 'lead the Philippians... to adopt a specific set of values' (90). Inherent to these values was the idea that if even Christ put the concerns of others first, then that is precisely what his followers should do. Fowl writes:

in a world such as our own and Paul's where power is manifested in self-assertion, acquisition, and domination, Christ reveals that God's power, indeed the triune nature, is made known to the world in an act of self-emptying. (96)

²⁴ Käsemann notes Paul's disinterest in the works and deeds of the historical Jesus: 'The hymn to Christ in Phil. 2.6ff. contains no direct historical reminiscence, but is a variation on the theme of the redeemer who descends from heaven and returns there. The scantiness of Paul's Jesus tradition is surprising in general, but his silence here, where he is so deeply engaged, is positively shocking' (1971, 49).

Through this self-emptying, 'Christ is actually displaying the form of God, making the glory of God manifest to humans' (96). Christ was subject to the same divine economy Paul espoused in Romans 13 that emphasised the importance of becoming a slave for one another. Michael Gorman calls Paul's description of Christ's self-emptying and self-humbling, 'a robust metaphor for total self-abandonment and self-giving' (2009, 21). This forged a new order in the community of believers.

In a move that draws this passage alongside Girard's Hellenistic reading of Job, Bruce Fisk aligns Paul's idea of kenosis in Philippians with the great tales of descent and ascent told in Greek literature. The difference in *The Odyssey of Christ* is that except for Christ, 'no hero in our secular corpus ever chooses to step down into humiliation' (2006, 65). The story of Christ goes beyond that which is told through Job. It is Christ, sharing equality with God, who undergoes the suffering and exposure of being subjected to the divine economy.

Stephen Evans relates this movement from privilege to slavery to those who entered into the Civil Rights movement in the United States in the 50s and 60s. There were those, 'who gave up positions of privilege and power to live in poverty,' in order to, 'share in the struggle and participate in the demonstrations' (2006, 6); in other words, to participate in truth.

Christ's death of the cross provided a symbol of his participation in the same struggle that the church in Philippi were enduring. The act of being crucified was one of humiliation at the hands of Roman Power, but the message of the resurrected messiah was this: 'Rome cannot make Christ its victim' (Fowl 2005, 99). In a play for a type of weak power, Paul positions Christ - who Rome failed to make a victim out of - as Lord over life and death. As Fowl puts it, 'these verses account for the nature and scope of Christ's dominion in ways that make it impossible for one also to acknowledge Caesar's claim to dominion' (2005, 105). What mattered within this divine economy was only the imitation of that self-giving and self-emptying which Christ had displayed. The love for the neighbour that fulfilled the law thus became the centre point of Paul's life as a follower of Christ.

Žižek here argues that God ‘comes to share Job’s astonishment at the chaotic madness of the created universe’ (2009c, 48). In this sense Christianity is an exception among the major world religions as, ‘it enacts the reflexive reversal of atheist doubt into God Himself’ (44). Remaining after the crucifixion is not the God who is in control; the God that gives meaning to events and justifies suffering, in the way that Job’s accusers would have it, is dead (indeed, He never existed). Given new life through the Holy Spirit, it is the community of believers who now carry the ultimate responsibility for the fate of God. Christ’s submission to creation, according to Žižek, repeats this stance by denying God the position of puppet-master. It is here that the crux of Žižek’s Pauline theology is situated.

There is now no way back; all there is, all that “really” exists is from now on individuals; there are no Platonic Ideas or Substances whose existence is somehow “more real.” What is sublated in the move from Son to Holy Spirit is thus God Himself: after crucifixion, the death of the incarnated God, the universal God returns as a Spirit of the community of believers, that is, He is the one who passes from being a transcendent substantial Reality to a virtual/ideal entity which exists only as a “presupposition” of acting individuals. (2009c, 57)

This does not, however, mean that all resistance moves from totalising explanations to individual resistance. Žižek is not positioning this participation as situated only particular sites of resistance, but emphasising the power of the community of the Holy Spirit. In this he acknowledges the death of God only in His return through the collective.

Kenosis marks the death of the authoritarian God; this shifts authority into the hands of the collective through their interpretations. For Vattimo this means ‘the disappearance of a unitary sense of history, conceived as objective rationality’ (2004, 52). Instead we are left with a living and breathing hermeneutics from which weak authority appears. In

Hermeneutic Communism, written jointly by Vattimo and Santiago Zabala, a reference is made to a critique of “weak thought” made by Žižek:

the era of big explanations is over, we need “weak thought,” opposed to all foundationalism, a thought attentive to the rhizomatic texture of reality; in politics too, we should no longer aim at all-explaining systems and global emancipatory projects; the violent imposition of grand solutions should leave room for forms of specific resistance and intervention. (Vattimo 2011, 3-4)

Of course, there is a punchline: ‘...if the reader feels a minimum of sympathy with these lines, she should stop reading and cast aside this volume.’²⁵ Vattimo and Zabala make their riposte to Žižek’s critique through a theory of hermeneutic communism. They write: ‘while communism motivates the resistance to capitalism’s inequalities, hermeneutics intervenes indicating the interpretive nature of truth,’ which means ‘restricting communism to its social function’ (2011, 4-5).

In resisting the capitalist ideology inherent to framed democracy, Vattimo promotes the idea of an anchor which resists the fanatical dreams of vengeance and the will for power that has defined communist projects.²⁶ Hermeneutics provides the (non)principle on which a specifically social communism can be founded. The disinherited of capitalism, or the remnant, can only gain a proper voice after the end of metaphysics; the disavowal of the truth claims which underpin power. Hermeneutics ‘struggles for conflicts of interpretations’ (2011, 6) which attempt to avoid a single interpretation that maintains a dominance over the symbolic structure of thought. Alternative visions of the political arrangements of the world are often dismissed or called a fantasy, but Vattimo and Zabala argue that such visions are possible.

²⁵ See also Žižek 2008b, 1.

²⁶ They define framed democracies as: ‘a conservative moralized order where the democratic is only what legally enters the established order of metaphysics’ (2011, 19)

A theory of love is central to the theory of hermeneutic communism. It is here that Vattimo and Zabala make the assertion that, 'in a Nietzschean-Christian style, one could say: now that God is dead and the absolute truth is not credible anymore, love for the other is possible and necessary' (2011, 112). Vattimo positions love as the weak force that has survived through Christianity to be revealed as its proper legacy - made possible in the advent of secularism.

The only truth revealed to us by Scripture, the one that can never be demythologised in the course of time - since it is not an experimental, logical, or metaphysical statement but a call to practice - is the truth of love, of charity. (2005, 51)

Vattimo understands this weak thought inherent to this love as the best response we have to the violence of framed democracies which creates divisions, destroys valuable resources, privatises that which should be common, and distorts how value is understood.

Paul's resistance to the world as it was can be situated in between the visions of Vattimo and Žižek. Christ's struggle is not only the solidarity of a God with His people, but also a sign of the imminent end of the world in its current form. Designed not only to find specific sites of resistance, the project of the Christ-event would culminate with the forcing of this conclusion. God had been emptied into the world, but this would act as the vehicle for His return to absolute sovereignty.

1.3.3 Measure for Measure

The paradox of Paul's theology is that the sovereign God controlling creation is also found as the Messiah suffering at the hands of this creation. These seemingly opposing ideas are intertwined in Pauline theology. Yahweh and Christ seem like opposing figures, but in Paul's thought they appear as one. For Paul, what occurs in the Christ-event is a re-ordering that reveals God's power in his very weakness. In this twisting of order, the burden of responsibility is placed on individuals and communities whose

actions have far-reaching consequences. The question remains as to why a God would hand himself over to His own creation, what type of game is at play here? There is something vital here in the economy of weakness and power inherent to the narrative of Job. In response to the situation, Yahweh retorts:

“Can you draw out Leviathan with a fishhook
or press down his tongue with a cord?
Can you put a rope in his nose
or pierce his jaw with a hook?
Will he make many pleas to you?
Will he speak to you soft words?
Will he make a covenant with you
to take him for your servant forever?” (Job 41.1-4)

Within Yahweh’s powerful response to Job is a sign of His weakness. There is something that His awe-inspiring retort to Job and his accusers, claiming ultimate power over all things, cannot disguise: a God who must force His creation to do His will undermines the significance of this creation. This revelation is crucial to Christianity and key to Paul’s struggle with the significance of the Christ-event.

There is one final caveat to be outlined before leaving this chapter: is all this talk of God’s weakness merely a trick? God’s descent into that which he has dominion over goes further than that of Duke Vincentio in *Measure for Measure*. The Duke of Vienna disguises himself as a friar in order to observe his city from within. He leaves a judge, Angelo, in charge while he is away. With the city in his charge, Angelo sentences a young man named Claudio to death for having sex with Juliet outside of marriage (despite this only being due to a technicality in their marriage). In order to free Claudio, his sister Isabella pleads with Angelo. In his lust for Isabella, Angelo agrees to spare Claudio’s life in exchange for her virginity. On the instruction of the Duke, who is disguised as Friar Lodowick, Mariana (whom Angelo rejected marrying due to her dowry being lost) takes Isabella’s

place in a “bed trick.” In darkness she sleeps with Angelo, making him think it is Isabella. On failing to keep his word, and reiterating his call for Claudio’s head, Lodowick arranges the “head trick,” whereby a replacement head is presented to Angelo. Eventually Lodowick reveals himself to be the Duke, reasserting his rule (which he had not ever really given up). The ruler in rags remains a ruler, and only reiterates his rule through appearing to give it up.

Christ takes this trick a stage further. Indeed it is only through taking on the form of a slave and humbling himself that his power can take shape. Put differently, God can only really have power *within* the symbolic system of representation. It is within this system that power resides. Christ had to disrupt the existing order from within its mechanisms of domination.

It is here that the potential for violence exists. As Chigurh revealed as a reflection of the world, the foundations of his violent force are forged in the symbolic and systemic excess of creation. The task of preventing this violence is in changing the narrative that drives Chigurh. For Paul this meant the Messiah had turned the tables on the Symbolic Order. God’s power is reasserted within the eschatological “now-time” that had arrived. The nature of the divine economy had shifted. Love became the revolutionary action that could overturn the dominance of the powers that crucified the Lord, but it, all the same, relies on this trick of fiction.

This brings us to the idea of divine violence; not a sign of God’s authority but of participation in the world. This is a divine economy that is driven not by the will of a transcendent being, but in the actions of individuals within this unstable economy.

Chapter 2

Divine Violence

2.1 Yahweh

God bursts into existence as a figure out of the divine; as an articulation of the unknowable Real. The pivotal moment in the Pauline narrative comes through His descent into creation through Christ. God's intervention in Biblical texts so often appears as a violent force, whether physically destructive or through a reshaping of the situation it encounters. This is usually typified as an expression of events that have spun rapidly out of control; of God failing to turn back His wrath. Signifying an 'irruption of the Real in the Symbolic' (Pound 2008, 39), divine violence disturbs the truth of the situation in which it is generated.²⁷ This chapter seeks to draw a distinction between the divine and fallen worlds in much the same way as Žižek follows Lacan in marking out the separation between the Real and the Symbolic.

Divine violence is not understood here as a divine being executing wrath out of His own free will, and also not as the intervention of a god guaranteeing historical consistency and movement towards an end point in history. Instead, divine violence signifies a moment when the Symbolic substance of truth ceases to be replicated. It is a blinding light or a gaping hole that appears, without warning, in the fabric of the Symbolic Order (revealing its pretence at truth). This violence, found in the foundations of transformative events, creates raw points of rupture which allows the possibility of a new experience of truth to unfold in the community faithful to its appearance. Created out of an excess over and above the nothingness (static, controlled knowledge) found in the void, it intervenes in the revelation that something else exists beyond the fixed state of

²⁷ Marcus Pound (2008) gives a critical overview of Žižek's theory of divine violence. He makes the important distinction that this is not a divine force simply intervening from the outside, but a force that is forged from within the Symbolic.

knowledge which holds us in its trance, violently disturbing dominant understandings of history.²⁸

Let us suppose, then, that there exists an excess which is unaccountable in the expectations of the narratives that shape our symbolic fields. One way in which this excess presents itself is through this divine “pure” violence; amoral, without personal fidelity, without desire. Such violence is formed in an excess created by a culmination of activity within the Symbolic. Signified here is the absence of the big Other; the absence of ultimate meaning. It is a reminder of the instability inherent to all power. As such, divine violence is a constant feature of history which becomes dramatized in theologico-political narratives. As a rupture in norms that hold worldviews together, it emerges out of an accumulation of actions and occurrences. When its appearance has passed, history, often violently, is reclaimed from its grasp in the form of law-creating “mythic” violence. It is divine violence which Žižek looks to as the force which might reveal the symbolic and systemic violence inherent to dominant systems of political and economic control; and it is Paul who lurks in the background of his interpretation of this force.

2.1.1 Paul’s Yahweh: The Hardening of Pharaoh’s Heart

At midnight the LORD struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the prisoner who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of the livestock. Pharaoh arose in the night, he and all his officials and all the Egyptians; and there was a loud cry in Egypt, for there was not a house without someone dead. (Ex. 12.29-30)

²⁸ It is in this sense that Badiou identifies nothingness with both nihilism and the death drive (1993:34). Nothingness, in this sense, is found in the empty language that resists the transformation of a situation. He sets the revelation of truth against the desire for nothingness that blocks the ‘possibility of the impossible’ that founds ‘an ethics of truth’ (39).

In the story of the Israelites' exodus from Egypt, Yahweh makes a numbers of ruthless and downright vicious interventions. Not only does He kill the entirety of Egypt's first born, He hardens Pharaoh's heart to ensure this cruel act of terror will transpire. Paul refers to this troubling story in his letter to a group of Christ's followers in Rome.

What then are we to say? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! For he says to Moses,

"I will have mercy on whom I have mercy,
and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."

So it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who shows mercy. For the scripture says to Pharaoh, "I have raised you up for the very purpose of showing my power in you, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth." So then he has mercy on whomever he chooses, and he hardens the heart of whomever he chooses. (Rom. 9.14-18)

There is an echo of Job's God in Paul's letter. As he puts it, 'who indeed are you, a human being, to argue with God?' (Rom. 9.20). Paul is not explaining that we are merely chess pieces of a god who is playing a game, but rather that this divine power is beyond our ability to wield. It is mysterious, complex, and at times even vicious. Yet this positioning of divine power beyond our comprehension was also a stinging riposte to the Roman authorities who directly aligned themselves with such power. They, like Pharaoh, did not have the power that they claimed. This did not mean that Paul believed the world to be devoid of divine power; rather, as he said to the church in Philippi, 'it is God who is at work in you' (Phil. 2.13).

Paul and many of his contemporaries were bound up in questions about the nature of divine power. There was a weight of captivity upon those who aligned themselves in the service of God's plan for creation. God in all His might, however, had not freed them from successive rule

under foreign powers. These questions, which are embedded in the histories of the Hebrew Scriptures, were vital for Paul. This was a story told and re-told through the Hebraic traditions: humankind's susceptibility to the power of sin had halted the fulfilment of God's promises (Rom. 15.7-13). Paul's self-proclaimed former zeal for the traditions of his ancestors indicates his own motivation to adhere to God's plan for creation (Gal. 1.14). His call to follow Christ ushered in a radical new direction in this plan as an apostle of Christ to the Gentiles. The impact of his collision with the event of Christ's death and resurrection altered the contexts and scope of his mission, but it did not alter its central thrust: playing his part in the reconciliation of man with God. Put differently, Paul's active role was in the subversion of the powers that would seek to put God's people, and purposes, under captivity (2 Cor. 10.3-6).

The claim here is that Paul's Jewish-messianic vision was rooted in a form of theologico-political disappointment. This disappointment led Paul to promote a weak messianic violence that was epitomised in the proclamation of *Christ as Lord* - the crucified slave and Yahweh as part of the same body, radically shifting the dynamics of theologico-political power.

What did not disappoint Paul were his own attempts to follow the law - in which he was without flaw (Phil. 3.6). Instead, it originated in creation's deviation from God's purposes. From Pharisaic Jew to apostle of Christ, Paul perceived a frustration building in the divine sphere. The revelation of Christ, with its welcoming of the Gentiles into the fold, declared that the time for God's plan to be fulfilled had arrived. It began in the influences of Jewish communities and sects that were entrenched in disappointment; in particular for Paul, the Pharisaic tradition which acted with an acute awareness of the responsibility of protecting God's promises through the law. This promise, as revealed through Abraham, was being held captive and distorted by forces with little concern or interest in His law or its purposes.

Paul's mission, we can only assume, also ends in some measure of disappointment, in imprisonment and execution in Rome without any

longer carrying expectations of his mission being fulfilled before his death. He is a peculiar hero of continental thought in both his immediate context and in his image as the founder of Christianity; a failure in his own mission, only to be resurrected as the hero of a religious monster.²⁹ Buried somewhere in this textual rubble, Badiou and Žižek are among those who believe they have found a revolutionary figure who not only survives the monster of Christianity but undercuts many of its pronouncements. Furthermore, far from being connected only to religious concerns, Neil Elliot echoes Jacob Taubes' claims that Paul's letters were 'a declaration of war on Caesar' (Elliot 2008, 61).³⁰ Paul's language becomes, in this context, that of resistance to the rulers and powers who stood in the way of the fulfilment of God's law (Rom. 8.38-39).

A message which was central to Paul's ministry, and one which has always been emblematic of Christian causes, is that Christ came not as the war leader or violent rebel; instead, this Messiah, through his resurrection, after a public execution, subverted the idea that the Roman Empire had the monopoly of power over life and death. This was a messianic figure who attempted to radically transform the theologico-political situation, not through brute force but through physically peaceful means. With this messianic proclamation, Paul disturbed the political framework of the Roman Empire. Christ's crucifixion and resurrection had revealed to Paul the foolishness of a worldly wisdom that proclaimed a partiality on the part of God. No ruler could ever claim equality with God, only Christ, who died as a slave on the cross, demonstrating this power through the resurrection. The Christ-event created a rupture in the reality of those who became entangled in its unfolding. It is this rupture that removes, even for a moment, the semblance of the Symbolic Order, and Paul's articulation of this Event makes him a vital figure for thinkers such as Žižek and Badiou.

²⁹ Robert Orlando's documentary *A Polite Bribe* (2013) creates this type of portrayal of Paul (as a failure who died believing that he was just that) and plays on this theme of being resurrected as a hero of Christianity.

³⁰ Taubes aligns his reading of Romans with a '*political* declaration of war on Caesar' (1993:16) while Elliot makes this declaration more explicitly with Paul himself.

This is crucial to the way in which Paul emphasises the importance of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ; a de-legitimising and defeating of a sign of a power (the Roman cross) that represented the captivity of God's promises. Kenosis is an important device in the transvaluation of values propelled by Paul's articulation of the messianic rupture in the Symbolic Order; if God is emptied out onto the cross then this has significant implications for the understanding of the nature of power. What is being fought for in the Pauline legacy is a continuing narrative which highlights the radical potentiality exemplified in the idea of God, the ultimate source of authority, taking the form of a slave in order to pronounce judgement through the signification of the cross; a symbol of power for those who merely claim ultimate authority. This is precisely the point of divine violence: it exposes the weakness of those who claim power. This work, however, was not complete. Paul determined that it was the work of the community of believers that, through the Holy Spirit, participated in the service of this power through faith and hope in its unfolding truth.

In order to work our way to Paul's articulation of the Christ-event, and the reading of this in recent philosophy, we must first seek to understand the divine force at work in the background. This begins with Yahweh.

2.1.2 The Violence of Yahweh

In appealing to divine (pure) violence (*die göttliche reine gewalt*), Walter Benjamin evokes Yahweh's intervention against Korah and his company in Numbers 16.1-35. Korah led a group of Levites who threatened to revolt against Moses for leading them into the wilderness with, thus far false, promises of a land of milk and honey (16.13-14). In response to their opposition they were annihilated by God; 'the ground split apart' swallowing 'all those associated with Korah' and they 'went down alive into Sheol' (16.31-33). God strikes without warning and annihilates the 'privileged Levites' (Benjamin 1921, 297).

This enigmatic theory of violence, as described in his essay *Critique of Violence* (*Zur Kritik der Gewalt*), begins with Yahweh. This temperamental figure is a troubling choice as a role model for revolutionary violence. Yahweh presents a problem through His narrow frame for identifying injustice (which essentially revolves around circumcised men). With only sporadic and infrequent exceptions, justice for marginalised groups (such as women or slaves) can often appear as less important than Israel maintaining its relationship with God.

It is with caution that Benjamin's troubling text should be approached. At stake here, though, is a way of understanding the responsibility for violence that is extended to its very limit. This responsibility extends even to the divine itself; as Simon Critchley would put it: an infinite demand.³¹

Benjamin's peculiar appeal to the violent act of a god whose judgement came upon the company of Korah is not an appeal to Yahweh Himself but to the power of this violent act to expiate the guilt of mere life (1921, 297). It is a story that warns of the consequences of challenging the mechanisms of divine sovereignty. The particular means of this violence is what interests Benjamin here. This means, the annihilation of the company of Korah through sending them directly into Sheol, is a bloodless violence which strikes from outside of the law; annihilating them but also removing the condemnation of law. The ambiguity surrounding this idea is centred on the idea that while its occurrence is assured, it is difficult to determine when this expiating power 'has been realised in particular cases' (1921, 300).

Writing on the subject of God's judgement on Korah, James Martel argues that rather than a judgement being made upon those associated with Korah, there is a demonstration of the falsehood of the idolatry of sovereignty.

³¹See Critchley (2007; 2012) and his idea of an infinite demand that places upon an individual an ethical imperative to serve the Other which is impossible to fulfil.

God does not reveal 'truth' but simply undermines untruth. God's action serves as a kind of messianic undoing of the fetishism of divinity. In the absence of such a fetish, another relationship with reality becomes possible (although far from certain), one that acknowledges the absence of truth, God's aporia in the world. (2012, 12)

The vital point here is that in the action against Korah and his company Yahweh creates 'something new' (Num. 16.30). God struck from outside of the existing order. Žižek takes this from Benjamin's description of this idea in imagining a revolutionary violence that is a sign of a world 'out of joint' (2008a, 169). Tensions in the collective weight of human action create a rupture through which access is given to the Real (which is outside of our horizon of language and understanding) and therefore not accounted for within the Symbolic Order. The consequences of this rupture are felt in the attempts to suture the contents of this irruption from the Real back into the Symbolic.

In the narrative of Numbers, this leads to what takes place beyond this example in Benjamin's short account of divine violence. After the annihilation of the 'two hundred fifty' in the company of Korah, Yahweh sends a plague which kills a further 'fourteen thousand seven hundred' (Num. 16.47). The people did not believe this was an act of God; instead they rebelled against Moses and against Aaron, saying: "You have killed the people of the Lord" (16.41). The questioning of Yahweh's faith in Moses and Aaron was met with further violence in the form of a plague. The divine violence that had initially invaded the situation might have only exiated the guilt of mere life, but the violence that followed sent death and judgement upon that life. This is the temperamental relationship between the divine and the human, or between the Real and the Symbolic. There are no guarantees over what the repercussions of an intrusion from the Real will have in the Symbolic. In other words, if such a powerful rupture is created in the apparent stability of the Symbolic Order it will expose a power vacuum with no guarantees over how it will be filled.

This is a recurring theme with the figure of Yahweh. Walter Brueggemann examines the troubling violence of God in the narrative of Joshua 11; a text which, among other such passages found in the Hebrew Bible, can be ‘an embarrassment,’ ‘morally repulsive,’ and ‘theologically problematic’ (2009, 11). Brueggemann’s approach to this text attempts to justify Yahweh’s intervention in the situation. In his reading, Yahweh struck out only against the injustice and inequality inherent to the situation. Yahweh creates the power vacuum wherein the potential for a brutal massacre is made possible. In this sense, ‘the Word of Yahweh... created new historical, social possibilities for Israel’ (31) through the destruction of the horses and chariots (facilitating the attack of Joshua’s forces). Horses and chariots ‘reflect the strength and monopoly of arms’ (15) held by the monarchies that claim sovereign power of their land and people. Yahweh acts against state power itself in the overturning of inequality inherent to the way that it dominates the balance of power.

Brueggemann advances Israel as an ‘ancient peasant nation’ (64) that was faced with a hostile system of monarchies led by the Hazor King. This violent moment, among many in Israel’s Biblical narrative, saw them destroy their enemies; ‘they did not leave any who breathed’ and ‘burned Hazor with fire’ (Jos. 11.11). The focus in Brueggemann’s reading is on the temperate nature of Yahweh’s promise: that the horses would be hamstrung and the chariots burned - ‘only violent against weapons’ (23). This divine sanction coincides with ‘justice and liberation against an oppressive adversary’ (23). The crux of the matter then, for Brueggemann, is that:

it is not a summons to violence (though its practice might be construed so) but only a permit that Joshua’s community is entitled to dream, hope, and imagine freedom and is entitled to act upon that dream, hope, and imagination. (24)

The point here is that, ‘except for Yahweh’s permit and mandate in v.6, all action in the narrative is left to Joshua’ (29). Yahweh allows for the

possibility of the destruction of the power of the alliance of kings brought together by Jabin King of Hazor, but the destruction is carried out by Joshua and his forces.

In this same way, leading the assault on Jericho, Joshua's army did not directly cause its walls to collapse and Yahweh did not massacre those inside. It was their fidelity to God's instruction which prompted the walls to be destroyed and deliver victory. It was Joshua's strength of arms within those crumbled walls that dictated the nature of that victory. The divine aspect of the violence was enacted by Yahweh alone, while the rest belonged to Joshua and his army.³² God's violent interventions in the fallen world are caused by the activities of humans, and the consequences of these interventions are in the hands of humans. The idea of divine violence which Benjamin evokes does not refer merely to this relationship, but to those specific moments when, in a moment, the divine figure appears with a 'pure immediate violence' (1921, 300) that transforms a situation in a way that could not have been anticipated.

2.2 Walter Benjamin's Bloodless Violence

In what Simon Critchley calls an already 'massively over-interpreted essay' (2012, 213), Benjamin's *Critique of Violence* seeks to find a way past the deadlock inherent to the cycle of law creating and law preserving violence. In this essay, mythic violence (a law-making and preserving violence which always bends towards power) is confronted by divine violence (a law-destroying violence with no interest in power itself). Benjamin posits law and violence as mutual guarantors that can only be disrupted by the pure immediate violence of the divine. It is this type of pure violence that Žižek connects to Paul's work of love, which Žižek reads as Paul moving beyond his own deadlock with regards to the law.

³² Not all examples of "divine" violence are accounted for in this way in the Hebrew Scriptures. The divine figure plays a much more active role in the killing of the Egyptian first born (Ex. 12.29-31) and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19.24-29). Not just contained to the Hebrew Bible, in the narrative of Acts Ananias and Sapphira are caused them to fall down and die because of their deceit towards God (Acts 5.1-11).

Benjamin's formulation of divine violence (a "bloodless violence" which, with a revolutionary spirit, pulls the emergency brakes on the locomotive of history) has weighed heavily upon the way in which violence in revolutionary action has been theorised in continental philosophy. This divine violence, or as Agamben puts it, "'pure" or "divine," and, in the human sphere, "revolutionary" (2005a, 150), creates a rupture that allows a move beyond that which had been previously anticipated within the Symbolic Order.

If mythical violence is law-making, divine violence is law destroying; if the former sets the boundaries, the latter boundlessly destroys them; if mythical violence brings at once guilt and retribution, divine power only expiates; if the former threatens, the latter strikes; if the former is bloody, the latter is lethal without spilling blood. (1921, 150-151)

He gives an example of this as a violent political force in Sorel's articulation of the general strike. "Pure" in that it makes no demand on the ends; it is defined by its withdrawal from the cycle of law preserving and creating behaviour. Its violence is wrought in its impact on the stability of the Symbolic Order; not through its own imagined means or ends but in exposing the already established violent systems to their untruth.

It is here that one of the many dangers of Benjamin's text arises. It places faith in the idea that the Symbolic Order can be transgressed, with no guarantees over what the consequences of this move might entail; as Žižek puts it, 'there is no guaranteeing its divine nature, the risk of reading and assuming it as divine is fully the subject's own' (2008a, 169). In this sense, the general strike should not necessarily be interpreted as an act of divine violence, but simply as the potential for a clearing of the way which would allow something different to emerge. In other words, attempting to disrupt the Symbolic Order in such a way that its pretence of truth collapses (at least for a moment).

Critique of Violence begins by examining the relationship between natural law (which focuses on using whatever violence necessary to achieve justified ends) and positive law (which judges the legality of the means). Benjamin describes natural law as such:

according to this view (for which the terrorism of the French Revolution provided an ideological foundation), violence is a product of nature, as it were a raw material, the use of which is in no way problematical, unless force is misused for unjust ends. (1921, 133)

The French Revolution repeats what occurs in the destruction of the Amalekites in 1 Sam. 15. God told Saul: ‘kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey’ (15.3). This violence was justified by revenge and the necessity to ‘utterly destroy’ (15.3) an obstacle to a greater purpose. The total destruction of the Amalek people was justified in the purpose it served (without any problems with regards to its morality).

The other side of the coin is positive law, which: ‘can judge all evolving law only in criticising its means’ (135). Positive law is found in our everyday lives as legalities judge what kind of path we can choose to achieve the ends that we desire. For example, justice may be found in the punishment of a murderer, but how this justice is wrought depends on the legal process. It determines what force can be exerted: under the Geneva Convention (1949; 1977) it is illegal to torture information from the captured terror subject, therefore other means must be found (to take a popular example) to achieve the goal of retrieving information pertinent to a potential terror attack. Positive law ties the ends to the means, overriding notions of universality with the particular statutes of the law. In this there is the law as given through Moses; “You shall not kill” might be a guiding principle, but the specific laws on capital punishment or in times of war, for example, determine where exactly this principle can be put aside.

Natural and positive law are by no means exclusive. They are part of the same ends/means system of law. Benjamin asserts that:

both schools meet in a common basic dogma: just ends can be attained by justified means, justified means used for just ends. Natural law attempts, by the justness of the ends, to "justify" the means, positive law to "guarantee" the justness of the ends through the justification of the means. (1921, 135)

The detention camp at Guantanamo Bay provides a recent example of the overlapping of the two; a site where positive law is replaced, at some point, by natural law when it is deemed necessary in the means/end cycle. Both seek sovereignty over means and ends, and use law-making and law-preserving violence to establish and maintain this power. This distinction is again blurred in the police force, which can preserve the law through breaking its specific commands; thus law making and preserving violence can become conflated in the police. They remained tied to positive law in the restricting how they can act, but are given a measure of responsibility of deciding when one bleeds over into the other. Riots and unrest in the United States sparked by the killing of a black man by police in Ferguson (August, 2014) demonstrate some of the tension caused by this overlapping of natural and positive law.

This problem is situated in the deadlock that is caused by natural and positive law; neither is capable of radically altering the situation outside of the realms of law. As demonstrated in protests over police shootings around the world in recent years, the problem is not merely rooted in the practices of the police, as if a slight adjustment of policy might be the answer. The violence in the truth of the situation must be exposed for the monstrosity that it is. The political and economic inequalities, attitudes towards guns, race, and crime, and the selfish culture at the heart of politico-economic structures remain locked within a narrative that rioters and protesters are both trapped in - and desperate to break free from. In this sense, revolutionary action cannot avoid the issue of sovereignty.

Divine violence is the force which descends from outside of this cycle of law-making and law-preserving violence; where a “pure means” disrupts this relationship between violence and law. The mythical violence of power-making is confronted by a divine violence that destroys power “as such.”

2.2.1 The Real

Embroiled in the theory of this force is the question of what action it might legitimate. It is with this caution that Derrida approached Benjamin's essay. Derrida, perhaps the foremost critic of Benjamin's essay, called it a dangerous text which was ‘haunted in advance’ by the Final Solution; warning specifically against its idea of ‘annihilation’ (2002, 298). His fear with this text, the facet which he finds ‘perhaps almost unbearable,’ is the ‘temptation to think the Holocaust as an uninterpretable manifestation of divine violence’ due to its ‘annihilating, expiatory and bloodless nature’ (298). Just as those who entered the death camps were destroyed completely, leaving only in an ash cloud of smoke, Derrida fears that the Final Solution could be interpreted as, ‘an expiation and an indecipherable signature of the just and violent anger of God’ (298); a God in which ‘authority, justice, power, and violence are all one’ (293). There is a danger in this idea in that if it is understood as violence against an illegitimate other, it becomes a nonviolent violence only in the sense that those who are the targets cannot be considered legitimate victims of violence. As Derrida suggests, this text leaves us open to the temptation of interpreting such violence (*gewalt*) as the ‘just and violent anger of God’ (298). There is an ambiguity to this text in its understanding of human rights and the value of life. This ambiguity continues to haunt Benjamin's text.

Pivotal here is the denial that an occurrence such as the Holocaust can be accounted for as a Truth-Event. As with Žižek's discussions of Gandhi, the argument is that nothing was transformed in the Symbolic in order to align an eventual force like divine violence with its mechanisms of

dominance over the historical narrative. Yet there remains ambiguity in Žižek's readings about exactly what would constitute an event of divine violence.

Another prominent example of this ambiguity comes in the form of terror attacks. Žižek argues that the atrocities perpetrated on September 11th 2001, which indiscriminately took the lives of many people, cannot lay claim to being an act of divine violence. It was its antithesis: an attempt to force the consequences of a particular set of beliefs onto those who were perceived to be its enemy. Unlike with religious terrorism, participants in divine violence can make no claim to be enacting God's will and make no claim to a deeper meaning in a grander scheme of history. There is no guarantee of eternal glory or God's victory in divine violence. The violent crimes of 9/11 were deliberate actions which served only to reinforce and heighten tensions that already existed. They attempted to replace the empty site of the Real with a sovereign source of authority.

Rancière also argues against the idea of something of the Real breaking through in this attack. He claims that 'if a symbolic rupture occurred it had already been accomplished' (2010, 104). In this line of argument he defines a Symbolic Event as 'the name for any event that strikes a blow to the existing regime of relations between the Symbolic and the Real' (97). Following this he asserts that no symbolic rupture or event occurred on this day because nothing was altered in the Symbolic by means of a disruption of that which was already anticipated; the Symbolic was instead amplified and reinforced. By this Rancière means that the towers were merely representations of the Symbolic Order, which already resided in the American people. It was a crime against steel, glass, and people - but it was not a successful attack on the heart of the Symbolic Order. If the attackers believed that they were attacking the symbolisation of the power of the United States, they were only partly correct; that symbolisation not only exists in towers but in the people themselves (this is why the attack was a startling failure on ideological grounds).

This breaking of resistance to the idea that a foreign attack on US soil could exist outside of fantasy only served to reinforce and heighten the

tensions that already existed. It was not a sign of God's anger against the United States, in line with the thought of either Islamic or Christian extremists, nor did it represent a break in the Symbolic Order. Yet this example shows the tenuous grounds on which divine violence stands.

2.2.2 Žižek's Divine Violence

In order to further examine this enigmatic theory of violence, we will look more closely at the way in which this Benjaminian divine violence has become crucial to Žižek's diagnosis of potential forms of resistance to the domination of regimes underpinned by capitalism. Žižek gives divine violence the 'minimal definition' of 'the counter-violence to the excess of violence that pertains to state power' (2008b, 483). He identifies divine violence with that which is created in the tension between the objective (symbolic and systemic) violence inherent to the Symbolic Order and the way in which those caught up in its mechanisms react to its presence. He describes this force as 'the direct subjectivization of (or, rather, the direct subjective reaction to) this objective violence' (481). In this sense, and as will be discussed later in the chapter through *Bartleby the Scrivener*, the inherent instability of the objective violence associated with state power, for example, is forced to reveal the very untruth which underpins its domination.

Divine violence arrives at a moment when a situation can no longer tolerate itself. It creates a rupture in the symbolic structure of governance, allowing access to a new set of truths through the disintegration of the symbolic domain maintained in the previous order. Žižek describes divine violence as, 'the terrifying point of the *direct intervention of the noumenal into the phenomenal*' (2008b, 486). In Badiou's language, this is the violence inherent to the emergence of an Event. Žižek describes the crux of the idea as such:

couldn't the entire history of humanity be seen as a growing normalisation of injustice, entailing the nameless and faceless

suffering of millions? Somewhere, in the sphere of the 'divine,' perhaps these injustices are not forgotten. They are accumulated, the wrongs are registered, the tension grows more and more unbearable, till divine violence explodes in a retaliatory destructive rage. (2008a, 152)

There remains, however, a measure of ambiguity relating to the way in which Žižek envisions divine violence. Central to the criticisms about the working of this theory of violence into his work is that it either legitimises reactionary violence or it encourages inaction while waiting for some catastrophic event that will never arrive.³³ Its relation to a "decision" has been criticised by Marcus Pound, who argues that Žižek becomes 'complicit in the very mechanism he criticises' (2008, 41) - the sacrificial logics of sacred violence.³⁴

In explaining the way divine violence relates to 'positively existing historical phenomena' (2008a, 167), Žižek exemplifies the Revolutionary Terror of 1792-94 and the Red Terror of 1919, as well as the destruction wrought by looters from the favelas in Rio de Janeiro. Such occurrences signify actions with no regards for the legality of means and no thought for the ends that it might bring. Put differently, 'those outside the structured social field strike 'blindly,' demanding and enacting immediate justice/vengeance' (171). It is here that we have the real problem with Žižek's articulation of divine violence: it links too closely with the deliberate acts of individuals, while at the same time dehumanising their

³³ This is seen especially in discussions with Simon Critchley. See Žižek (2008b) and Critchley (2012).

³⁴ The crux of Pound's criticism, in his *(Very) Critical Introduction to Žižek*, is that he remains 'locked into the very retributive system he is critical of' through evoking the idea of violence linked to a retributive divine force (2008, 40). He adds that divine violence should be refused on the basis that divinity, as understood through the Gospels, should be identified as peace-making; that, following René Girard, the link between violence and the sacred should be refuted. He argues that an appeal to the 'retributive God' of the Old Testament is an appeal to a preferred violence; this remains tied to a sacrificial logic in which violence is enacted upon the guilty. Pound affirms here that Christ is not the sacrifice intended to appease a wrathful God, but a sign of the breaking of the link between violence and the sacred. His criticism of Žižek is that he fails to fully break this connection; therefore, without actually sanctioning acts of violence, he argues that Žižek remains tied to an appeal to the Old Testament God of wrath.

involvement.³⁵ It attempts to detach agents with the immediate reasons that they carry out such violence. In essence, it could be argued, that he attempts to cover up instances of mythical, law-making, violence by attaching a greater significance to them.

The truly novel thing in the explosion of violence in Rio was the interruption in the constructed socio-economic reality that kept the worlds of the wealthy suburbs and the poor favelas distinct from each other. The point here is not to align divine violence directly with the actions of the rioters, but with the situation which created the possibility for such violence to occur. The lootings and riots were not an act of divine violence but a sign of its presence - that the situation was no longer tolerable. It is in these moments, when the Symbolic Order can no longer tolerate itself, that divine violence (this tear in reality) can be exploited in a myriad of ways.

It is in this sense that divine violence is 'the domain within which killing is neither an expression of personal pathology... nor a crime... nor a sacred sacrifice. It is neither aesthetic, nor ethical, nor religious' (Žižek 2008a, 168). It is in this regard that Žižek states that 'there are no objective criteria enabling us to identify an act of violence as divine' (169). It is a theory which is defined by its volatility; amoral in nature and defined by its lack of cover by the big Other. A force that is destructive to power itself, with no expressed demands, Žižek identifies a wide range of situations through which it might be present: 'non-violent protests... through individual killings to organised or spontaneous violent rebellions and war proper' (2008b, 483).

Divine violence, according to Žižek, 'is a decision (to kill, to risk or lose one's own life) made in solitude, with no cover in the big Other. It is extra-moral, it is not "immoral"' (2008a, 171). This decision, which comes into existence from a position which is beyond good and evil, is made without an idea of the potential consequences. This is what separates

³⁵ As Jamil Khader points out, he is 'invoking colonial representations of Third World barbaric thugs and hooligans who are not capable of mounting an effective act of resistance to the system itself' (2013, 165). In this case, Žižek's language describing those who descended from the favelas 'like Biblical locusts' (2008b, 162), creates an impression of a primal force that dehumanises those involved.

Žižek's theory of divine violence from terrorist crimes that are given justifications through some reference to a greater meaning. There is an important qualification about this decision (that Žižek perhaps fails to emphasise). Divine violence occurs beyond the reach of what any individual can anticipate. In this regard he is correct in associating it with striking blindly; it is an act of faith. In the same way that Joshua marched his army around the walls of Jericho, he can make an appeal to the divine but the intervention of Yahweh is completely beyond his ability to guarantee.

Žižek draws upon Christ's abandonment on the cross described in Matthew's gospel to exemplify this lack of cover for our actions under the big Other - '*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?*' (27.46). He characterises divine violence in the very death of God.

we humans are left with no higher power watching over us, only the terrible burden of freedom and responsibility for the fate of divine creation, and thus for God himself. (2008a, 157)

Thus, divine violence is not a sign of God's strength but of His 'own impotence' (170). This does not mean that the "divine" is absent - it has been replaced by the Real. This is why Žižek identifies himself as a Christian atheist; it is that we feel the overwhelming presence of God in that moment of decision. Put differently, with there being no God watching over us the responsibility is transferred to us. Divine violence occurs through the imminent presence of God in its relationship with the burden of responsibility; not as a decision to act in God's stead, but as a consequence of the failure of the powers that create and perpetuate objective violence to be able to disguise this violence any longer.

The problem, as Žižek admits himself without fully elaborating on the consequences, is that mythic violence always overcomes divine violence. The ruthless intrusion of divine violence upon the truth as perpetuated by the objective violence of capitalism in Brazil, or the powerful monarchy in late seventeenth century France or twentieth century Russia, is followed by a play for power underpinned by the law-creating mythic violence; or,

as Žižek acknowledges, ‘from Leninist divine violence to Stalinist mythic violence’ (2008b, 471). This paradoxical presence of God in the absence of sovereignty has far reaching consequences. Instances of divine violence contain the potential to expose injustice and end terror, but they can also create terror in a way which only serves to create more injustice and suffering. The point here is that this violence occurs in a tearing of the Symbolic Order, an order which is represented in language, art, and other forms of symbolism. Divine violence, therefore, is wrought on this level rather than the effect which it makes physically possible. To understand this we will now look at the violence inherent to language.

2.3 Divine and Fallen Language

Žižek makes a distinction between mythic and divine violence in their relationship with language: mythic violence is ‘a language-forming violence’ while divine violence is ‘language destroying twisting of language in order to enable a trans-symbolic real of a Truth to transpire in it’ (2013b, 11). The relationship between divine and fallen language in this sense is between fallen language which creates our understanding of the world and divine language which reveals the untruth of fallen language. Žižek describes this violent potential intrinsic to language as such:

language, not primitive egotistic interests, is the first and greatest divider, it is because of language that we and our neighbours “live in different worlds” even when we live on the same street. What this means is that verbal violence is not a secondary distortion, but the ultimate resort of every specifically human violence. (2013b, 2)

There is significant power in the ability that language has in shaping the Symbolic. Imperfect and premised on inevitable manipulations and betrayals, language gives life to what is experienced. It is fundamental to

forces which create or facilitate suffering, violation, and destruction as much as it is to reconciliation and liberation.

It is in language that we find the representation at the core of divine violence. In a criticism of Benjamin's description of divine violence, Hent De Vries argues that its inability to transcend language makes it futile:

Neither divine nor proletarian violence can hope to situate itself comfortably beyond the fundamental undecidability that it - now and then, for a moment only - seems to interrupt. (2001, 283)

When this fleeting moment of rupture in the Symbolic is over, it cannot prevent 'a (possible) perversion which inscribes nonviolent violence in the order from which it appeared to break away' (283). It is assimilated into the narrative of the prevailing order. There are two points here: we should affirm that these moments do exist, even if for a moment, and we should acknowledge that it can only be understood, inscribed into language, in a deviation and betrayal of what it uncovers. Divine violence is only the site from which such deviations become possible.

The tension here is in the theological dimension of divine violence. An attempt to capture this force is akin to attempting to speak in a divine language or conjure a divine miracle. Simply put, it is beyond our capacity. This, however, does not make divine violence impossible. As with an Event - and here we are getting to the theological dimension of the turn to Paul - it is a matter of faith. In an Event, truth is not simply given in totality but revealed through a procedure in which it will thereafter exist in the unfolding of commitment to its interpretation. The Event of Christ's death and resurrection presents a striking example of this. It can only be considered as a Truth-Event as long as there are those committed to its appearance as such; and those with faith can only claim that it was possible through some sense of divine rupture in the static nature of knowledge.

Drawing upon Rosenzweig's 'yea' in *The Star of Redemption*, De Vries accounts for this nature of truth that is indebted to language for its

existence. He writes, '(the 'yea') gives every word in the sentence the right to exist,' it is similar to the 'I think' which 'accompanies all representations' (2001, 262). The 'yea' is the pre-marker to every word, which gives it the right to exist but also marks the possibility, or inevitability, of its 'betrayal or perversion' (262). It calls for a second yes to reaffirm the legitimacy of the first (or the absence of the second yes to deny it). This brings De Vries to Benjamin's interpretation of language, and the gap between divine language and fallen language. Divine violence is akin to the perfect language which reveals the frailty of fallen language. It is the destructive appearance of a revelation of untruth.

Benjamin's assertion here that the things of nature 'have no proper names, except in God' (2001, 330) echoes Karl Barth's views on the division between the perfect meaning of words in relation to God and the meanings of words that we are capable of understanding. This is a distinction between the endless 'play of signifiers' (Ward 1995, 16) inherent to human language and the type of truth which is communicated through the trinity.³⁶ Barth makes a distinction between the meanings of words as related to God compared with the use strictly in the human sphere. In this way divine language belongs to the category of revelation as understood in this theological tradition. It was Barth's view that the language given to Adam by God was perfect. It related objects to thoughts to words in a perfect way. However, humankind after the fall is no longer able to make the true connection between the three.

This approach to language begins in paradox, as Graham Ward puts it, Barth's insight is 'the dialectical necessity of assuming that words name while also countering such an assumption' (1995, 5). Language, then, insists that we participate in perpetual hermeneutic activity. Barth states two routes of participation: through attempts at self-mastery or participation in God's truth as communicated through the Trinity. Ward surmises that Barth understood 'the latter reveals the former to be an idol, or, in terms of linguistics, the endless play of signifiers' (16). For Barth this means that the proper knowledge we have access to is revealed

³⁶ Graham Ward (1995) provides an overview of Barth's relationship with language.

in both the absence and presence of God. In Derridean terms, the meaning is absent in the word itself but becomes present in its *différance*. Words relate to the Word by the very means of their imperfection. We glimpse at the divine through the Bible but even that is obfuscated by the very words which grant its possibility of meaning. Through the Christ-event, as Ward puts it, there is 'a rupture of meaning that places everything in question by being other than meaning' (24). Or, as Barth would have put it, we cannot fully know God but we can *participate* in His truth. God is *the* subject, so although we are faced with the object of his revelation it does not depend on our subjective input, God can only be known as the object-in-Himself - the perfect subject. In this Barth reveals a paradox; how can we know the nature of God without creating God for ourselves? Barth's answer is in God's Word, but even that is deeply embroiled in that paradox intrinsic to the nature of language.

Barth understood what is at stake in the way words are constructed and manipulated. In his commentary on Paul's epistle to the Romans, he wrote:

We must not give the word 'God' the value of a clearly defined, metaphysical entity. What will it profit us if a formal fidelity to the meaning of a word is purchased at the cost of complete infidelity to the Word? (1933, 484)

Barth perceived that the fragility of human language struggled to articulate the divine, but at the same time is the very means of revelation from God. This is the interplay between the Real and the Symbolic (or the divine and the fallen). We are all bound to a horizon of language, but we are not bound rigidly to a static horizon. The aim of talk about God for Barth is strive to restore words to their proper usage (or, at least, demonstrate their absence from their source). Barth wrote, 'when we apply them (words) to God they are not alienated from their original object and therefore from their truth, on the contrary, restored to it' (1940, 229). God, through His Son and the Holy Spirit, reveals the truth of

His nature to humankind in a way we can understand but also misunderstand. Through God's revelation, Barth explains:

we are definitely active as the receivers of images, and the creators of counter-images. Our viewing as such is certainly capable of receiving images of the divine. And our conceiving as such is capable of creating idolatrous pictures. (1940, 182)

Divine violence works in this way, yet the Pauline revelation is that we also have an influence over the divine (or the situation in which the divine shatters through the Symbolic). This revelation does not allow us to glimpse at the truth of the object that our word names, instead, it reveals only the foolishness of our own truth. Divine violence, then, is a description of the consequence of both the absence and presence of God. It is the presence of truth working in the absence of its absoluteness. Barth's interjection here is crucial. Divine violence is created in the tension between the Symbolic Order and those who search for an alternative. Language is the basic marker of this tension.

Words cannot exist without being manipulated or misunderstood; they are inarticulate signs and signifiers of a fallen world. The law, as a prominent sign of the Symbolic Order, manipulates language, binding us to its forces. Divine violence, in theory, is this 'nonviolent violence (which) interrupts the representational power of language' (De Vries 2001, 281). It forces truth whereby the law, based on mythical foundations, has falsely claimed the privilege of being truth; therefore, the 'writing and re-writing of the law can only be confronted with a (divine) unwriting' (281). This is what Žižek sees as being at stake in divine violence: the unwriting, or uncoupling, of the truth of systems and structures which uses a mechanical type of violence to assert its dominance. What divine violence reveals is the very absence of the absolute in the Symbolic Order. The question that we now must turn to is: how does this force come into being?

2.3.1 Bartleby the Scrivener

Imagine my surprise, nay, my consternation, when, without moving from his privacy, Bartleby, in a singularly mild, firm voice, replied, 'I would prefer not to.' (Melville, 10)

Divine language is beyond the reach of our understanding but appears, akin to the messages of the Greek God Hermes, in the form of flawed human language. If divine language is that which only has the *potential* to come into being, then fallen (human) language is that which has come into *actuality*. Clayton Crockett relates the idea of divine violence to Agamben's idea of potentiality in this way; the restoration of 'impotentiality' (2011, 56), put differently, power being returned to the divine through the force of divine violence damaging the legitimacy of temporal sovereignty.

This brings us to a tale that has entranced continental philosophy: Herman Melville's *Bartleby the Scrivener*. This is the story of a character famed for a single spoken line of resistance. What Deleuze named 'the formula' (1998, 70), Bartleby's enigmatic phrase "I would prefer not to," holds a bewildering spell over the lawyer who hired Bartleby (as it also does for Deleuze, as well as others such as Agamben, Žižek, and Rancière who have attempted to interpret this interjection). Žižek uses Bartleby as an example of divine violence; as a character that is destructive without spilling blood, radically changing the situation he finds himself in.

In hiring Bartleby without references, the lawyer took a risk in his new choice of scribe. This gamble appeared to pay off as 'at first, Bartleby did an extraordinary quantity of writing. As if long famished for something to copy' (9). Agamben likens this act of the scribe to that of creation. The ink forever marks the paper from a connection of sources tracing back through the pen, the hand, and the mind back to the divine (1999b, 249). To the astonishment of this Wall Street lawyer, on the third day, upon receiving an order to help in a 'small affair,' Bartleby, 'in a singularly mild, firm voice, replied, "I would prefer not to"'(10). So it was to be that

the copier was to cease copying, and in turn to cease to do anything out of his own will apart from utter: "I would prefer not to." This disarming stroke becomes the very essence of Bartleby as he no longer contributes to the world beyond the effects of what this utterance represents. He does not leave the office. And when the lawyer moves office, he squats there until he is sent to prison. He then dies of starvation, leaving the lawyer to ponder what this force was which upset his world.

Bartleby, according to Agamben, 'transforms every potentiality into an impotentiality' (1999a, 245). In his refusal to copy he returns words from the edge of their realisation back to their origin in the divine. Agamben understands every potentiality as something which also has the potential not to be. As soon as something is actualised it loses this potential not to be. If Bartleby had rejected the lawyer's instruction directly, then he would be denying the potential of that occurrence; but instead he negates his own will for the thing to be or not to be by preferring not to actualise or prevent anything. He negates all things (including any reasoning behind the negation itself) returning them to where they came. In this sense, 'the formula emancipates potentiality (*potius*, from *potis*, which means "more powerful") from its connection to a "reason" (ratio) and its subordination to Being' (Agamben 1999b, 258). It may appear as if Bartleby simply rejects all potential to be, but by refusing to engage with any sense of his own will he leaves the instructions in a state of potentiality.

Žižek invokes something similar to this idea of impotentiality in his reading of Bartleby. He provides a model for the disengagement with the system a subject is caught up in. Unless there is a complete disengagement from systems and structures being opposed, the destruction and division created by capitalism will only deepen until its inevitable point of catastrophe. The potential solution is to not actively fight the corruption of injustice in the mechanisms of systemic violence but to prefer not to engage - to refuse to enter into participation within the system at all. This is the path to violently exposing the truth of how the system operates, and how it uses its active opposition to sustain its normal functioning. Through

this there remains a potential to see what might not be as well as what might be; that first there needs to be an understanding of the truth of the situation before anything new can be created thereafter. The obvious problem with Žižek's analysis is the unpredictability of the consequences of such a radical withdrawal; indeed, it only meant death for Bartleby.

Bartleby's death occurs in a place where he is almost completely forgotten, with only the lawyer left to inscribe something of his final days into history. In a similar way, Paul also, we can be quite confident, dies in an almost forgotten place. His death in Rome marked the end and the defeat of his own mission as he understood it. He relied on others to remember his message of self-sacrifice for his cause. Those who Žižek holds up as examples of revolutionary figures, from Marx to Lenin and Paul to Guevara, end their life mission in this position - they are reliant on others to continue their work.

2.3.2 I Would Prefer Not to...

"I would prefer not to" frames a novel form of resistance to the systemic violence of capitalism by calling upon a force to disrupt that which is transfigured into actuality. It is a provocation to those who work to end injustice: either continue in that system or radically withdraw from its mechanisms. In response to criticism by Critchley, Žižek defends his understanding of the link between Bartleby and divine violence.

When I write "sometimes, doing nothing is the most violent thing to do," is it not clear that, for me, the Bartlebian gesture of "preferring not to" do anything and the "divine violence" [...] *are themselves sometimes one and the same thing?* If only sometimes, then when? Only when, as I repeat over and over again, our activity supports the functioning of the power apparatus, or helps it reproduce itself - in this context, our "doing nothing," our refusal to participate, can deal a blow to

the power structure, radically de-legitimising it, preventing its normal function. (2008b, 474)

Bartleby's disarming utterance, within the limits of his own power, opens the potential for his copying *not to be*. He throws the world around him into chaos because his actions were not anticipated within the lawyer's worldview. The passive refusal to act inside the expectations of the lawyer's world caused a rupture in its ability to remain stable. It could no longer reproduce the conditions required for its smooth functioning. Of course, the lawyer managed to finally find a way beyond Bartleby's immediate influence, but not without a trace of his influence remaining.

The lawyer's interpretation of Bartleby's condition is always slightly off the mark. After Bartleby's death, all the lawyer can do is attempt to incorporate this influence back into his symbolic universe; which can only continue when Bartleby is given meaning that makes sense within this world. The lawyer reveals what he knew 'one little item of rumour. ...how true it is I cannot now tell' (34). What he had heard was that Bartelby worked at a dead letters office. In the lawyer's imagination, Bartelby, 'a man by nature and misfortune prone to a pallid hopelessness' (35), was brought to death by sorting and burning these letters that were supposed to provide 'pardon for those who died despairing; hope for those who died unhoping; good tidings for those who died stifled by unrelieved calamities' (35). In this interpretation of a life that was beyond his reckoning, the lawyer ultimately finds humanity in Bartelby. Whether true or not, and despite the tenuous nature of the rumour, Bartleby becomes re-inscribed into the lawyer's symbolic world.

This is the deeper issue with Žižek's radical, and indeed uncomfortable, call to withdraw from participation in the mechanisms that support the reproduction of capitalism: how will such actions be re-inscribed into the Symbolic Order? In a statement that exemplifies the difficulty in this unplugging, Žižek states:

"I would prefer not to" is not primarily "I would prefer not to participate in the market economy, in capitalist competition for profiteering," but - much more problematically for some - "I would prefer not to give to charity to support a black orphan in Africa, engage in the struggle to prevent oil-drilling in a wildlife swamp, send books to educate our liberal-feminist-spirited women in Afghanistan." (2006, 383)

This action is motivated from a desire not to fall into the trap of participating in violence from a non-violent stance. It is with this issue in mind that Žižek argues that 'the "means" we use to achieve emancipatory goals have themselves to display these goals, have to already be their manifestation' (2006, 486). The greater problem is how to ensure that these goals are inscribed back into the prevailing narrative after the revolutionary moment has faded.

By ceasing to write, Bartleby refused to continue his participation in the reproduction of the situation. His non-preference caused an abrupt end to the lawyer's normal situation; more than this, it revealed that what held this situation together was not as strong as he might have assumed. No more writing occurred. Žižek argues this not only serves to expose the (symbolic) mechanisms of power but also to help form a perpetual foundation of a new order:

Bartleby's attitude is not merely the first, preparatory, stage for the second, more "constructive," work of forming a new alternative order; it is the very source and background of this order, its permanent foundation. (2006, 382)

Yet this alternative order, it should not be forgotten, only exists in the lawyer's interpretation of Bartleby's behaviour. It would have been a different tale altogether if the lawyer, showing no patience with Bartleby, had him removed immediately upon not fulfilling his duties, never to be heard of again. Bartleby relies on the lawyer being an essentially good

ethical agent. He plays the game initiated by Bartleby's withdrawal. As with the lawyer's case, initially at least, authority turns out to be an illusion that becomes de-legitimised once the truth of their empty core is revealed. In this sense the lawyer is, for a time, rendered impotent.

This is the same caution that Jacques Ellul related to Gandhi (as noted in chapter one). Even if, as Žižek argues, Gandhi did more to revolutionise his situation than Hitler, through using a nonviolent violence to reveal the impotence of his opponents, it relied on the British being bound to the limits of their own authority. In short, they could not have simply arrested Gandhi and made sure he did not return. Many other empires, including the British in an earlier era, would have simply crushed such resistance with no thought other than it being a small roadblock on their march of progress. This is what makes the mechanisms leaving terror-suspects to be forgotten in places such as Guantanamo Bay so terrifying. To deny the very voice of those resisting is a violent act. The brutal violence enacted on groups such as Jews and homosexuals by Nazi forces were not bound by moral or ethical injunctions to treat such groups with dignity. Without the compliance of the lawyer, Bartleby would have had no such force in this context.

2.4 Potentiality

In what way, then, is it possible to participate in this radical disavowal of the world as it is, without simply being overcome by other forces? Is this not the very question at work in Paul's letter to the Romans? In what sense does the new theologico-political idea of radical disavowal of the world through Christ meet with Bartleby's withdrawal from his world? It is located precisely in its potential to create a radical shift in the prevailing narrative.

According to Deleuze, Bartleby's formula is 'ravaging, devastating, and leaves nothing in its wake' (1998, 70). He interprets Bartleby as a 'pure outsider' (73) with no social role, who invented a new logic of preference which completely blocks the lawyer's authority:

Bartleby is the man without references, without possessions, without properties, without qualities, without particularities: he is too smooth for anyone to be able to hang any particularity on him. Without future or past, he is instantaneous. (74)

Bartleby, through a refusal of the world, works his way outside of the Symbolic. Deleuze completes his essay on Bartleby by announcing that he is a 'new Christ or brother to us all' (90). Christ, like Bartleby, is concerned with potentiality - the forcing, at any cost, of what exists beyond the Symbolic Order. He testifies to the effect of the individual on the collective.

2.4.1 Agamben and Potentiality

Agamben calls attention to Bartleby's formula as being, 'a barely disguised citation from Romans 7:10' (1999b, 269). That which was meant to bring life (the act of writing), instead brought death. Bartleby's renunciation of copying is also a renunciation of the law; in this he returns potentiality back to its place in creation. He does not attempt to create anything apart from potential itself; like Christ, he came '[not] to redeem what was, but to save what was not' (Agamben 1999b, 270). This requires a pure violence which violates and destroys what was to be actualised, and returns it to the position of absolute potentiality.

Divine violence, as Rancière says of Deleuze's interpretation of Bartleby's formula:

shatters not just the hierarchies of a world but also what supports them: the connections between the causes and effects we expect from that world, between the behaviours and motives we attribute to them and the means we have to modify them. (2004, 146-147)

This is where both the potential for emancipatory movements and explosions of physical violence are situated in divine violence. It creates the possibility for something new to occur by creating a roadblock in the current systemic and symbolic mechanisms which dictate the existing order. This is where Agamben thinks of this force more acutely than Žižek; “I would prefer not to” as the potential for something *not to be*, nothing more than this.

For Agamben, Bartleby ‘dwells so obstinately in the abyss of potentiality and does not seem to have the slightest intentions of leaving it’ (1999b, 254). Potentiality is the essence of divine violence; the potential for something to be or not to be created by the unplugging from the current state of history. Agamben clarifies this idea: ‘as the scribe who has stopped writing, Bartleby is the extreme figure of the Nothing from which all creation derives’ (1999b, 253). There is no clear intent from Agamben to define Bartleby as an example of divine violence; yet it is this “Nothing” that is at the heart of divine violence. The creation from a space of nothingness is the act of divine violence which allows the potentiality of creation or non-creation; it gives possibility to something new as it prevents the smooth functioning of the old.

The potential to be or not to be is the kind of weak power that Paul aligns with the Christ-event. To be or not to be a subject of Christ was the ultimate question of identity for Paul. This bypassed and superseded the existing categories of identity (male/female, Greek/Jew, slave/free) even if it could not destroy their temporal meaning. The rupture in the event of truth experienced by Paul in Damascus halted his current life and revealed a new potential through breaking the existing order (Gal. 1.17). Deleuze describes the operation of Bartleby in similar terms.

There is nothing particular or general about Bartleby: he is an original. Originals are beings of Primary Nature, but they are inseparable from the world or from secondary nature, where they exert their effect: they reveal its emptiness, the

imperfection of laws, the mediocrity of particular creatures...
the world as masquerade. (1998, 83)

It is no wonder that Paul remains a significant figure in this discussion. The revolutionary turn in Paul's narrative created the potential for a transvaluation of values in the wake of a kairotic moment that announced the messianic era. The meaning of weakness and strength moved to a space of perpetual re-examination. Paul's understanding of Christ is that of the figure which, through a continuing faithfulness to a divine violence, disrupts the mechanisms of the current order and opens space in which there is a potential for something new.

Establishing a space of potentiality (or a place of perpetual paradox), is this not the very thing which is really at stake for Žižek in *Bartleby and Paul*? And is this not also the thing at stake for Gianni Vattimo, the creation of a space in which the potential of hermeneutics dictates the organisation of politics? There is a spectre of Nietzsche and the violent disruption of truth here (despite the tension between understandings of truth as such in Žižek and Vattimo). Of interest is an action which is neither violent nor non-violent, it is violent *and* non-violent at the same time. This is the crux of the potentiality inherent in the divine violence of Bartleby; he does not positively act, but acts through this non-action.

2.4.2 Critchley and the Commandment

Despite criticising Žižek's examples of divine violence, Simon Critchley is a helpful interlocutor in moving beyond the deadlock that holds this idea in a perilous state between impotent disavowal and targetless destruction (between Bartleby's death and targetless riots). Taking a different view of Gandhi's resistance, he adds, 'what defines Gandhi's nonviolent resistance is not inactivity or passivity, as Žižek suggests, but a stubbornly persistent and hugely imaginative activism' (2012, 241). Critchley disputes the claim that Bartleby is a figure of divine violence. Rather than sitting around and

waiting, he believes that it is 'engaging in a series of preferred actions' (241) that can bring about radical change. What Critchley's position lacks, however, is the violence that creates the possibility for decisions taken beyond the control of the existing order.

There is a facet of Critchley's interpretation of divine violence that allows us to clarify that this deadlock is merely a part of the amoral nature of divine violence. What specifically interests Critchley is Benjamin's interpretation of the commandment not to kill. From this he understands that violence is sometimes necessary, if not justified. Indeed, all we have now is 'the folly of a plumb line of non-violence' (2012, 226). In getting to what he understands as the crux of what we should take from Benjamin's essay, he explains that, 'when we wrestle with the commandment in solitude and decide not to follow it, then the responsibility falls on us' (219). He summarises: 'this law destroying act is divine violence; violence against violence' (219). Non-violence is the aim but it cannot be the principle as 'we cannot expect a radical change in the state of human beings in the world if we exclude violence as a matter of principle' (240). As Benjamin describes the commandment:

it exists not as a criterion of judgement, but as a guideline for the actions of persons or communities who have to wrestle with it in solitude and, in exceptional cases, to take on the responsibility of ignoring it. (1921, 298)

While this could be read as being roughly in line with Žižek's basic reading of divine violence, Critchley distances himself from this idea, preferring instead to focus on non-violent activity. He argues that rather than waiting for a profound moment of divine violence, we must work tirelessly towards a better world (and this sometimes means violent action, but the responsibility falls on us).

What Critchley fails to address, however, is the gap between what might cause an irruption of the Real in the Symbolic and the subsequent consequences of this break. While rioting or revolutionary terror might

announce the appearance of divine violence, the two are not one and the same (if they were, then the violence would not be divine but merely human - and by that very nature either law-preserving or law-making/breaking violence). Against Pound's claim that it is not that Žižek's theory should be adjusted but refused (2008, 47), it is precisely an adjustment or clarification that his interpretation of divine violence requires. Divine violence should not be considered as our action, but what our action makes possible (or impossible) in its impact on the tension between the Symbolic and the Real.

Critchley connects divine violence with his idea of the infinite demand; of our endless responsibility towards the Other. In this sense, through the glimpse of something which stands apart from the law, we strive to replace the function of law and its violent resolution with an ethic of love. Divine violence, then, is that which we must take infinite responsibility for.

“God” is the first anarchist, calling us into a struggle with the mythic violence of the law, the state, and politics by allowing us to glimpse something that stands apart, an infinite demand that cannot be fulfilled, that divides the subjectivity that tries to follow it. (Critchley 2012, 220)

It is divine violence which tears down the curtain to reveal the empty centre of the law; that God does not reside in the Holy of Holies and that this responsibility is thrown back onto us. Critchley argues: ‘divine violence is violence against violence that releases the subject from its (de)formation by law’ (217). Rather than connect divine violence simply with a decision to take responsibility beyond the dimensions of the law, divine violence is our responsibility, in Žižek’s words, ‘for God Himself’ (2008a, 157). In this sense it is precisely about the potentiality that is found in chaos. It is here that the connection with Critchley is situated: divine violence, like the Christ-event, is invested in anarchy.

This is why Clayton Crockett aligns divine violence with a 'weak messianic power' (2013, 59). This violence without violence 'disrupts sovereign power... including the power of divinity itself,' and therefore 'opposes sovereign power and its teleology' (59). Understood in this way, divine violence is that which disrupts power, and its symbolic support, through the absence of divine sovereignty and its guarantees of truth. James Martel makes this link between divine violence with this type of anarchism; moments where sovereignty is stripped of its power. He explains that the Biblical narratives describe the rule of the Levites and the Hebrew Kings, 'except during periodic (but regular) eruptions of divine violence' (2012, 142-143). These anarchist moments reveal the volatility of sovereign, or, put differently, the fragility of the symbolic underpinning of power.

2.4.3 Bartleby and Chigurh

Bartleby denies those within his sphere of influence the ability to actualise anything out of his potential. Chigurh, conversely, actualises the potential of the events which surround him; but at all times remains a figure bound by the chance of a coin. These figures are connected by the reality that they have no influence without first being hired. They are not the same, but they are of the same literary type: the divine figure that has descended into creation. They violently rupture the structures of the worlds they descend into. They are invited into the world, hired for some purpose, and while it may appear at first that they will simply carry out their duties, they will exceed the boundaries of the imagination of those who hired them. Christ is also of this type; created out of the conditions of the Jewish subject in that period, he subverted the logics of power inherent to his situation. These figures are a product of the worlds they disrupt; invited into those worlds as mercenary, scribe, or rabbi. They characterise the appearance of divine intervention; the violence which appears as if by accident, but always out of the conditions in which they were brought forth.

Bartleby and Chigurh are expressions of a divine force only insofar as they are expressions of the absence of God's immediate presence. Bartleby's work as a scribe, the act of writing which defers back to the divine, is ceaselessly marked by its separation from its origin in God. When Bartleby ceased writing, a motion which is marked by being overwhelmed by the work of the scribe, he revealed this absence - an outpouring of meaning in the absence of a connection to the absolute. Chigurh, in a very different way, recreates the act of the scribe - forever directed and compelled by other forces. This is precisely what Sherriff Bell saw in Chigurh's eyes; that which he could not fully comprehend. These stories are linked to that of Job. The attempt by Job's comforters and accusers to explain his suffering was an attempt to tame the forces of the divine; an attempt which God firmly refuted. This is one of the reasons why it is useful to explain the figure of God through fiction. Such literature, like God, dwells in paradox - between the absoluteness of his truth and the irreconcilable gap created from that truth as soon as the writing process begins.

This brings us to Paul and his meeting with Christ's rupture in the world. Paul's realisation was that he dwelt within messianic time, which Agamben describes as 'a zone of absolute indispensability between immanence and transcendence, between this world and the future world' (2005, 25). In other words, like Bartleby, Paul 'dwells so obstinately in the abyss of potentiality' (1999b, 254). The law, as the primary block to the potential of salvation and justice for the Gentiles, is removed. For Paul, the activity of the time that had arrived was to be focussed on the fulfilment of the law through love in order to serve God's potential in creation.

Chapter Three

Divine Violence and Love in Romans 13

3.1 The Roman Empire

The Real and the Symbolic share a symbiotic relationship. The Real becomes known through the Symbolic, while the Symbolic can only exist because of the Real, yet one always betrays the other to a lesser or greater degree. This, in basic terms, describes the relationship between the material universe and the creation of meaning. This relationship is mediated through a divine economy that is directed by every little thing that exists. With divine violence, the tension created between the two, as mediated in the divine economy, becomes unbearable. Despite this volatility, the two rely on each other. Their boundaries and connections are constantly shifting. The tension and creativity that define their relationship exist together in one body, enclosed in a mutual relationship. It is here that Paul's importance really emerges. It was in this way that Paul dramatically describes the relationship between the human and the divine: God is only known through his working in creation, while creation relies on God to justify its existence. The relationship is bound to a body where the fate of both is played out. To put this in Paul's language, it is the body of Christ that carries the power of God.

Paul's context was heavily influenced by life within the boundaries of the Roman Empire.³⁷ Dominant portrayals of the Roman Empire project an image of widespread violence: wars of conquest and control, criminals and slaves killed for sport, and capital punishment on public display are sewn together into these narratives. Popular imagination of this empire is one that contains the most brutal violence.

³⁷ This insight is at the heart of the Jacob Taubes turn to Paul. Recent works by Brigitte Kahl, L.I. Welborn, Neil Elliot, and Davina Lopez have constructed convincing arguments for the influence of the Roman Empire over Paul's life and works.

This is not a reputation gained without reason. Indeed, it is easy to discern why, in the stories we tell about past empires at least, the reputation of the Roman Empire is one that ‘remains extraordinary for the scale and method of its violence’ (Kyle 2012, 1). This empire, like most others, was based on the fundamental premise of expansion. This meant conquering by any means necessary.

Violent men know the nature of such empires; they are not merely practical, a means by which to survive, they decide who is closest to god. Cormac McCarthy knew this in writing *Blood Meridian*. “The Judge” inhabits a brutal imagining of the old west, but he could very well exist in an imagining of the Roman Empire in the first century CE. In a crucial juncture of the novel, the Judge, a figure of unmitigated violence, smiled and said: ‘men are born for games. Nothing else. Every child knows that play is nobler than work.’ He explains the highest nature of this: ‘War is the ultimate game because war is at last a forcing of the unity of existence. War is god’ (249). War, ‘the truest form of divination’ (249), is at all times a concern for an emperor; whether wars of expansion or the war to maintain stability within the borders of the empire.³⁸

A short time after the probable date of Paul’s death in Rome, and only a small number of years after writing his most famous letter to the members of the Christ sect that lived there, a great fire devastated much of the city. In the burning heat of the summer the centre of the empire was reduced to rubble. The displacement of people, especially the poor, and the destruction of the mechanisms that allowed people to make a living had created anger on a level that the usual appeasements could not manage.³⁹ Rumours of his weakness, or perhaps even his guilt, accompanied the anger that was directed towards Nero. A scapegoat was required to take the brunt of the blame for the fire. Step forward the group that Tacitus described as ‘the detested of the human race’ (Faulkner

³⁸ Claudius, who reigned as Emperor during 13 years of Paul’s mission, firmly believed in the centrality of the principle of expansion to his rule.

³⁹ In Rome, ‘free circuses, like free bread, brought stability’ (Faulkner 2002, 22).

2002, 24): the followers of Christ.⁴⁰ Some were burned as torches to light Nero's gardens and others were sentenced to a bloody fate in sporting spectacles. The ruling authorities brought great wrath upon this group in order to maintain their power.

Paul, in writing his infamous passage on governing authorities in Romans 13.1-7, was either tremendously wrong about the nature of ruling authorities or had some other purpose in sending a message that appears to give divine authority to those who use the most cruel violence as a means of punishment.⁴¹

In the decade before the anti-Christ-sect pogrom intensified following the great fire, a violent end at the hands of the Roman Empire was also the most likely outcome for Paul. Many slaves of Christ had their life snuffed out in this manner. There was no overturning of the powers, no Parousia in their lifetime, and no Kingdom of God to replace the Roman Empire. The messianic vocation, as Paul envisioned it, ended in the Roman Empire once again asserting its dominance over a maligned group within its borders. The idea of revolutionary love that Badiou, Žižek, and many other disparate voices in recent continental philosophy have taken from Paul was a spectacular failure in his own lifetime. He died in Rome with his mission incomplete. His story would be commandeered by an early Christian movement which would obscure his message of the revolutionary labour of love inherent to the time which had heralded by the Christ-event.

Christianity emerged from the ashes of the mission to the Gentiles propelled by Paul and the remnants of the Jewish messianic movement organised around Peter in Jerusalem. The merging of their narratives, as shown in the Lukan story told in the Acts of the Apostles, allowed the

⁴⁰Faulkner describes this group as 'socially marginal' with 'odd' practices, who drew old prejudices that were held for 'the East, the Greeks, and the Semites' (2002, 24).

⁴¹ Mark Nanos gives an alternative interpretation of Rom. 13, relating it 'not with the state, empire, or any other such organization of secular government' but instead with 'the obligation of Christians, especially Christian *gentiles* associating with the synagogues of Rome' (1996, 291). The Gentile followers must pay their respect and taxes to the local synagogues they are connected to, whilst remembering that their responsibility was not to the law but to love the neighbour. This interpretation is a reminder of how remote we are to Paul's context, and how subtle shifts in the understanding of context can create significant consequences. Yet it seems more convincing, given the context of the passage (particularly the immediately preceding 12.9-21), that Paul is referring to greater power mechanisms than the local Synagogues.

Christ-cults to survive. Richard Horsley emphasises the volatility of a context moulded in the midst of Jewish revolts.

It would appear obvious that any discussion of violence in the New Testament or in Jewish society in the late second temple times must begin by recognising the realities of structural violence and the escalating spiral of violence in Roman dominated Jewish Palestine. (1993, 29)

The failure of the Jewish revolts is testament to the true strength of the Roman Empire at that time. Such revolts were doomed to fail not merely because of the physical strength of the Imperial army, but because of the systemic and symbolic stranglehold it exerted over much of the populace. The siege of Jerusalem demonstrated the totality of this power. It controlled resources, it controlled large parts of the population, and it controlled the narrative of stability and the walls collapsed.

In amongst the chaos of the conditions under siege, as food increasingly grew scarce, Jerusalem became consumed with explosions of violence internal to its walls. Josephus, influenced by his own 'outrage' at the rebels, even notes an instance of cannibalism (Rudich 2015, 304-305). According to Josephus, the consequences of the response of power from the Roman authorities were stark: 'the roofs were filled with women and dying babies; the alleys with the corpses of the old; children and youths swollen, reeling like ghosts in the marketplace, fell whenever suffering overcame them' (304-305).

It is out of such feelings of disappointment, outrage, fear, and hope that the texts of the New Testament evolve; the Gospels and Acts create narratives that attempt to find a meaningful future for the good news of Jesus Christ. It is in light of this atmosphere created under the Roman Empire that Neil Elliot claims: 'the passion narratives provide a sophisticated cover-up for the political nature of Jesus' death' (1995, 100). The vision of Paul's campaign is distorted, its revolutionary fervour, indeed

rage, displaced onto new targets. Paul becomes buried in a new narrative.⁴²

The question, then, is what does Paul's revolutionary idea of love have to offer contemporary political revolutionary projects? The answer can be found in a reclaiming of the narrative of Romans 13: Paul's belief in the revolutionary weak violence of love.

This work has so far begun to develop a theory around the impact of actions within an interconnected, divine, economy. Within this economy, absent of divine sovereignty, symbolic violence resides at the zero-level. Therein, divine violence exposes, even for a moment, its distortion of truth. This theory will now form the backdrop, and an essential part of the context, of an interpretation of the crucial passage that revolves around Romans 13.

In this passage Paul describes his approach to dealing with the authorities (1-7), the ethic that the community of believers must adopt in order to fulfil the law (8-10), and the Messianic "now-time" that frames this context of their actions (11-14). In essence, it summarises Paul's belief in the revolutionary violence inherent to the unfolding truth of the Christ-event. This chapter examines the violent context that Paul was writing in, the importance of understanding Christ's resurrection in this context, and what this rupture signifies in Paul's comprehension of time. It is within this context that the connection between love and violence in the divine economy in Paul's narrative is uncovered. The Christ-event creates a violent rupture in the Symbolic Order; a rupture which Paul enjoins us to continue to participate in. The violence of the Christ-event is pitted against that of the powers. We will begin this chapter with an archetypal villain of early Christianity: Nero.

3.1.1 Nero

Maintaining the Roman army was the biggest expense of the state in the time that Paul lived. Nero, emperor in the decade after Paul wrote his

⁴² Ward Blanton

letter to the Romans, however, was more interested in immersing himself in a more immediate world of violence. He believed the power of his personality to be such that he did not require the same strength of arms as his predecessors. Nero appears in the literature written about him as a lavishly violent character. Such was his passion for violence and his will for attention, he was said to have engaged in brawls in the streets of Rome while in disguise (Beacham 1999, 201). In addressing the issue of how we have come to imagine this Emperor, Edward Champlin writes in his biography on Nero:

We all know about Nero. Nero was the emperor of Rome from AD 54 to 68. Nero murdered his mother, and Nero fiddled while Rome burned. Nero also slept with his mother. Nero married and executed one stepsister, executed his other stepsister, raped and murdered his stepbrother. In fact, he executed or murdered most of his close relatives. He kicked his pregnant wife to death. He castrated and then married a freedman. He married another freedman, this time playing the bride. He raped a Vestal virgin. He melted down the household gods of Rome for their case value. After incinerating the city in 64, he built over much of downtown Rome with his own vast Xanadu, the Golden House. He fixed the blame for the great fire on the Christians, some of whom were hung up as human torches to light his gardens at night. (2003, 1)

Nero, as his reputation goes, was a self-obsessed masochist who revelled in his own depravity. There is something else here, though, that Champlin urges the reader to remember: ‘much of what he did resonated far more with contemporary social attitudes than our hostile sources would have us believe’ (236). In part this has to do with a normalisation of violence; the stitching of violence into the very fabric of society that hides the ferocity which would later be excavated from its symbolic rubble. A power of symbolic and systemic violence is that it normalises what might otherwise

be considered extreme. Despite some embellishments and fabrications that have found its way into the figure of Nero, he represents the disturbed centre of the fervently violent world that Paul inhabited.

The systemic violence that was embedded in the functioning of the Roman Empire that was maintained by structures and symbolism (which ensured incredibly violent zero-level worldviews) would have been an ever-present part of life without necessarily being a jolting or disturbing force in the daily life of its inhabitants. The threat of violence and death was an ever-present reality.⁴³ The Roman Empire had enormous power over life and death, not only because of its strength of arms but also because of its far reaching social, political, and geographical control. In a time of high infant mortality rates, unsanitary urban areas, and violence as sport, the idea of death had an imminent presence. In politics, culture, and in war, the Roman Empire had the power to improve living conditions or make them worse, to crush rebellions, and to make examples of rebels.⁴⁴

Its claim of power of life and death was intrinsic to its existence.⁴⁵ In his description of the oppressive conditions of first century Palestine, Neil Elliot draws a comparison between the regime of terror perpetrated by the Roman Empire and the brutal efficiency of the death camps of the Nazi regime. He writes: 'the Nazi death camp at Treblinka, where 840,000 Jews were gassed to death, was operated by some thirty German officers and perhaps 100 Ukrainians' (1995, 99). With the same type of control, the Roman Empire was able to maintain its power over troublesome outlying regions. The highly visible and common sight of the criminals and trouble makers crucified on the outskirts of towns displayed an image of power which betrayed the truth of their real power (which existed in the twisting of truth). There was not the required number of soldiers to send to every part of the empire to maintain control through brute force.

⁴³ Valarie M. Hope characterises this as a looming threat that 'could be close up and personal' (2009, 17). Her work on death in the Roman Empire begins in emphasising this imminent threat in cities that 'were dirty, polluted, and violent' (17).

⁴⁴ In the face of brutal spectacles, 'crowd reactions were ones more of pleasure than revulsion, amusement rather than terror' (Rudich 2015, 55).

⁴⁵ The power of death was 'one of the empire's most threatening weapons' (Punt 2011, 58).

Through the maintenance of social hierarchies, imperial propaganda, and, where needed, the awe of terror, the empire could maintain enough peace to prevent enough regions from revolting at once. Within this structure, military reserves could then be sent to where and when they were needed to quell larger disorder. Yet the centre of its power, and the centre of its violence, was in the dominance it held over life and death in the image it projected. This physical violence coupled with symbolic and systemic control was epitomised in the image of the crucified slave.

Despite its sizeable and expensive army, the Roman powers could not afford to be constantly at war in all corners of its domain. It could not, through brute force alone, maintain its control over powers at its borders (from the Parthian Empire to the tribes of northern Europe) while also asserting dominance within. Tolerance for local customs was necessary for peace, but it also had to assert its dominance over those customs. Davina C. Lopez argues that the symbolism of Roman dominance would have had a profound impact on Paul. Imagery of the conquering Romans was prevalent in art throughout the region.⁴⁶ The Roman eagle placed above the Temple in Jerusalem was a powerful symbol of tolerance of local customs mixed with ultimate power over them (which created a particular tension with many Jewish groups). This was the world of theologico-political tension that Paul lived in. The Roman Empire was defined by strength and depravity that Paul would come to so vehemently oppose, and, as the final insult, it claimed the ultimate power of life and death.

3.1.2 The Crucifixion of the Jewish Messiah

The movements that would become Christianity developed out of this context of Roman dominance. Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer, in examining

⁴⁶ Lopez argues: 'ethnic stereotyping through gender constructs served the purpose of historicizing and legitimating hierarchical relations of conquest and assimilation on patriarchal terms' (2008, 32). The use of public art displaying the glorious Roman soldier and the defeated sub-human image of the barbarian would have been an influential reminder of who held power.

violence in Christianity, characterises a violent aspect of this context as such:

Messianic fantasies came crashing down as Roman Soldiers slaughtered Jews, burned cities, and lined roads with crosses on which decaying corpses became food for birds and wild animals and served to discourage future rebellions. (2003, 67)

The ingrained nature of this violence, which displayed a disregard for the bodies of those of lowly status, was a dominant force over life in the region. The greatest violence of this collection of structures, crafted to disguise the lack of direct physical force to control all the entire breadth of the empire, was weighted against those of the lowest status. The bodies of slaves and the political enemies rotting together on crosses epitomised this power over life. The greatest power, then, was maintained through this manipulation of reality (backed up by their strength of arms). This manipulation that occurs within the symbolic landscape has been one of the hallmarks of empires for thousands of years. Yet something miraculous would appear out of this context - a messianic figure would claim victory through dying on the symbol which defined power.

The story of Jesus Christ, a crucified rebel, has left a footprint on history that is scarcely rivalled. The violence of the Roman Empire left a deep-seated imprint on the story of Christ; indeed, it made it possible. Outside of Judea, crucifixions were seen as a form of 'exposure to the elements of the beasts' (Kyle 1998, 169). Throughout the empire, 'to prolong the message of deterrence, corpses were simply left to suffer excarnation via animals and decay' (169). The fragility and miracle of the Christ-event only exists in the history of Judaism and its regard for the body. What if Christ, hanging there among other rebels and criminalised slaves, was left on the cross? Would it be unpalatable to the Christian imagination to see the saviour decay on a cross, while his flesh rotted away into inexistence? The final act upon the body of Christ, the spear in the side, should perhaps be seen as an act of mercy; more specifically, a

Jewish act of mercy. Mel Gibson's *Passion of the Christ* (2004) attempts to frame Christ's crucifixion as an act of extraordinary physical violence, yet the real spectre of violence that haunts this scene is that this was only an ordinary act of violence in this context. It is the operation of Christ within this ordinary sphere of violence that is crucial here.

It was this violence that Paul countered in his interpretation of the Christ-event. In following Jacob Taubes to insist, 'the Epistle to the Romans is a political theology, a political declaration of war on the Caesar' (2008, 61), Neil Elliot argues that this was a text that drew battle lines between those in the labour of God's plans, and those in the way (61). Elliot writes:

the letter is not a treatise on how wicked human beings can be saved; to the contrary, as we shall see, it begins by driving a rhetorical wedge between the justice of God and the false claims of mortals who pretend at justice, but deserve God's wrath instead (62).

Paul's messianic vocation was one greatly at odds with the ideology of the Roman Empire, and in this letter he was writing to those at the centre of its depravity. Paul opposed what Rome stood for in his lifetime, as Neil Faulkner summarises, Rome 'was the New Babylon: the mother of whores and every obscenity, a black hole of corruption at the centre of the world' (2002, 23). This did not mean, however, that Paul saw value in new earthly authorities to replace the current incumbents.⁴⁷ In the tradition of Jewish apocalypticism the very point was that neither the rulers nor any of the alternatives provided a solution to the theologico-political impasse that had occurred. This is the revelation that struck Paul in the Christ-event; as he put it: 'God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are' (1 Cor. 1.28).

⁴⁷ As Richard Kearney puts it, the radical nature of Paul's message 'lies in reversing the ontological *dunamis* of power in favour of an eschatological *dunamis* of possibility' (2009, 142).

This is the criticism that Paul casts against many Israelites; they are not yet willing to become nothing and align themselves with what is low and despised. For Paul, what many failed to see was that revolution only comes through God's grace; not through taking up arms, or building temples, or making sacrifices, or seeking to rule as a human authority. The only revolutionary power belongs to the fulfilling of the law through the work of love and the faith of what God can do with that fidelity to His promises.

Paul's faith in the specific nature of the Christ-event showed that he not only opposed the Roman Empire, he also opposed the way that some Jews (including himself) had previously attempted to resist its power. Elliot, in disputing facets of Badiou's assumptions about Paul, especially his understand of the resurrection as functioning as a fable (Badiou 2003, 4), writes that:

it is even more important for us to recognise that the fundamental ideological requirements of Roman imperialism are directly opposed in Paul's representation of the body of the crucified and risen Christ in the world. (2010, 144)

The Roman Empire is undermined by Christ defeating death through the very mechanisms which the empire chose to crush resistance within its tributary states. The key here, and what Badiou misses, is that we should situate Paul within a Pharisaic and apocalyptic tradition which understood the significance of physical resurrection. Resurrection after crucifixion gave Christ victory over the Roman Empire in a way that subverted its particular imperial logics. Paul is inscribing the actuality of resurrection into Roman imperial logics by using the marginalised figure of the slave as the authority which overcomes that which would posit itself as absolute authority.

The Messiah resurrected from a humiliating death was the world-shattering aspect of the Christ-event for Paul. Its rupturing of the Symbolic revealed the fragile mechanisms that held together structures and systems

of authority. Elliot is not far away from this theory of divine violence when he writes:

within an apocalyptic logic that if a crucified man is resurrected, there is neither slave nor free person, since resurrection means a divine intervention that ruptures the very system of significations that oppose slave and free, man and woman. (2010, 148)

Paul's Lord claimed victory from the humiliating site of the cross, 'a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles' (1 Cor. 1.23). The Christ-event transformed how Paul understood divine logics of power in the moment that had arrived.

3.2 Romans 13

In Chapter One we saw the way in which Žižek uses the Book of Job and the idea of double kenosis, taken from Paul in Philippians 2, to establish the basis for a materialist theology. Crucial to this is the positioning of Paul as a terror to authority. In sum, Paul understands God as humbling Himself at the hands of His own creation; the foolish God triumphs over even the strongest authority in an overturning of the way in which power is understood. So how then do we incorporate 'the reef that threatens to capsize every Christian liberative project' (Elliot 1995, 217)?

Romans 13 is a dangerous text which reinforces the looming presence of the wrath of God in Paul's letters. To think about Paul in the context of this passage requires that we acknowledge, as Blanton puts it, 'the experience of realising that we may not turn out to be who we thought we were' (2013a, 195). This experience of our words saying more than we intended to say, or not realising the contexts they might reach, should not be forgotten in our readings of Paul. His inconstancies and missteps are symptomatic of a writer who, like the rest of us, was human, and who, we

should not forget, was wrong about many things in his immediate interpretation of the consequences of the Christ-event.⁴⁸

Indeed, Žižek's interest in Paul is bound up with this struggle of the subject. Paul was not simply proclaiming truth but participating in it; as Žižek puts it, 'universal truth is accessible only from a partial, engaged subjective position. Therein resides Paul's communism' (2013a, 184). Nowhere is this clearer than in the rhetoric of Romans 13. This passage represents Paul's disavowal of physical violence and his acceptance of divine violence. This was Paul's call to revolution through love; his centre-piece on the weak violence of love. Brigitte Kahl explains this force of love in relation to Paul's letter to Galatia: 'love is the driving power that throws the combat square into an irreversible spin of messianic "revolution"' (2010, 265-266). This is a love which exists in relationship with divine wrath.

3.2.1 Romans 13.1-7: Paul and the Wrath of God

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval; for it is God's servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be subject, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience. For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, busy with this very thing. Pay to all what is due

⁴⁸As John Gager puts it, 'the problem, of course, is that the entirety of Paul's God-time scheme soon became obsolete. In a word, he was wrong' (2000, 151).

them—taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honour to whom honour is due.

The wrath of God is a major theme of the epistle to the Romans. Paul refers to this wrath throughout his letter (1.18, 2.5, 3.5, 5.9, 9.22, 12.19), but at no point have its interpretations been more troubling than in relation to that opening passage of Romans 13. Romans 13.1-7 has done more than any other passage in Paul's letters to destabilise the idea of an anti-imperial Pauline message. This passage, and its surrounding chapters, epitomise the sometimes stupefying nature of Biblical texts. Placed in the middle of the letter's love-inspired crescendo, this dangerous text appears to attribute divinely sanctioned legitimisation to governing authorities. Authorities that were implicated, by Paul himself, not only in the persecution of followers of Christ but also in the execution of Christ himself. As he put it, 'none of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory' (1 Cor. 2.6-8). It seems unlikely that Paul would not have aligned the death of Christ on a Roman cross with the mechanisms of Roman authority, yet it remains difficult to determine exactly what power Paul believed the ruling authorities had been given by God.⁴⁹

Romans 13.1-10 presents perhaps the greatest paradox of his letters. If 13.8-10 is the confirmation of the various discourses in the turn to Paul that centre on this idea of love towards the neighbour, then 13.1-7 is the very passage that threatens to uncouple these assertions through the return of the sovereign God who is master of all fate. The nature of the

⁴⁹Richard Cassidy offers an alternative interpretation to Rom. 13. He argues that Paul would have, at the time of writing Rom. 13, had a 'sunny estimation of the Roman authorities' (2001, 35). He argues that Paul would have found the current administration in Rome to be relatively favourable for the purposes of his mission. By the time of writing Philemon, however, Paul shows no defence of the imperial power he was imprisoned under. He goes on to argue that Paul surely would have adjusted his message in Rom 13.1-7 if he had been afforded the opportunity (204). He argues that a "Philippian" reading would change 13.1 and 13.6, essentially rendering void the rest of the passage. This argument rests on a Romans-Philemon sequence of Paul's letter writing which seems unlikely.

divine economy here, as we shall see, is that the authority of rulers is merely a fact that is undercut, made ethically irrelevant, in the demand to fulfil the law through love.

The idea that Paul was justifying the moral goodness of any governing authority should be rejected. Paul was not suggesting, in moral terms, that Christ, dying a rebel's death on the cross, was a victim of the 'servants of God' given authority to 'execute wrath on the wrongdoer' (Rom. 13.4). Yet he was not denying this nature of the divine economy. Read in relation to Philippians 2.6-8, God took on the form of a slave and humbled himself to his own agents of wrath by becoming obedient to execution on their symbol of authority. This is indicative of the divine economy that Paul calls the Romans to participate in. Paul was not reflecting their moral uprightness, but the reality of the situation. It was, after all, governing authorities (local and state) that imprisoned Paul and persecuted many other followers of Christ.

While Paul writes of the mystery of how God's sovereignty works (Rom. 9.18), he also expresses a belief that everyone has the choice to participate in God's plan out of their own will (Rom. 10.4). Paul appears to have had no problem with the paradox contained in the distance between the actions of the governing authorities and the instructions given to the followers of Christ. The failure to understand this acceptance of the paradox of the divine economy turns this passage into a dangerous text; one that, despite all logic (whose side is God on?), has justified the actions of nation states in war. Paul simply does not account for how state power is constructed.^{50 51} The absolute horror of the mass-produced death at concentration camps in 20th century Europe, or in the ethnic cleansings that have devastated Rwanda, Congo, and Sudan in the past two decades cannot be reduced to the will of a God and a people of bad conduct. Paul is not acutely enough aware of the absence of God in the world.

⁵⁰Katherine Grieb makes this point that it would come to be ironic that Paul's 'warning that authority "does not wear the sword in vain" should have functioned for so many centuries as the warrant for unquestioning obedience of Christians to the state' (2002, 126)

⁵¹Ernst Käsemann notes this problem in Paul: 'the problem of political force does not come into view' (1980, 359).

3.2.2 Paul's Ambiguous Rhetoric

Neil Elliot is a strong advocate that Paul could not have believed these words as any sort of metaphysical declaration; he writes, 'the language of submission and fear that appears here is a startling exception to the rhetoric of the rest of the letter'. (2008, 153). Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza responds to Neil Elliot's defence of Paul in Romans 13.1-7 by cautioning that 'instead of revalorizing Paul's rhetoric, one must theorize and develop a critical biblical rhetorical inquiry that would help to prevent scholarly identification with Paul and the exegetical re-inscription of Paul's rhetoric of othering' (2000, 53). This means finding the 'voices within Paul' rather than the 'master Paul' (53). To what extent should we seek to defend Paul's rhetoric in our creation of Pauline voices?

This was a typical message in Paul's corpus of work: practical advice for living in the end times which was laced with theological justification. Despite its immediately jarring presence between the end of Rom. 12 and Rom. 13.8, there is little reason to dismiss verses 1-7 as a later interpolation.⁵² Indeed, it can be interpreted as a crucial part of the subversive nature of the passage. As Robert Jewett describes, the 'variety of imperial and local offices' (2007, 788) that Paul is referencing must rely on God for their authority. It was 'not Mars or Jupiter, as in the Roman Civic cult' (2007, 789), or even from the Emperor himself; instead, 'no matter what Roman officials may claim as their authority, it really comes from the God of the Jewish and Christian faith' (789).⁵³ In this sense, the passage remains closely aligned with the general theme of God's authority that is maintained through the letter; indeed, 'it is not as if the word of God has failed' (9.6). The source of all power and authority is not found in

⁵²Jewett cites a strong connection between obligation in 13.7 and 13.8, as well as no distinctive change in style or tone in his conclusion, 'it remains highly likely that 13:1-7 is an authentic and original portion of Paul's letter' (2007, 784).

⁵³As N.T. Wright points out, 'this passage actually represents a severe demotion of the rulers' (2005, 78).

the governing authorities, but in God alone. This is a subversive message to the structure of the authority that the Roman authorities assumed.

Jewett draws Paul's reasoning for writing this passage towards the practical reason that he was writing his letter: the Spanish mission. He argues that this passage is 'missional rather than theoretical,' and Paul simply 'overlooks aspects of governmental behaviour in times past in order to appeal to the groups of believers within the imperial bureaucracy whose cooperation was perceived to be vital' (794). With this in mind, he later adds that Paul's articulation of the Roman tax authorities as being 'ministers of God... remains a breathtaking claim' (800). It was this taxation (enforced with a complex system of dominance over life itself) that helped to underpin Roman rule.

James Dunn defends Paul's rhetoric in this passage, noting Paul might have been defending Christian merchants against problems surrounding unrest to do with taxes. He proposes that this rhetoric may have been designed to guard against a 'well-developed system of spies and informers' that would have caused trouble for them in their 'defenceless position' (1998, 675).

Douglas Harink argues that Paul is explaining that the community following Christ must live with 'readiness to suffer at the hands of enemies rather than repay with violence' (2003, 143). This is a reflection on the community of believers, not the ruling authorities; he points out, 'subordination is significantly different from obedience' (144). The argument here is that this is practical advice, as Kathy Ehrensperger argues:

They have no option but to submit to this power - any other behaviour would come close to suicidal activity. [...] It is actually submission to a dominating power - not voluntarily but by force.
(173)

These small communities would have had little option but to submit to the authorities. Significantly, though, such authority is only given by God and

their rule is 'doomed to pass away' (1 Cor. 1.8) due to the unfolding of the Christ-event.

It could be, as Elliot puts it, 'Paul intentionally characterises the Roman authorities in such slavishly deferential terms that his audience must have recognised his remarks as ironic' (1995, 154). The defence of Paul's rhetoric on practical terms does not deal with the idea that this passage undermines the structures of political order. If it is designed to allow Christians to escape trouble, it does not manage to do this without maintaining that his God has authority over even Caesar himself. The governing authorities might not have been as pleased with this passage as a surface reading might suggest.⁵⁴ As Elliot goes on to point out, 'If Paul's goal is purely pragmatic isn't his praise of the rulers effusive?' (1995, 220).

Seyoon Kim, in countering Elliot's anti-imperial readings of Paul, describes Romans 7 as 'the Achilles heel for all anti-imperial readings of Paul' (2008, 36). Calling Elliot's grasp of the theme of the letter 'unconvincing, and at times arbitrary' (39), Kim argues, 'it is clear that Paul preferred the Roman order of justice, in spite of all their imperfection, to chaos and anarchy' (42-43). Accusing the anti-imperial readings of Elliot and N.T. Wright of appearing to 'defy elementary logic in relation to Romans 13,' Kim settles on a reading that simply testifies to Paul's Jewish understanding of order under a ruling authority. Elliot (2008, 55), however, argues that even the enemies of God were described as carrying his authority, including the Assyrians (Isaiah 10.5) and King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (Jeremiah 27.6).

We cannot be certain what Paul preferred in practical terms. Even if he did prefer the brutality and order of Roman rule to the potential chaos of the alternatives, in theologico-political terms Paul shows no preference. This is why Paul is at great pains to point out to those in Rome that he is not spreading a message of partiality. Using the example of the barriers that Christ broke down between Jew and Gentile, he explains that in

⁵⁴ Sylvia Keesmaat describes Paul's claim that the authorities ruled by the sword as 'a slap in the face for a ruler who thought he ruled by persuasion and reason' (2012, 60).

reducing the things that are (1 Cor. 1.28), God no longer showed any partiality in these terms.

There will be anguish and distress for everyone who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honour and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality. (Rom 2.9-11)

This was not a partiality that only extended to the gap between Jews and Gentiles. It is the 'doers of the law that will be justified' (2.13); in the messianic period that has arrived, Paul makes it clear that being the ruling authorities has no real significance in this regard.

Yet it would be misleading to follow John Milbank's claim that Paul 'simply bypassed empire and did something else' (2010, 72). The type of Christian anarchism promoted by Jacques Ellul is closer to Paul's thinking; where state mechanisms are subverted rather than merely ignored in order to fulfil the promises of God. God's victory over the powers is only possible through their subversion. In this sense Paul was troubled by empire; he had the same concerns that had been prevalent throughout the history of Israel. N.T. Wright's basic premise in understanding this passage is that 'it is a classic piece of writing about how to live wisely under alien rule' (2005, 103). He goes on to make three important points: that Paul is dissuading private vengeance, that the governing authorities cannot themselves claim 'divine honours,' and that life under foreign rule could only now be understood within the eschatological framework of the now-time. What ties these points together is the crux of the passage; whatever else might be going on within the divine economy, the only debt that remains outstanding is the debt of love to the neighbour. We should not, however, forget the violence imbedded in this message. Paul's rhetoric was undoubtedly violent.

3.2.3 Romans 13. 8-10: A Divine Economy based on Love

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet”; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, “Love your neighbour as yourself.” Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law. Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep.

In his response to the relevance of the turn to Paul in continental philosophy, Larry L. Welborn addresses the lack of attention that has been given to Romans 13.8-14. He contends that there is a wariness surrounding the potential legitimacy that Paul gives to governing authorities in Rom. 13.1-7; but in doing so there is something crucial that is missed in Paul’s theologico-political worldview. The point here is twofold: 13.1-7 does not enjoin obedience to the governing authorities and 13.8-14 denotes the active resistance that is compelled by the Messianic moment. As Welborn puts it:

in sum, the traditional interpretations of Romans 13:1-7 as a Pauline preachment of submission to the authorities and the conventional assumption that Paul’s eschatology was static and that he continued to await the Second Coming are the two rams whose blood must fill the trench, if the spirit of Paul’s most intense formulation of the demands and conditions of messianic life in Romans 13:8-14 is to rise and speak to us. (2015, xvi)

The assertion here is that Paul, as his campaign matured, became more and more active in his participation in the labour of messianic time. It was not enough simply to wait for time to come to an end, as if there was

nothing required on the part of those who were faithful to the Christ-event. Instead it was in the activity compelled by the command to fulfil the law through love to the neighbour that Paul wished to define the activity of messianic time.

This theological viewpoint became particularly relevant within Paul's apocalyptic framework. What had changed, what Paul makes clear in his positioning of God above Caesar, was that the coming wrath places everyone, from emperor to slave, directly under God's imminent judgement. Being 'God's subject for your good' was not a sign that the authorities were aligned with God's ethical or moral judgement, nor was it a sign that they were beyond God's wrath. Christ's death and resurrection in the body of a man revealed that God is also subject to this divine economy. Revealed for Paul was that now all were responsible within this divine economy; Jew, Greek, slave, and free all shared in the responsibility over their place in God's plan. This is the foundation of Pauline universalism; the shared responsibility for the fate of the whole of creation. What occurred in the now-time would determine the particularities of the coming judgement (Rom. 2.6).

The revelation in the Christ-event that the weak will shame the strong provides a reinterpretation of the honour system that this empire prided itself on. The only way then to gain influence, to gain honour, was to love one another. This was, for Paul, what God demonstrated on the cross. If the way to displace the powers and release the world from its current captivity was to directly take on those powers through physical force, then Christ would not have been crucified. Victory over the power of death was displayed through Christ's own submission to the powers. Christ became a victim of the "good sword" of the governing authorities to show that the real power, the foolishness overcoming wisdom, was situated outside of the power structures of the authorities.

This is what Žižek referred to in one of his earlier writings as, 'perhaps the greatest ethical revolution in the history of mankind: the moment when the subject refuses the allocated role of the victim' (1992: 65). This is why kenosis begins with Job. Job makes a break from the

ideological pressures of this world through negating the very existence of the big Other (the explanations of his accusers). He has no interest in playing their game of scapegoating and sacrifice. This is Job's symbolic suicide that would be repeated by God Himself through Christ.

Paul's repeats a claim evident throughout the Scriptures. One way or another, their actions relate to the divine. For Paul this was defined for the Gentiles in their love for the neighbour. There is an echo here of the opening of the tradition of prophetic writings under the name Isaiah. The Israelites are asked: 'why do you seek further beatings? Why do you continue to rebel?' (1.5). While aliens devour their land the Israelites do not adjust their behaviour (1.7). Instead, they offer sacrifices to God so that he would allow them to continue in their ways without the attacks of their enemies. The Lord replies: 'bringing offerings is futile, incense is an abomination to me' (1.13); and in the crescendo of a pattern not dissimilar to Romans 13, the Lord instructs the Israelites:

Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;
remove the evil of your doings
from before my eyes;
cease to do evil,
learn to do good;
seek justice,
rescue the oppressed,
defend the orphan,
plead for the widow. (Is. 16-17)

Do not rebel, do not bother with rituals, but instead love your neighbour. Paul's message is clear: 'vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord' (12.19). Paul was warning this community in Rome about revolting against the ruling authorities, because it was by fulfilling the law through love for the neighbour that they would heap burning coals on the heads of those who opposed this plan for creation (12.20).

Christ's death on the cross, and the hardship Paul and the communities that he corresponded with had experienced, confirmed that there was no guarantee in their action. The agents of wrath among the ruling elite did not fulfil the law through their actions - this was only possible through the debt of love to the neighbour. This passage should be read alongside the Book of Job as well as this opening passage of Isaiah: get on with the business of fulfilling the law instead of worrying about the particularities of divine action.

3.2.4 Romans 13.11-14: The Now-Time

Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armour of light; let us live honourably as in the day, not in revelling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarrelling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

Read alongside Paul's claim that 'rulers of this age are doomed to perish' (1 Cor. 2.6), it becomes difficult to read Romans 13 as any sort of endorsement of the existing order. The fulfilling of the law and the perishing of the rulers are inextricably linked. Karl Barth cuts through the rhetoric to articulate Paul's message: 'real revolution comes from God and not from human revolt' (1933, 485). Is this not precisely what Paul means when he wrote, 'it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who shows mercy' (Rom 9.16)? This does not, however, mean that our activity is meaningless. On the contrary, Paul emphasises that it is only through love that we can participate in this grace that God has afforded to His creation.

In his commentary on the epistle to the Romans, a far more politically charged work than some of his later theology would become, Barth

positions love as ‘the essentially revolutionary action’ (1933, 498). He explains:

Love is that denial and demolition of the existing order which no revolt can bring about. [...] Love is the destruction of everything that is - *like God*: the end of all hierarchies and authorities and intermediaries, because, in every particular man and also in the ‘Many,’ it addresses itself, without fear of contradiction - to the One. (496)

This represents a twisting of Žižek’s Bartlebian withdrawal in the service of divine violence. What Barth had already perceived in Paul was that love serves this divine force in a way that, if pushed to its limits, the existing order would no longer be able to tolerate. In short, when we live in full subjectivity to Christ through our debt of love to the neighbour we deny the potential for the powers to continue to operate. Barth acknowledges the astonishing and impossible nature of this love and its power to deny the truth of the existing order.

This is what makes Žižek and Barth interesting theological partners; even if it would have been an antagonistic relationship. Their work on Paul is heavily invested in the way in which love might transform the theologico-political coordinates of the situation through making the conditions for the existing order intolerable. The idea put forward by Paul, as awkward and dangerous as his rhetoric can be, is that the law is fulfilled not through directly challenging the governing authorities but through an absolute fidelity to this absolute of love.

Taking up arms or throwing petrol bombs can all too easily be inscribed back into the dominant narrative of the authorities, facilitating the spiral of violence in the quelling of those who are merely “troublemakers.” Allowing such power to destroy itself by denying its ability to reproduce the conditions for its survival is the point being drawn out in such narratives. The transformation of the narrative, and with it the possibility for radical change, is situated, according to both Barth and

Žižek, in a Pauline theory of love. The problem with Paul's specific example is that it is so mercilessly trapped within an eschatological context. There is no other strategy for overturning the powers. In Paul, in Barth, and in Žižek we have different examples of trying to imagine what seems impossible - the overturning of the dominant narrative and its ability to continue to reproduce its power.

Barth maintains the revolutionary nature of Paul's letter, and its relevance beyond its initial context. The stress here is on a very different type of revolt from that which was to unfold in Palestine in the decades following Paul's death. He warns that 'it is not for us to arm ourselves for action with the standard of the measurement of God - as though He acted through us' (1933, 485). Instead the responsibility placed on our shoulders is a debt of love. Paul does not want the members of the church to create trouble in the streets.⁵⁵ What would the point of Christ's crucifixion have been if God wanted His people to take up arms? Paul remained enamoured with the specific logics of the Christ-event and its nonviolent violence. It was this indirect approach which formed the basis of Barth's idea of resistance to Hitler's administration.

Paul informs the Gentiles, whom he is corresponding with somewhere in Galatia, that all those 'who rely on the works of the law are under a curse' (3.10). In this letter Paul puts forward a passionate case to this community that followers of Christ should not conform to traditions and rules related to Jewish law. In his letter written some time later to a small Gentile community of Christ-cult followers in Rome, Paul clarifies another important issue. This Gentile shunning of Jewish traditions did not mean the end of the Law. On the contrary, it meant that the Gentiles must fulfil the law in a different manner. The law is fulfilled through a fidelity to loving the neighbour. Paul's awkward juxtaposing of the fulfilment of the law through love with a warning to submit to governing authorities reinforces this message: let nothing get in the way of the vital work in the body of Christ. Read in this way, Christ becoming a curse was not an attack

⁵⁵ Elliot picks up on this point. Paul is attempting 'to impel them rather toward mutual compassion and striving for the common good' (1995: .223).

on the law itself but an attack on anything that stood in the way of its fulfilment. Paul's warning was stark: the rules and the taxes of the governing authorities are meaningless in light of the Christ-event, the only debt that truly matters is the debt owed to your neighbour.

Paul's identification with slavery in the service of Christ made it clear that he believed authority was situated in Christ as Lord. As Sylvia Keesmaat puts it, "Paul, a slave of Jesus Christ." Just imagine how this would have sounded in the context of an empire governed by status and a culture governed by an honour/shame dynamic' (2012, 52). The community of believers were bound together in equality under Christ.

The consequence of this was a new community with a new set of values. Katherine Grieb follows Elliot to succinctly make this point.

The solemn eschatological warning that concludes chapter 13 serves, among other things, to destabilize the apparent facticity of the reigning Roman Empire and to describe the alternative community that wears "weapons of light" (13:12) because it belongs to the coming Day of the Lord and not to the present time of darkness. (2002, 60)

Romans 13.8-10 undercuts the initial verses of this chapter, and this is brought to completion in verses 11-14. Paul brings us straight back to his preceding words: 'Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good' (12.21). The appetite to gratify the desires of the flesh, which was epitomised in a figure like Nero, was what Paul criticised in Rome. His response to Rome was a part of the way in which Paul attempted to radically transform the way that the followers of Christ understood the violence of the existing order and how to oppose this violence. Paul, like the Gospel writers, wanted to distance himself from the idea of opposing the governing authorities through withholding taxes or physical revolt; only love, to reiterate this point, has the power to 'heap burning coals on their heads' (12.20). As Theodore Jennings puts it, the message was clear: "let

them have their damned money”’ (2013, 193). For, as Paul put it himself, ‘the night is far gone; the day is near’ (13.12).

3.3 Divine Violence and Love

Barth comes to the idea that to love one another means: ‘no debts! Paraphrased, this means non-resistance!’ (1933, 492). Subjection negates the possibility of opposing evil with evil, while love provides the possibility of protesting against the evil in the world. Barth argues:

Love of one another ought to be undertaken as the protest against the course of the world...we remember that human conduct is positively ethical when it is not conformed to this world. (492-3)

In Paul’s view, the act of resistance in the form of withholding taxes would have only added to the spiral of violence without the potentiality for something truly novel to appear. Barth reads Paul here as affirming that ‘love is the good work by which the evil is overcome’ (496). The responsibility inherent to the works of love is infinite. In other words, creation was given responsibility over Christ - and he was nailed to a cross. Paul describes to the church in Philippi the way in which love requires the members to think others better than themselves, taking Christ as the ultimate example (2.3). This is a divine economy based on a law of love.

It is here that we should situate continuing the weak violent potential of the Christ-event. This weak violent potential, a “militant weakness” as Kenneth Reinhard calls it, is at the core of Žižek’s materialist readings of Christianity (and Paul in particular). It is essential to Žižek’s (now famous) claim that ‘to become a true dialectical materialist, one should go through the Christian experience’ (2003, 6). Reinhard, following Benjamin’s understanding of political theology, understands this crucial aspect of Romans 13. He writes, ‘the profane world of politics hastens the coming of the messianic era not by aspiring to

emulate it, but by intensifying its own profanity, and thereby speeding its fall' (2013, 457). This is along the same lines as the argument that Žižek employs with regards to Bartleby and divine violence. It is through letting the powers reveal their own monstrosity, exposed in the dissolution of certain power mechanisms (in the case of the Roman Empire, its power over life and death), that its end is hastened. We need something that is more violent, more perverse, in order to expose the powers which impinge on our potential to act as ethical agents.

The death of God is not simply the rise of the secular. Rather, 'it is the profane, not the "secular," that hastens the coming of the messianic world' (Reinhard 2013, 464). This is how we should read Christ's death: as the profane Event that allows the possibility of a transvaluation of values. Reinhard sees the importance of this profanation in thinking of neighbour love beyond its inception into secularity. It is here that we might:

rescue neighbour love from the banalization of secularism, where it functions at best as a platitude of ethical reason, the empty universal par excellence, or at worst as an ideological cloak for institutional indifference and social cruelty. (2013, 465)

It is not enough to attempt to live ethically within the violent boundaries of global capitalism, we must violently hasten the demise of the social, political, cultural, and economic structures which define their control.

3.3.1 Foolish Power

Troels Engberg-Pedersen relates Romans 13.1-7 to a passage of text a contemporary of Paul, the Stoic philosopher Seneca. In writing to Nero about his authority, Seneca explains about the nature of power. Engberg-Pedersen writes:

for our purposes, the important elements in the description Seneca gives of Nero's power are the following three. Nero has

been chosen (*electus*) to serve on earth as vicar of the gods. Nero is the sovereign judge (*arbiter*) of life and death, good things and bad things, for all his subjects, namely, all ‘peoples’ (*populi*), ‘cities’ (*urbes*) and ‘nations’ (*nationes*); all such things fall within his jurisdiction (*mea iuris dictio est*). In particular, those many thousand swords (*gladii*) which Nero’s peace restrains ‘will be drawn at my nod’. (2013, 167)

As Seneca showed, there was a general belief in a ‘just, divinely installed leader’ (2013, 169).⁵⁶ Paul’s precise point, being written for the specific purpose of instructing on the payment of taxes, is that the people should strive to do what is good. Paul uses the motif of the just ruler to instruct the followers of Christ to pay their taxes, but he follows it up with a clarification. Even though this is accepted logic, there is something greater that supersedes it: you might owe taxes to the state, but all that really matters is the fulfilment of the law through love. Engberg-Pedersen puts it this way:

bringing in again agape from ch. 12, Paul is here offering a more comprehensive view of his believers’ politics, one that supplements the univocal reading of 13.1-7 and calls for a double or ‘bifocal’ reading of that passage: X—and also not-X, but Y.’ (2013, 167)

Following Taubes and Agamben, Engberg-Pedersen argues that much of the recent work on this passage converges on the idea of living “as if not.”

In other words, do it ‘as if not.’ Or: do it, but without paying any special attention to it. That is not what matters. By contrast, fulfil your obligation to love. Or rather: try to fulfil it,

⁵⁶ The interesting connection between Seneca and Paul is in the way that Seneca attempts to temper Nero’s behaviour through appealing to a Stoic mastery of the passions (similar to Paul’s tract in romans 7).

always and everywhere. For that is what matters. And that kind of life precisely belongs with the eschaton. (2013, 168)

Paul is comfortable with the idea, as Elliot puts it, that ‘God is simultaneously the source of the world’s coming liberation, and the one who imposed the present subjection’ (153).⁵⁷ Paul’s theological outlook was radically different to contemporary Christian discourses which create a consistent theological story through the New Testament. Why the authorities have been given power is of little concern; give respect to authority knowing that they have no authority, for all that matters is the fulfilment of the law. The cracks in their authority cannot be interrupted by physical force - it is only God’s force that can make the powers pass away. It is through the act of faith in striving to fulfil the law through love that the divine power can disrupt the power of the governing authorities.

Paul was not challenging the authority of the rulers or questioning why they have been given such power. In his own words, ‘who indeed are you, a human being, to argue with God?’ (Rom 9.20). Paul is challenging the significance of authority; he is challenging the very conditions and assumptions of the world that he was thrown into. This is precisely what Christ had done by humbling himself through his death on a cross.

In Richard Horsley’s political reading of the epistles, Paul’s mission had proclaimed the triumph of the ‘antithesis of the epitome of aristocratic virtue and values standard in Greco-Roman rhetoric,’ he gave credit to the ‘weak, foolish, poor, lowly, and despised, rather than powerful, wise, wealthy, noble, honoured and compelled by necessity’ (2000, 90).⁵⁸ Jeremy Punt, in a similar vein, argues that Paul’s rhetoric attempted to, ‘advocate a shift in the power balance from Greco-Roman upper-class ideology to a Jewish-apocalyptic, turning-the-tables ideology, that is, a shift from the Roman Empire to God’s empire’ (2011, 60). Paul

⁵⁷Stanley Stowers argues that, for Paul, ‘God hides and reveals truths as history unfolds in ways that suit his inscrutable purposes’ (2013, 173).

⁵⁸Horsley argues that ‘Paul employs the standard deliberative rhetoric of unity and concord to advocate disunity and discord in the polis of Corinth’ (2000, 74). Paul knew the power inherent to his language.

challenged the theological basis of Roman hierarchical power - without ever advocating resistance to its power on its own terms.⁵⁹

Paul subverts the symbolic underpinning of order through his fidelity to a Messiah who claimed victory through the experience of a humiliating death at the hands of the ruling authorities. As Žižek puts it, 'the idea that God Himself could die in pain on a cross...violates the conventional expectations of what befits a god' (2011, 107). Davina Lopez places this idea within the context of the Roman Empire. This was not an attack on the idea of the God in Paul's own background; this was a critique of the power of Rome. She writes:

positioning the God of Israel as the only and most powerful god, the benefactor and law-giver, who guaranteed certain destruction of Roman-configured peace and security, constitutes the political view of Paul. [...] Paul, then, is nothing without his observations on the crucified Christ in relation to his Roman imperial context. (2008, 123)

Paul's rhetorical shifting of power carried an inherent violence. These rulers are doomed to perish, and while the community of believers have no power of their own to physically force this end, they are active participants in the revelation of the Christ-event which undermines the empire's claim to power.

As a follower of Paul, writing under his name, would later write in a letter to a community of believers in Ephesus:

For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic

⁵⁹Gordon Zerbe argues that Paul is parodying imperial rhetoric through the language he uses: 'Paul's usage of *ekklesia* is linked to the language of political assemblies of Hellenistic city-states and the corporate identity of Israel's past, while *evangelion* (gospel, good news) finds its closest counterpart in the rhetoric proclaiming the deliverance brought by the imperial order' (2011, 69).

powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. (Eph. 6.12)

Furthermore, as another part of this movement would put it, his death on the cross Christ 'disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it' (Col. 2.15). This is not a movement without an enemy, and this enemy is not merely supernatural - it is the power embedded in the structure of political authority.

Lopez takes this line of argument further. It was not only the case that God was declaring the victory of His weakness over their strength, it was that Paul was now aligning himself with the workings of this weakness. More than a theological move, it was wrought out of a commitment to his Jewish heritage. The ideas of love, faithfulness, and the ultimate authority of God do not signify a break from Paul's Jewish roots, but rather indicate their transformation in the messianic era that had been initiated through the Christ-event. This was the fulfilment of a set of beliefs concerned with a love for the neighbour (Lev. 19.18), consideration for the poor, and desire for justice. Lopez argues:

Paul appears more conscious of the particularity of his Jewishness, as well as his commonalities with members of other nations throughout the Roman Empire. In other words, Paul comes to consciousness as a marginalised person. (2008, 137)

Paul's life was determined within the bounds of the Roman Empire. His mission was shaped within its context. He held the uncomfortable position of being a citizen of the empire which wished to hold his God captive by declaring their power as the ultimate authority. Timothy Marquis (2013) links Paul's entire mission with the new possibilities of travel within the boundaries of the Roman Empire. The empire itself was crucial in creating the conditions for not only the Christ-event but also the movements it created.

This Messianic power now resided in the community that carried the Holy Spirit through the now-time. Bruno Blumenfeld puts it this way:

Paul's reiteration of the theology of power is excessive. God is not just the source of authority - of the king's legitimacy - but alone is ruler. Kings like commons partake in power through Christ. (2001, 282)

Human authority is levelled. It would be presumptuous, though, to interpret a "politics of the multitude" in this reading of Paul's theology (in the way which Hardt and Negri envisage such power). Blumenfeld reads Paul as being socially conservative. In his reading this was not the people finding themselves outside of the sovereign domain, only the reorganisation of its significance. The practical implications of Paul's undermining of authority are always tempered by his belief that there is simply no necessity for a temporal theologico-political revolution to occur. Paul's rhetoric challenged the ultimate power of the empire and its structures of control without ever directly challenging its temporal rule (in its own terms, at least). The apocalyptic Jew would have very little need to directly challenge the temporal powers in this way, apart from when they, in Paul's case, blocked the message of salvation to the Gentiles.

It is here that we can situate the various readings of Paul in continental philosophy that have created tensions with historical-critical readings of the apostle. How do we read Paul outside of his own boundaries in a way which does not simply make him into an example that has been cut too far from its own situation? It is in this sense that Paul has been positioned not in opposition to Nietzsche, but as another thinker concerned with uncovering a genealogy of morality; as Critchley puts it, 'Paul is trouble,' adding that 'Nietzsche's call for a revaluation of values is based on a sheer jealousy of Paul's achievement in bringing about such a revaluation' (2012, 155-156). To be clear, the visions of the worlds imagined in their respective projects were radically different; it was the

mode of transforming that truth of the situation in which they find similarity. There is a divine violence at the heart of each of their projects.

There are not only similarities in the type of project Paul and Nietzsche respectively embarked upon, but also similarities in the ways in which their respective projects have been twisted, betrayed, and used for purposes far beyond a reasonable diagnosis of their intentions. They have both, at certain points, become buried under interpretations that betrayed their intentions. Badiou argues, 'if Nietzsche is so violent towards Paul, it is because he is his rival far more than his opponent' (2003, 61). They both sought to usurp the Symbolic Order; not by the force of arms but through undermining its claims to truth. Ultimately this is why Paul is of such interest, and why Romans 13 is crucial in this context. Paul, bound up in a messianic moment when truth had been shattered, positions love as the force that allows the community of Gentiles believers to continue to participate in this fracturing of truth. Not as the means to an end, but in the very conflation of means and ends that marks the messianic era.

3.3.2 Love as Authentic Terror

This shattering of worldviews is inherent to the power of love. Wes Anderson's film *Moonrise Kingdom* tells the story of two adolescents who fall in love. There is no logic to their love and very little tangible reason for it. Their eyes meet on the edges of a peculiar little island community. In their common dysfunction they form a fidelity to their love for each other. It is an example of what Badiou means when he writes, 'what is universal is that all love suggests a new experience of truth about what it is to be two and not one' (2012, 39). Their love is impractical, uncomfortable, and quite perverse. It is, however, also quite admirable and beautiful. It is pure and emphatic but it is also violent, like a storm to all around them (which is physically manifested in the film). Even though Paul was not talking about romantic love, it is this handing over of oneself to the other, of the creation of new subjectivity, which characterises the centre of his theory of love.

Badiou explains of this type of love, ‘the process of love isn’t always peaceful. It can bring violent argument, genuine anguish and separations we may or may not overcome’ (2012, 61). For Badiou, the process of fidelity to an Event is quite like falling in love. It is the love of the Event that ties the subject to its unfolding truth. A new way in which reality is experienced exists in the foundations of this love. It is a mutually embraced slavery in that they are now dependant on one another for their truth to continue to exist.

In Badiou’s language, love names an unknown unobjectal maxim. In other words, it is tied to the fidelity of a subject; to an Event and can only be experienced as the highest form of dedication to the unfolding of its truth. It cannot be tied to morality and ethics from a position outside of the particularity of the situation. This is not simply a love *for* something, nor is it simply an abstract term for compassion, but a common property revealed in its universal application. Badiou writes, ‘Paul is in no way a theoretician of oblatory love, through which one would forget oneself in devotion to the Other’ (2003, 89-90).⁶⁰ It is more immediate than that. His devotion to Christ and to God can only be participated in through his love for the neighbour.

Paul is not an exponent of romantic love, a love which is reducible to moral absolutes, or a love that is identical to charity. There are, though, facets of each of these in Paul’s dedication to love that is tied to his encounter with the Christ-event. In the idea of love, Paul names a generic nonlaw which allows for a fulfilment of the requirements of law in order for the gentiles to attain a measure of liberation from the constraints of law as Paul had understood it. Badiou understands love as being positioned as a common maxim which reaches all people, replacing the Jewish specific dictates of law. For Paul, at the very least, it was the maxim which allowed the promises bound to the law to be released to all.

⁶⁰The emotion of love experience is a by-product of our action, not the cause or the goal. It is ‘something we receive as a form of undeserved grace’ (Žižek 2011, 107).

It is this impossible demand of love that is particularly striking. Terry Eagleton says of the Christian value of love towards the neighbour: ‘far from being delightfully undemanding, this is well-nigh impossible’ (2003, 167). Here we find a compassion which is ‘ruthlessly impersonal’ (167). This is the decisive gap here between Eagleton and ethics aligned most closely with Levinas. The face of the neighbour is not enough for us to show love towards them; we struggle to love ourselves enough, as opposed to ‘pampering oneself, thinking highly of oneself, being brutally self-interested and the like’ (167). In this understanding of love towards the neighbour, ‘generosity, for example, becomes a public obligation’ and ‘non-reciprocity becomes a matter of routine’ (168). This is the impossible, yet potentially transformative, understanding of being compelled by love for the neighbour. It is also an understanding of Christian love that takes us into dangerous territory. We are approaching, in Žižek and Paul, that which opposes the heart of contemporary values: love as revolutionary terror and love as slavery.

Is there a connection between terror as a work of love and the love which, for Paul, fulfils the law? Does Paul, as Taubes imagines, make a ‘declaration of war’ upon the Roman Empire? Paul’s understanding of the new order declared through the Christ-event is inherently violent. As Žižek puts it:

our reproach to the fundamentalist terrorists, whether Islamist or Christian, should be precisely that they are not terroristic in the right way, that they shirk from authentic terror as the work of love (2011, 117).

This love, which violently cuts through petty self-indulgence, is crucial to revolutionary action. Žižek writes:

For the price of a couple of cappuccinos, you can continue in your ignorant and pleasurable life, not only not feeling any guilt,

but even feeling good for having participated in the struggle against suffering! (2011, 117)

He goes on to quote Oscar Wilde, ‘charity degrades and demoralises...it is immoral to use private property in order to alleviate the horrible evils that result from the institution of private property’ (118). The subject tied to love must instead be a subject that does not shirk from this authentic terror. It is precisely this challenge to the Symbolic Order which makes these terms so appealing to Žižek. In order to challenge the basic assumptions that allow an oppressive system to continue, the complex set of ideas that form the zero-level of its function, they need to be subverted. This is where he follows Paul down the route of a foolishness that defeats wisdom. He explains:

Christianity madly insists on the impossible. Love, especially in its Christian form, is definitely not wise. [...] We should take the term “wisdom” literally here: it is wisdom (in the sense of a “realistic” acceptance of the way things are) that Paul is challenging (2011, 116).

While Paul’s context is radically different to Žižek’s, it is the shattering of the “way things are” that aligns their approach. Paul, epitomised in Romans 13, throws all his weight behind the foolish power of love for the neighbour; the impossible defeat of the governing authorities through a combination of compliance and subversion of their power.

In the same way that Žižek sees Bartleby’s disarming gesture “I would prefer not to” as the foundation of a new order, Paul saw love of the neighbour as this new foundation (2011, 117). He explains, ‘love is the force of this universal link which, in an emancipatory collective, connects people directly, in their singularity, by-passing their particular hierarchical determinations’ (117). What makes Žižek distinctive here is his focus primarily on the theologico-political dimension of Love. This love is not merely found in an emotion or commitment to a new set of rules, but in the dedication to the participation in an Event and the truth it reveals. The

consequences of this are revealed in the divine violence which it, by very nature, becomes linked with. Indeed, this is not a force which connects all people after its call has been heard. As Žižek puts it:

the universal proposition "I love you all" acquires the level of actual existence, only if "there is at least one of whom I hate" - a thesis abundantly confirmed by the fact that universal love for humanity has always led to the hatred of the (actually existing) exception, the enemies of humanity. (2010, 100).

We have entered the properly universal sphere in which without violence, even if a weak violence, there is no revolution.

Chapter Four

The Slave of Christ

4.1 Re-imagining Paul

Re-imaginings of Paul, developed out of the turn to this apostle in continental philosophy, have sought to find new ways of challenging perceptions of political power. Taubes constructed an image of Paul as a radical Jew who directly challenged the authority of the Roman Empire and local rulers. Critchley sees something in the Pauline message which helps us respond to our political disappointment. Žižek draws Paul's message directly into his political theory of divine violence. It is surprising, then, that little is made of Paul's formulation of the subject of Christ that emerges as a direct response to the Roman authorities (it is Agamben who comes closest to realising its importance). Paul's conception of the slave of Christ directly challenged Roman imperial order and its claims of power over life; it is the subject tied to the labour of love which works in the service of divine violence.

Paul's idea of subjectivity has been read in different ways in the turn to Paul. Badiou utilises Paul's articulation of the Christ-event as an example of a universal address that cuts across the significance of all identities by showing that differences can co-exist in the struggle of a common cause. Agamben, contrastingly, argues for a Jewish reading of Paul that announces a re-ordering and release of proper possibility in messianic time; through which a remnant is created to carry the potential of Christ-event through this era. These readings develop different ways of understanding the rupture in time experienced by Paul, and revolve around an idea central to the Pauline epistles: the hierarchies of temporal power are rendered irrelevant in the call of the Christ-event to fulfil the law through love for the neighbour. While both draw Paul into their own narrative a bit too far, they also both provide useful interpretations of Paul's subjectivity.

Romans chapter 13 demonstrates Paul's comprehension of the divine economy that imagines real power in the hands of the community of believers. The practical structures of society remained in place; they had not been obliterated by the Christ-event, but their meaning had been transformed. The new calling at the heart of this shift in theologico-political focus is embodied in Paul's self-identification as Paul, a slave of Christ. This vocation cuts across all social statuses and obligations (1 Cor. 7.29-31); as Agamben discerns, the Christ-event compels us to live "as not" - Jew *as not* Jew, Gentile *as not* Gentile, slave *as not* slave.

The consequence of Paul's conception of fidelity to the Christ-event was the call to live as a slave of Christ. What this meant for the body of this movement was that political power, as the world conceived it, would not be taken. The true power already resided in the foolishness of God as played out through the fidelity of the slaves of Christ. Or, to put this identity in different terms, the militant of Christ dedicated to weak violence.

4.2 Alain Badiou and Saint Paula

Paula's come here among us like provocation (*The Incident at Antioch*, 47)

Badiou wrote *The Incident at Antioch: A Tragedy in Three Acts* during the 1980s over three drafts. Charting the revolutionary activities of the overthrowing of a State in crisis, the play frames Badiou's political and philosophical thought within an unnamed city at an unspecified historical time. Its situation resonates with the events surrounding the 1871 Paris Commune (the short-lived bloody rise to power of a socialist government in France) and the events of May 1968 in France (when students, workers, and intellectuals created civil unrest in the country). The form of the play is inspired by Paul Claudel's *The City*, which Badiou at many points directly subverts in the telling of his story. His other significant inspiration is Paul,

who is given new life as Paula: an apostolic voice on the edge of the revolutionary situation.

Paul symbolising of the creation of the Event becomes crystallised for Badiou in the figure of Paula. She represents a reading of Paul in Badiou's context in much the same way that Saul/Paul represents Luke's context. A betrayal, certainly, but also an important articulation of Paul's encounter with new possibilities of truth revealed through his experience of the Christ-event. In its novel setting, the play follows three moments in the formation of Christianity: Paul's road to Damascus experience (the crumbling of the state), the incident at Antioch (the decision on how to act in the moment of revolution), and the council of Nicaea (the formation of a new rule after the fallout of revolution).

Something that is striking is the way in which the play is structured around a number of voices desperately attempting to figure out what to do with the revolutionary moment which had unfolded before them. Pierre and Jean Maury (representing the left and right of established politics), and Claude Villembray and Cephas (representing the old politics and its disruption) are confronted with Paula, who seeks to cut through these differences in imagining an Event that breaks down all identities. She understands the true nature of politics as the way to unite people beyond 'the mind control exerted by the state' (115). Yet we struggle to comprehend what might be created in this break from the overburdening control of the existing order.

The play continually returns to this point; in the service of ending power itself, there is a trail marked out by a set of new opportunities - but no absolute answer. During a pivotal moment in the play that is reminiscent of Bartleby's formula, Paula prefers not to act in the moment ripe for revolutionary action. She does not stop the revolution, but leaves it, preferring an alternative without any statement of what that might be. She later, in regretting her withdrawal, comes to a full Pauline revelation: it is only through acting in continuing service of the Event that this trail can be blazed.

Paula, assuming a central trait of Paul's personality, acts as a provocation to those around her without ever forcing their actions; it is in this way that she is able to participate in the revolution which surrounds her. She warns the council not to initiate violent revolt, that it is only their role to watch the crumbling of the current order; their participation in the process of power will only lead to their participation in the catastrophe to come. So she urges that they 'not seize a power that's there for the taking' (63). Revolution is, in this sense, 'the prelude to Empires,' and should be disavowed. She adds: 'just as circumcision was for St. Paul, revolution is nothing and unrevolution in nothing' (65).

The question, however, arises: how do you radically change the political coordinates of the situation without some form of revolution? How does a revolt occur against the ruling class without simply taking up their brutal position of power? These questions haunt the background of emancipatory projects: the Marxist Communist project given life through Lenin becomes Stalinism; the Christ-event given life through Paul, over time, becomes Constantine's Christendom; democratic movements in Tahrir Square are transformed into further corrupt regimes. Disparate voices in contemporary continental philosophy are haunted by the question of how to overturn power itself without its brutal return. Paula's answer is that the subject must remain dedicated to the unfolding truth of the Event which ties together its subjects in the same labour.

What Paula does in naming both revolution and unrevolution as nothing is recognise the uncontrollable nature of history. She, in the end, acknowledges the futility of her gesture in attempting to halt the revolution; the wheels were already turning, and no breaks would bring that locomotive to an abrupt stop. She was also right in asserting that the revolution would be the very thing that would give life to and also destroy the revolution. She assesses the situation as such:

no more does a picture window facing the South Seas compel me
to smash its transparency by the fantasy that I could thereby
possess the waves and the salt... the law of victory is too specific

for the universal subject to put an end to any constraint in it;
it's he who'll be destroyed by it. (63)

It is here that Paula situates their failure; in losing sight of the aims of their movement through the means used to achieve this. The means in this instance is in direct conflict with their emancipatory ends; this is at the heart of the disaster of twentieth century communist projects (it has also been an essential aspect of the failures of Christianity).

Paula explains this failure as that of being drawn into the power of the state; you cannot 'order your power to disappear' once you have assumed such domination over others (103). 'The desire for emancipation became deflected from its own origins,' when the hypothesis of that emancipation 'itself got swallowed up in the State' and became 'entirely focused on conquering it' (103). This leads us to the great problem that faces leftist projects today - its history of violence from positions of state power. The extreme violence of the Soviet Union and Mao's China haunts the far left. Badiou's hope is to imagine a form of communism absent of such violence - that horrific acts of violence are not an intrinsic part of the communist project itself. Instead it is the disavowal of such power that must form its foundations. This is the impasse that Paula cannot quite find her way around: how can the symbolic violence inherent to power structures be overcome without being replaced by another world of violence?

Therein lies the heart of the fascination with Paul in recent continental philosophy: is radical, or revolutionary, violence possible without appeals to physical destruction or the sacrifice of the Other? The answer for Paul was to be found in a transformation that occurs within the Symbolic when the Messiah revealed the eschaton. This is a transformation that first had to occur in the way in which reality was articulated in language. In terms of the communist project, the issue becomes: would the Marxist/Leninist project be possible without the physical terror that accompanied it, without the selfish ambition and grasping of power that opened the path to the Red Terror and to Stalinism? It cannot frame its

cause in the context of the end times; to use Paul in this context he must also be betrayed.

For Badiou, the state cannot be overcome through the same logics of violence which define state power itself. Instead, it is the symbolism of state power which must be disarmed; through violence that appears weak in its eyes. *The Incident at Antioch* highlights that the connections between violence and revolutionary moments are key to understanding Badiou's turn to Paul. Paul's disavowal of violent means in overcoming the state is a direct denial of using the means of that state against itself. This is as true for communist projects as it has been for Christianity; whose inception into state politics ensured its future influence while diminishing the subversive aspect of its message. The crucial question, then, that has led thinkers like Badiou and Agamben to Paul is: how does a radical movement avoid becoming a version of that which it sought to replace, or defeated and effectively written out of the narrative, by a greater power? Finding a way around this deadlock is one of the greatest problems for the disparate threads of leftist politics represented in many areas of continental thought.

4.2.1 The Truth-Event

Badiou positions Paul as a 'poet-thinker of the event' (2003, 2). As one with the passion to motivate faithfulness to an Event which, through love, ties the direction of a life to the truth that unfolds in the wake of the Event. Badiou's idea of creating a subject out of a Truth-Event is exemplified in Paul's fidelity to the Christ-event. Subjects of the Event are tied to the interpretation of its truth without ever fully completing this task.

This interest in Paul is tied up in Badiou's own road to Damascus experience: the collective expression of emancipatory hopes in the events of May 1968. In this respect, Badiou, 'for once and once only,' trusts 'that fabricated biography of Paul that the New Testament presents under the title of the Acts of the Apostles' (2003, 17). In recalling the moment Paul was subjectivised by Christ - not converted but, rather, called into the

body of Christ - Badiou finds a compelling narrative which mirrors his own transformative experience. It is not clear why this is the moment to trust the Lukan account of Paul's mission, but it certainly dramatizes the radical break beyond (if not from) the Pharisaic tradition which had driven Paul's religious and political convictions up to that point; not dismantling or replacing it, but heightening his awareness of its meaning. Kenneth Reinhard sums this up for Badiou as the experience which 'emblematises the kind of eventual break that is the condition for the emergence of a new subject' (2013b, xxviii). It is in this movement from the Event to the emergence of a new subject which allows the emergence of its truth.⁶¹ As Žižek puts it in *The Ticklish Subject* (one of his earliest attempts at pulling Badiou's Paul into his writings):

the Event (crucifixion) becomes a Truth-Event 'after the fact,' that is, when it leads to the constitution of the group of believers, of the engaged community held together by fidelity to the Event. (1999, 141)

The subject of the Event now becomes split between 'the finite biological life and the infinite life of participating in the Truth-Event' (147). In Paul's language this is signified by what the Gentiles experienced in their split between life in the flesh and in the spirit. He reassured the community of believers in Rome that 'what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering' (Rom. 8.3). Christ revealed that the Gentiles could now participate in what had previously been beyond their symbolic fields of comprehension. Participation in God's plan, which had previously only been possible through the Jewish law, was now possible through the Truth-Event that was forced by Christ's death and resurrection (it is not a break with the law as such, as Žižek suggests, but its deformation in relation to the Gentiles). It was the shattering of the

⁶¹ Reinhard, following Badiou, examines the way in which 'Paul forces Jesus to have been the Messiah' (2009, 82). This risk produces a new situation through new emerging possibilities in the light of his reading of this Event.

Symbolic, the breaking of the block between the law and the Gentiles, which was announced in the Christ-event's undermining of the existing order.

Badiou positions truth as the novelty that appears out of the static nature of knowledge. These truths are discernible in what Badiou calls the four conditions of truth procedures: love, science, politics, and art. An Event creates a subject through their fidelity to the new possibilities of truth that the Event creates through these procedures. Love is the force that bound the subjects of the Christ-event to its truth (a truth that was made possible only, in Paul's formulation, by the grace of God). Love dictates the practical workings of this faithfulness; the public declaration and dedication which allow the truth of the Christ-event to be made visible in the activity of the community of believers. It is this 'nonliteral law' (Badiou 2003, 87) that maintains the truth of the event in the 'power of doing' (84). Badiou theorises this connection between truth and love as such:

the subjective process of a truth is one and the same thing as the love of that truth. And the militant real of that love is the universal address of what constitutes it. The materiality of universalism is the militant dimension of every truth. (2003, 92)

The subject of the truth becomes such through the workings of love; made possible in a militant (public) dimension rather than merely in private conviction. In Paul's case this comes through the way the Christ-event allows for an articulation of an idea of love that would have been an important aspect of his life as a Jew (as he defines in his famous passage of 1 Cor. 13).

There is a crucial distinction here between Badiou and those strands of continental philosophy (found in Derrida, Vattimo, and so on) that frame all "truths" within a horizon of language. While Badiou does not dismiss the prominent role of language, he emphasises the importance of truth which exists beyond this horizon. It is the dedication to the Truth-Event

that shatters our worldview from a position beyond language. Yet Žižek reminds us that, following Lacan, 'truth has a structure of fiction' (2006, 60). As he describes the condition of the subject of an Event:

he is never fully adequate to the infinite order of Truth, since the subject always has to operate with a finite multiple of a situation in which he discerns signs of truth. (1999, 130)

Its truth is sutured into the symbolic creation of a world given its possibility in the crumbling of the old order. As Žižek puts it, we should understand 'the Real of the Event as the "generator," the generating core to be encircled repeatedly by the subject's symbolic productivity' (1999, 165). This productivity is enabled by the suspension of the big Other; a suspension that is inherent to the divine violence that enables the Event to occur. It is the symbolic death of that which 'dominated and regulated our lives' (1999, 151). It generates the possibility for the subject to be created out of the Event, but its truth is pinned to the activity of the community.

According to Badiou, 'an event is what decides about a zone of encyclopaedic indiscernibility' (2009, 174). Through his fidelity to the Christ-event, Paul leaves certainty (wisdom) behind to be part of the unfolding of truth (foolishness). It called into question what Paul thought he knew about the time-period that he lived in. This Event is a creative form of resistance to elements of power that determine domains of knowledge, whether personal or public. Pertinent to both Paul and Badiou here is the resistance to the violence of totalising explanations of the state. The victory over death by the God who acted as a human is the creative act which, for Paul, ruptures the current theologico-political situation. This revealed the falsehood of Roman rhetoric and the fragility of its power over life itself, even if it could not diminish its physical strength. Badiou, while missing important aspects of Paul's resistance to the power of Rome, has become hugely significant in the genealogy of his legacy.

4.2.2 Badiou's Paul

Badiou disregards the necessity of religion with its rituals and superstitions when constructing his Paul, largely subtracting it from his reading (despite the deeply embedded religious foundations of Paul's own thought). As Žižek describes this type of move, in a Lacanian reading of Paul, 'the first part provides the deepest insight...the second part is just theological rubbish' (1999, 149).

One of the criticisms levelled against Badiou's reading of Paul is that by bypassing the religious aspect, he misses important aspects of Paul's worldview. Elizabeth Castelli criticises Badiou in his inability to break free from an imagined split between Judaism and Christianity. Indeed, she argues that 'an especially troubling aspect of Badiou's method of reading involves his predisposition to superimpose his own one-size-fits-all "event" on everything he sees' (2013, 150). While Badiou ignores much of the recent study of Paul that withdraws from this Judeo-Christian break in his letters, there is an important aspect in Badiou's thought to be acknowledged here: his insight that Paul is 'anything but a moralist' (2003, 83). The unfolding truth Christ-event is not dominated in Paul's narrative by metaphysical declarations of morality to appease his God, but guidelines intended to draw the believers together in the labour of the messianic now-time.

For Badiou, Paul forces the fabulous to be real through his commitment to the message of generic universalism inherent to his resurrection. In a similar way to Chigurh or Bartleby, Paul's Christ descends into the narrative as a disruptive force - a violent rupture in the symbolic nature of time. Without a back-story, Paul's Jesus becomes Christ through his violent impact upon established norms that occurred through his crucifixion and resurrection. The miracles, good deeds, parables, and narratives that define the Gospels are not required in Paul's articulation of the divine force of Christ. He descends, shattering the reality of those caught up in his wake, and leaves the Holy Spirit as that which binds the subject to the truth of his shattering revelation.

The voice of Badiou's Paul becomes active in his interpretation of Events that bear that same symbol of rupture in the potential creation of subjects of an Event. In one of Badiou's less formal writings there is more than a trace of the "antiphilosopher" Paul. In an article expressing the importance of the idea of communism when thinking about contemporary political emancipatory movements, he makes a distinctly Pauline appeal:

"communism" here means: common creation of a collective destiny. This "common" has two distinctive traits. First, it is generic, representing in one place humanity in its entirety. In this place there are people of all the kinds a population is usually made up of, all words are heard, all propositions examined, all difficulty taken for what it is. Second, it overcomes the great contradictions that the state pretends to be the only one capable of surmounting: between intellectuals and manual workers, between men and women, between rich and poor, between Muslims and Copts, between people living in the province and those living in the capital. (2011)

Paul's experience of the Christ-event resonates with Badiou's understanding of communist emancipatory projects. Badiou understands the Event as the creation of opportunities that were hidden before its appearance. An Event does not re-make the conditions of the world; instead, it only opens it up to new possibilities. The potential universality of its address is revealed in the way its message cuts across social, ethical, political, and cultural boundaries: between rich and poor, male and female, intellectuals and manual workers, Jew and Greek, and so on. The Event is universal in the sense that it cuts across all identities in one common struggle.

Badiou's context is radically different to Paul's, but he retains this same structure of commitment to the Event. In working to expose the violence of global politico-economic systems that rely on a narrative constituted by consumerism, personal wealth, and capital (supplemented

by charity), Badiou holds to the unfolding truth of May 1968, when people from many areas of society stood together against the exploitation intrinsic to the mechanisms of capitalism. A movement that stood in opposition to new walls, separating the insiders from the outsiders, continues to determine the direction of Badiou's thought. For a subject to emerge from a break in such a system, the Event must be 'a-cosmic and illegal' (2003, 32). It emerges as an organic movement from outside of the Symbolic Order, relying on faith to force the possibility of something new to emerge from a situation that resists such disruption. The interruption in the existing mechanisms and narratives of domination allows the truth to be revealed that had been hidden within those narratives.

Žižek describes this function of the Event as 'the moment of truth in the overall structure of deception' (1999, 135). In such an Event there is a violation and disruption of the mechanisms which oppresses the potential of those within its grasp. Divine violence, in this sense, is an essential part of an Event; that which strikes as if out of nothing to exploit the instability inherent to the excess of a situation required for the domination over life itself. This does not mean that it denotes 'an intervention from the Outside or Beyond' (Žižek 1999, 130); rather, it exploits the inconsistency of the excess necessary in the systems or structures that allow its reproduction. It exposes and interrupts the narratives that sustain power.

Badiou describes aspects of new movements of revolt and revolution emerging in a 're-birth of history' in recent times as often being 'blind,' 'naïve,' and 'scattered' (2011). There are commonalities which provide coherence, typified in slogans such as "Mubarak out" or "we are the ninety nine percent," but such movements are plagued by fractures and power vacuums. Paul is also blind and naïve in this sense, as he works within the beginnings of a scattered movement. The chaos created by the Christ-event did not, in any precise way, determine the movements that it gave life to. There are no guarantees of what will emerge out of the community dedicated to the proclamation of its truth. Yet it is in this radical break, this rupture in the Symbolic Order, that Žižek follows Badiou to affirm the potentiality that is tied to this Event. Paul, with all his deficiencies, is

vital to this a-cosmic and illegal Event - this crime against the Symbolic Order.

Paul believed that the barriers between all identities were broken down through the revelation of the Christ. Male, female, Jew, Greek, slave, and free all became part of a collective with access to the promises of God. All were now heirs of the promise made to Abraham; first to the Jew, now infinitely expanded through the known world. The site of the death and resurrection of Christ was now the site where all humanity were granted common access to God's grace. In the same way that Badiou believes communism has the potential to break down barriers created by capitalist systems, Christ broke down the symbolic barriers that prevented all people from accessing God's plan for redemption.

The incident at Antioch, which Paul describes in his letter to the Galatians, exemplifies Paul's resistance to the previously accepted or assumed hierarchies. He accuses Peter of hypocrisy because he did not comprehend the consequences of Christ dying as a slave. The 'truth of the gospel' (1.14) is that order was now established by the Christ-event. As he made clear in a letter to the communities of believers in Corinth, the power of the cross of Christ is the ability to join together and be made equal, not to divide or create class distinctions between believers.

4.2.3 Paul's Universal address

Infinite alterity is quite simply *what there is*. (Badiou 1993, 25)

In pinning an idea of universalism to Paul, Badiou, wittingly or otherwise, stepped into a deeply contentious theological issue. Neil Elliot, in discussing the problem of a Christian universalism, says that it has been 'the lingering dominance of a liberal Christian agenda that poses Paul as a champion of an "intercultural," "universalistic" religion' (2008, 48). It is this universalistic idea which, not only in the address of Christ's call but also in the nature of the truths that it proclaims, has so often been the driving force behind factions of Christianity. It is within this context that Paul is positioned as the founding figure of a religion which, despite an

inwardly fractious history, has made claims of being *the* universal religion. What is there to be gained, then, by continuing to fight for this notion universalism?

Badiou's answer remains trapped within the opposition between law and grace typified by an Augustinian-Lutheran reading of Paul (rather than the law supplemented and infinitely extended by grace).⁶² Badiou puts it like this:

the law blocks the subjectivation of grace's universal address as pure conviction, or faith. The law "objectifies" salvation and forbids one from relating it to the gratuitousness of the Christ-event. (2003, 75)

He argues that the universal address comes through grace, not law. Law cannot transcend cultures and societies; it is designed for a specific community and imbued with power therein. The new address, founded in grace, reaches all particularities in a way that a fixed set of instructions or signs cannot (circumcision, rites, rituals, rules for living, and so on). It does not obliterate such particularities, as we see through Paul's letters to different communities. Instead the address manipulates the meaning of such particularities, it cuts through them. Read in this way, Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law through submitting himself to its experience.

Engberg-Pedersen argues both with and against Badiou's idea of universalism in Paul. He cuts to what is at stake in an essay on Paul and universalism in faintly referring to dangers to come in 'universalistic'

⁶² Badiou's interpretation of Paul moves away from many traditional understandings of the apostle, yet he remains bound to a reception history dominated by Augustine and Luther. His reading of Romans 3:27-30 ('God as One') leads him to the idea that God being One means that those addressed are also One, and since he is addressing all (both Jew and Greek, and so on), 'the One is that which inscribes no difference in the subject to which it addresses itself' (2003, 75). Law cannot be a universal address because it relates to a specific group at a specific time: 'for Paul the law always designates a particularity, hence a difference. It is not possible for it to be an operation of the One, because it addresses its fallacious "One" only to those who acknowledge and practice the injunction it specifies' (2003: 76).

religions, writing that if ‘a universal perspective on human beings and particular perceptions of identity...cannot in some way be reconciled, the practical result will probably be violence’ (2013, 87). Indeed, this split between the forcing of a universalistic doctrine on opposing particularities precisely relates to this idea of symbolic violence in matters of identity.

It is here that Engberg-Pedersen engages with Badiou’s idea of universalism in relation to Paul in a way that attempts to delve behind its purpose as an illustration to perceive the ways in which there might be more substance to the idea of Paul as an important figure in the foundations of universalism. There is an emphasis initially here on the opposition between those who follow Christ, and those who do not; between those in the Spirit and those in the flesh. In this sense, it is not the type of universalism that means that all are redeemed or that all can continue in their current particularities in perfect harmony with their fidelity to the Christ-event. The point that Engberg-Pedersen makes here, and the way in which Paul does enact a type of universalism that was already evident in Stoicism, is that he allows all to act as they wish, as long as it does not run counter to the demand of the Christ-event; the demand of the fulfilment of the Law through love. In this we have what Žižek perceives as something worth redeeming in the Pauline corpus of letters; a universal violence against those who are the enemies of the people.

What signifies the difference between Badiou and thinkers such as Emmanuel Levinas, who frame their thought around an ethics based on the love for the neighbour, is their inability to move beyond the confines of their situation. The significant criticism which Badiou sets against ethics based on alterity is in its failure to see beyond the face of the other, and therefore its susceptibility to being hidden from the truths inherent to the creation of the situation. In response to Levinas and the ethics of difference founded upon the recognition of the Other, whose primacy arises out of their replacement of God (the immediacy of the Altogether-Other), Badiou writes:

this commonsensical discourse has neither force nor truth. It is defeated in advance in the competition it declares between 'tolerance' and 'fanaticism,' between 'the ethics of difference' and 'racism,' between 'recognition of the other' and 'identitarian' fixity. (1993, 20)

It is not the commonsensical element of this discourse which Badiou opposes, as it lacks the force to disrupt the reality of these elements. It instead creates a dialectical distance which opposes alternative emancipatory discourses. It generates projects of identity politics which fight separate battles, leaving the real core of the trouble untouched. It also divides liberalism and fundamentalism without considering that which has the potential to cut diagonally through both. Among Badiou's criticisms are that we end up with a religion without God, or a 'spiritual supplement for incompetent governments' (23). It is ethics devoid of philosophy; in other words, it prescribes action without the relevant force of thought which might connect people against their common enemy.

It is this idea of infinite alterity that helps to define Badiou's approach to universality. Universalism plays on our differences, and what allows those differences to exist together in a common fight. Common to all within particular divisions is their battle against something that impinges upon all within the reach of the Event. What Badiou does not emphasise enough is the political dimension of Paul's struggle - it cut across the entirety of the Roman Empire by opposing its order with slavery in the service of Christ.

This theologico-political cut, marked through the identities which the state claims power over, creates the messianic potential that must be 'generic, representing in one place humanity in its entirety' (Badiou 2011). This generic potentiality, as seen at its most bare point in May 1968 in Paris, or more recently through the Arab Spring, exemplifies the powerful address of the Event as well as its fragility. Like Paula in the midst of the revolutionary moment, we must initiate the revolution *as not* revolution in order to maintain this potentiality which will be destroyed in the creation

of identity that occurs in the process of revolution. The new possibilities created by the Event are fragile and susceptible to manipulation in the return of the mythic violence of that which it opposed.

An important question here in terms of identity formation is: does Paul's message break down barriers between different ethnic and religious groups, or does it replace those barriers with another (for example, between the Christian and the non-Christian)? Can a generic potentiality really emerge in opposition to empire, to the dominance of symbolic forces, that does not simply replace it with other oppositions that are also violent? The Croatian theologian Boris Gunjević attempts to address this deadlock by drawing upon Hardt's idea of the multitude as the political subject. He writes:

only a catholic, universal community can offer an alternative to the practices of Empire which, under the guise of capital circulating as fast as possible, invariably celebrate violence and terror which then lead to nihilism. (2012, 97)

Gunjević is asking an essentially Pauline question. Yet there is also an element of nihilism in Paul's thought. It is precisely this that makes Paul's reading of the Christ-event so violent. This universalism is based upon the meaninglessness of the claims of the powers. Indeed, Paul could only comprehend this in the context of the eschaton.

In a similar way, Badiou believes that ideas of identity and universalism are now trapped in binary contexts of fundamentalism and liberalism. If fundamentalism claims the universality of natural truth and liberalism leads to a particularity which dismisses universality, then Badiou's theory of universalism through the lens of Paul is the "third way" that cuts through differences without dissolving them into natural law.⁶³ Yet, if 'universality is nothing other than the faithful construction of an infinite generic multiple' (Badiou 2003, 46), can any construction of this

⁶³ Badiou and Critchley discuss this idea of a "third way" between fundamentalism and liberalism in the recording *Democracy and Disappointment: On the Politics of Resistance* (2008).

set remain faithful to the Event that created it? As much as Badiou attempts to resist the particularities of identity politics, we must move in that direction to gain a better understanding of what this universalism might mean for those caught up in its wake.

4.3 Paul and Identity

Davina Lopez comments on the problem of the interpretation of Paul's letters:

it is true that Paul uses language of universalism, and this truth is unfortunately what has led to interpretations of Paul as a patriarch himself who conquers otherness in the name of oneness. (2008, 167)

It is not enough to assume that the universal address of the Event will be able to unite people against a common cause without significant issues relating to identity politics arising; and, indeed, forming an essential facet of this movement. Participation in the event means dedication to its unfolding truth without knowing the ways in which this dedication will impact upon the world. Yet in this sense it is also a dedication to the current world fading away, or, more accurately, facing the coming divine violence. This jumbles our sense of identity in a way which allows the movement to exist, but also creates victims in its attempt to bypass issues relating to the particularity of identity. We can see in Paul's letters that issues relating to identity were vital and difficult components of the new life in the communities of believers.

It was not the case that Christ replaced the scapegoat who bore the brunt of violence; it was rather a shift in the dynamics of strength and weakness.⁶⁴ The sacrifice of the other, of the meaning of identity itself,

⁶⁴ Richard Hammerton-Kelly makes the link between Paul's understanding of the Christ-event and the scapegoat. He argues that 'scapegoats bear the brunt of violence that cannot be contained or vented on a target that can avenge itself' (1994, 25). In this line of argument, the Jewish system of law was a 'system of sacred violence,' which appeared and provided 'theologically the bondage of sin into which the idolater falls' (21).

still exists in the unfolding of the Pauline narrative. John Gager (2005) responds to Richard Hammerton-Kelly's work on Paul's articulation of Christ replacing the scapegoat by insisting that Paul did not break from Judaism or the language of violence at all. The idea of the Christ-event being about a break from sacred violence should be refused. Sacred violence has only ever been a facet of symbolic violence. The sacrificial logics of sacred violence are created in the symbolic violence which is hidden behind it.

René Girard's assertion that Christ replaced the scapegoat by revealing its innocence, therefore, misses the point.⁶⁵ The problem with this interpretation is that it was not strictly religion, or Judaism at all, which Paul understood as the problem. It was the religio-political manipulation carried about by the authorities - their systemic, symbolic, and physical violence - that was the problem. Christ defeated the theologico-political powers which imposed their domination over Paul's world. He was less concerned with those scapegoated in instances of sacred violence as he was with the violence of the Symbolic Order. He did not break from a system of sacrifice; he instigated its transformation in the reversal of the understanding of power.

Shmuel Trigano argues that 'it is hard to know what to make of René Girard's theory that the end of mimetic rivalry followed the advent of Christianity' (2013, 445). The claim is made not to diminish the idea of the role of mimetic rivalry in violence, but to question whether the development of Christianity does not rely on this very foundation of violence. Trigano argues that 'Pauline universalism is sacrificial in nature' (445). While his assumptions about Paul seem outdated and contentious in

⁶⁵ Girard is perhaps the most prominent exponent of the emphasis on the role of sacrifice in sacred violence. His ideas regarding violence revolve around the idea that humankind relieves inevitable tensions, generated through mimetic desire, by finding a scapegoat to expel violence onto in the form of a sacrifice (an act of violence which creates a sacred object from a subject). If your crops do not grow, civilisation threatens to break down; therefore the force of the violence towards a scapegoat is needed to restore balance and peace. This logic then filters through the whole of society. Unhappiness, misfortune, and trauma can be relieved by finding a scapegoat that can be legitimised as the cause of misfortune. Through this sacrifice the group can continue to function without tearing itself apart; therefore the stability of a community is tied to the narratives it is able to create to dispel unrest.

many cases, there is an important point to be developed here about the ways in which forms of Christianity, as a religio-political movement, have demonised Jewish particularism. Trigano's criticism of the turn to Paul is particularly stinging: 'the rehabilitation of Paul, besides indirectly deposing the contemporary Jewish political and metaphysical subject, revives the terrible heritage that gave rise to twenty centuries of anti-Semitism' (431). He adds that the turn to the apostle, in light of this perceived legitimising of 'the Jew' as a sacrifice, is 'depressing' (431).

Trigano analyses Paul's universalism as 'a universalism minus one (the Jewish people)' (440). According to this reading, Paul sparks a forceful change to the meaning of "the Jew," reducing circumcision to a kind of 'ethnic tattooing' (441). Here Badiou's idea of Pauline universalism is flipped; where Badiou uses Paul as an example for, what he would call, the fact of infinite alterity (that what exists is infinite difference), Trigano claims that Paul attempts to justify 'a conception of being without otherness' (444). He continues, arguing that this divergence 'from the altruism of the Torah, which is based on differentiation and separation' (444), leads to the collectivising force of a catholic Christianity. More than this, here we have a Paul who not only legitimises the sacrifice of the Jew in the creation of Christianity but also gives legitimacy to the ideology of Rome; there is no longer Jew or Greek, in this way, means that there is only the Christian and its excess (the Roman and the barbarian). This process repeats itself, organising European ideology on the basis that the Jew (now in the form of the State of Israel) is the particularism to be demonised.

While Trigano's claims should be strongly disputed with regards to Paul's alleged demonization of the Jew (outside of the Book of Acts, at least); it should be noted that Paul does not manage to break free from language which has the potential to oppress. Indeed it is vital to acknowledge that Paul's entire argument with regards to what Badiou's understands as universalism, can only be understood properly in Paul's imagined eschatological context. Paul had enemies, and shows a remarkable, if dangerous, dedication to fighting their power. There are

potential victims who have arisen out of his violent singlemindedness and cultural and historical constraints.

4.3.1 No Male or Female?

In what ways can the universal address of the Christ-event break down the way identity is formulated? Christian, Jew, or Gentile; male, female, or transgender; gay, bisexual, or straight; slave, factory-worker, or banker; what can the fidelity to this Event do to such logics of identity? Put differently, what does the universal address change in the narratives which are created that allow people to understand what defines their identity? The way in which we use terms such as “woman,” “slave,” and “Christian” leaves a forceful imprint on the subjects who are collected under such terms. Such markers of identity have the ability to liberate and the ability to oppress. They are necessary in the construction of the symbolic world that allows meaning to exist. The Event ruptures the Symbolic Order in such a way that opens up a myriad of possibilities that were previously impossible. For Paul this meant a dramatic shift in the way in which he understood various markers of identity, yet the shift in how he understood those markers themselves was less dramatic.

It is evident that Paul's belief in the transformation in potentiality relating to identity politics did not require a radical transformation in social roles; it was the shift in purpose within the body of believers that was vital. When Paul wrote, 'let each of you remain in the condition in which you were called' (1 Cor. 7.20), his purpose was to testify to the shift in the meaning of the condition rather than the importance of conditions themselves (circumcision, slavery, marriage, and so on). The Christ-event rendered all such markings as unimportant within the context of the community of believers. In the now-time that had arrived, their importance had been transformed. Traditional markers of identity became irreversibly altered in their meaning. Paul became a slave of Christ and apostle to the Gentiles (whilst also remaining a Jew, a citizen of Rome, and a man marked out by his deficiencies). Imagining the interconnected

aspects of these identities, at some points universal in their address (the call to be a slave of Christ) and at other points ethnically or politically particular (Roman citizen and Jew), profoundly impact upon the type of movement that will emerge from the haze of new possibilities.

Paul's communistic possibilities in relation to identity and organisation liberated the believers from their previous restraints in relation to the context of the eschaton (working in the body of Christ in the end times), but outside of that context its effect was not as potent. What did not break down for Paul were aspects of identity that remained unaffected in his worldview. Contemporary ideas of gender equality, racial equality, gay rights, workers' rights, and so on, did not exist within the Symbolic Order in order to be shattered in the first place. These issues, dominant in our minds, were not on Paul's radar. This has implications for how we understand the movements that followed.

Paul is still wrapped up in violent language. His subversive attack on the governing authorities and his ability to create division are two facets of this violence that have already been discussed. He also, due to this divisive language and his misunderstanding of the particularities related to the length of time remaining, plays a role in symbolic violence against groups including women, Jews, and slaves. John Gager argues that Paul is complicit in this violence. He contends:

I see the post-conversion Paul as still very much entangled in the coils of violence... I see Paul as a violent *personality*, in his actions, in his language, and in his ideology of Gentiles and their world as a world of violence. (2005, 16)

The basis for this thinking is simply and succinctly put by Gager in relation to Paul's 'violent language,' he explains, 'when I was young - one of the lessons that it took me years to unlearn: "Sticks and stones can break my bones, but words will never hurt me." But violent words do hurt - by

themselves and as precursors to violent acts' (17).⁶⁶ An important facet of this violence is the way that Paul remained trapped with the symbolic coils of violence which were prevalent in his cultural context with regard to markers of identity. His universalism remained trapped in this sense. This does not relieve him of his guilt in this regard, Gager's imagining of Paul's violent personality is an important assertion, but, as we saw with the violence *behind* Anton Chigurh, we are not attempting to ascertain innocence or guilt (categories which are transformed after the Christ-event). Instead it is a genealogy of violence that is of interest here, of that we are all guilty *and* innocent (to radically differing extents).

4.3.2 Eschatological Re-ordering

What if, to the worst expectations of our liberal sensitivities, Paul really did think that female subordination was an intrinsic part of God's plan for creation? Paul did not dispute that God had created things in determinate ways; each thing has its purpose (Rom. 9.23). All purposes, however, came together with equality in the body of Christ (1 Cor.12.12-26). What does this mean in the community of believers, and outside this community, to those defined as inferior? For Paul, 'If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it' (12.26), but this did not mean equality for all or the end of oppression on the basis of markers of identity. In the twisting and resisting of the logics of social order, Paul began to think of a generic universality that opposed the existing order. How does this, however, look outside of Paul's eschatological context?

⁶⁶ This echoes Žižek's appropriation of an essence of violence that is violent in its own symbolic and systemic domain, but also opens the grounds for further violent acts. He explains: 'Heidegger does not merely provide a new variation on his standard rhetorical character of inversion ("The essence of violence has nothing to do with ontic violence, suffering, war, destruction, etc.; the essence of violence resides in the violent character of the very imposition/founding of the new mode of Essence - disclosure of communal Being - itself"); here, Heidegger (implicitly, but clearly) reads this essential violence as something that grounds - or, at least, opens the space for - explosions of ontic violence themselves' (Žižek 2008b, 151).

It is worthwhile being clear on the reality of this situation, in all likelihood Paul believed woman to be inferior to man. There is little reason to doubt this.⁶⁷ As Dale Martin contextualises the body in this era: 'all bodies (male and female, young and old) fall somewhere on a spectrum from moist to dry, cold to hot, soft to hard... women and infants were moister, colder, and softer than men' (1995, 29). Paul gives this position its proper theological grounding: man comes from God and woman from man (1 Cor. 11). There was no intellectual reason for Paul to believe anything other than this. What changes, all that changes, is the meaning inherent to this inferiority.

Even though this was a fact for Paul, such distinctions were rendered meaningless in the period between the resurrection of Christ and the coming judgement. The overall impression of specifically named women in his letters is positive, with little or no indication of inferiority or subordination in these cases, precisely because of their worth to the activity of the now-time (in Romans 16 he counts females among his friends, co-workers, and apostles). Richard Hays creates an impression of a Pauline mission in which 'women did play a significant role,' and provided a social structure which would have been 'particularly attractive to 'upwardly mobile' urban women' (2004, 144). Indeed, in the only seven surviving Pauline epistles, women are found in places of Paul's gratitude, appreciation, and praise.⁶⁸

In discussing 1 Corinthians 11, Michael Lakey argues that due the unknown nature of what is to come, Paul's defines the sexual metaphysic as 'rendered provisional and open to revaluation' (2010, 189). The veil, while maintaining a distinction between man and woman, breaks down the difference between the way they might honour God. In this way, 'the veil is a sign that the Christian woman, while metaphysically subordinate, is in the process of being eschatologically re-ordered or transformed' (188). Herein the suggestion is that we can only interpret Paul's statements from

⁶⁷Dale Martin (1995) shows that there were strong physiological reasons why women were believed to be inferior to men.

⁶⁸Hays, among others, argues that the most likely explanation of the appearance of 1 Cor 14.34-35 within the Pauline corpus is that it was a later interpolation.

the perspective that the world is fading away; what there was previously is now subject to revaluation in the context of the coming end. In this sense, Paul still has to make a practical interpretation of the generic potentiality inherent to messianic time.

Paul's letters, as well as the Gospels, acknowledge the position of the female as part of a marginalised group; these writings testify to their important position within the early formation of the Christ-cults. There is a revaluation within the woman's position as inferior; while Paul sees little point in resisting social conventions, he sets no restrictions on the roles than women can potentially hold in the new movement. The new economy of a debt of love to one another supersedes what Paul believed to be natural truth. Paul's following (apparent) attack on women in the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 14.33-36) re-iterates an important point: this re-ordering of status retains an idea of inferiority that remains an aspect of the world that had not yet faded away.

Therein lies a problem with Paul's treatment of marginalised groups. The Christ-event releases a potential that had been silenced before its appearance. Paul's effort, furthermore, was bent towards the further release of potential - a breaking of the power that came from outside of the body of Christ. The view remains, however, that woman cannot simply break free from her temporal subordination to man. The re-ordering inherent to the Christ-event had not been completed. Paul's treatment of women was indicative of the developed sense of subjectivity impelled by the Christ-event, as part of a body where all were heir of the same inheritance. Yet this could not disturb all social limitations.⁶⁹ This leads us to another way that the implications of the Christ-event have been imagined in recent continental philosophy. Agamben understands messianic time as the period in which potentiality is released (in a way that resists both the particularities of the law and the universality that Badiou proposes).

⁶⁹ In exploring the Adam-Christ typology in Paul, Benjamin Dunning argues that it is a 'failure of this typology and its afterlives to resolve embodied differences without remainder' (113). This is an example of why it is not simply a case of redeeming Paul or, on the other hand, dismissing his relevance all together, but to critically examine the consequences of his articulation of the Event.

4.4 Slave of Christ: Social Order and Proper Possibility

The God in rags made a mockery of the prevailing social order through turning foolishness into a virtue. Agamben's description of 'the messianic vocation' as the 'revocation of every vocation' shows this idea of re-ordering within social status without breaking down these statuses as such (2005b, 23). It did not change the social reality that enveloped their world, but it did radically change their meaning in the context of the end times. This re-vocation describes a 'generic potentiality' (26) which is epitomised in Paul's letter to the Corinthians:

the appointed time has grown short; from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no possessions, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away. (1 Cor. 7.29-31)

The Symbolic Order which imposes the meaning of status was interrupted, giving each person their 'proper possibility' (2005b, 39), without any guarantee of that being fulfilled.

Agamben opposes Badiou's concept of universality which he attaches to Paul's message. He insists, 'it makes no sense to speak of universalism with regard to Paul' (2005b, 53), that 'no universal man, no Christian can be found in the depths of the Jew or the Greek' (52). It is the remainder cut out of Paul's oppositions that is important. This remnant renders the law inoperable rather than destroying it. Messianic time, therefore, is the period in which new possibilities are cut for the people who are specifically addressed by Christ's death and resurrection.⁷⁰ Agamben argues, 'the

⁷⁰ Kaufman (2013) outlines some of the differences and similarities between Agamben and Badiou in their approach to Paul.

messianic is not the destruction but the deactivation of the law, rendering the law inexecutable' (2005b, 98). Indeed, for Paul, the law is still holy and good for the circumcised. What is at stake is the destruction of the limitations placed on the Gentiles because of the law. Simply put, the law did not relate to the Gentiles as it did to the Jews. Paul's vocation as an apostle and a slave of Christ means that he understands that the system he lived in has changed. A potential now exists which did not before because of this move into the messianic era.

Agamben is much closer to the heart of the matter when he talks about Bartleby.

If what is at issue in a scientific experiment can be defined by the question "Under what conditions can something occur or not occur, be true or be false?" what is at issue in Melville's story can instead be formulated in a question of the following form: "Under what conditions can something occur *and* (that is, at the same time) not occur, be true *not more than not be true?*" (1999b, 260-261)

Identities do not fade away in messianic time, but their potential is no longer bound to the law in the same way as it had been before the Christ-event. Instead they are bound to the messianic vocation, as Agamben argues, 'the syntagma "slave of the Messiah" defines the new messianic condition for Paul' (2005b, 13).

While social boundaries still existed, and Paul did not untie himself from these boundaries, of ultimate importance was the extension to be heir of the promise given to Abraham (Gal. 3.29). In this scheme what was once considered low and despised reduced their opposite; therefore male and female, slave and free, and Jew and Gentile lose their ultimate points of distinction. Paul's language, however, remains dominated by masculinity and his concerns about the critical issue of circumcision are

androcentric.⁷¹ The female is too often invisible in Paul's text. His implicit views towards women can be positive, hailing their pivotal role in his mission, but the female remains secondary to male in Paul's concerns (if not his theological declarations). This re-ordering inherent to this proper possibility remained locked within social confines.

Agamben emphasises the importance of grasping this new vocation understood under the marker of slave. He writes:

the messianic vocation is not a right, nor does it furnish an identity; rather, it is generic potentiality (*potenza*) that can be used without ever being owned. To be messianic, to live in the Messiah, signifies the expropriation of each and every juridical-factual property (circumcised/uncircumcised; free/slave; man/woman) under the form of *as not*. This appropriation does not, however, found a new identity. (2005b, 26)

Being a slave of Christ entailed being a part of the community that formed the body of Christ and was filled with the Holy Spirit. As Agamben notes in Paul this generic but not abstract subject, in the service of the messianic vocation, signifies a new formation of being under the form of "as not". The slave of Christ is the signifier that Paul used to address himself as part of a community that cuts across all parts of social and economic order. This messianic vocation cannot avoid the return of identity, but it does transform the significance of such markers of identity.

In the midst of a crucial passage in a letter to the church in Corinth, concerning the status and responsibilities of the community in a world which in its present form was passing away (1 Cor. 7.31), Paul instructs:

whoever was called in the Lord as a slave is a freed person belonging to the Lord, just as whoever was free when called is a

⁷¹ 'If the *hymen* ("you") and the second person plural verb of Galatians 5.2 is not addressed to her, what about the *hemas* of the previous verse, "For freedom Christ has set us free"?' (Polanski 2005, 14)

slave of Christ. You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of human masters (7.21-22).

In the same way as he announces himself at the beginning of his letters to Rome and Philippi, Paul calls them to be slaves of Christ. Paul used this term to describe his relationship with Christ, even tying it into the rhetoric of being purchased. Captivity and emancipation are vital themes in Paul's letters; the primary focus is theological rather than social, so what are the implications of Paul's ideas about slavery? Paul writes, 'for freedom Christ has set us free, therefore, do not submit again to a yoke of slavery' (Gal 5.1)? The foremost implication of this freedom, bought at a price, was that those in the body of Christ were now slaves to Christ. This was a reminder to the Gentiles that Christ has given them access to the promises of God.

This was not a comment on the reality of slavery throughout the Roman Empire; yet this idea is tied to its understanding within this context. Only a slave, the subjected "thing" of the social order, could turn the tables of power on the powers that crucified Christ.⁷² This brings us back to the way Paul challenged the logics of the Roman Empire. Neither Badiou nor Agamben manage to fully appreciate the specifics of Paul's attack on these logics, despite it being central to Taubes' Pauline revelation. It is not merely a generic potentiality or a generic set created by a universal address - it is a violent attack on the existing order that attempted to undermine God.

4.4.1 Slavery in the Roman Empire

In the beginnings of Western civilisation - the Roman Empire, Christianity, Greek culture, and so on - was the reality of a structure of society that determined there were levels to humanity; that some were 'understood to be more human than others...a sliding scale on which some humans approach the status of things, of objects' (DuBois 2003, 6). The

⁷² 'Legally, the slave was *res*, a thing, a property, an object. Roman law acknowledges slaves as people and distinguishes human property from other property, although at times the distinction is difficult to see.' (Joshel 2010, 38)

uncomfortable reality is that this type of thought has appeared in every generation since. Divisions between races, genders, nationalities, religions, classes, and abilities have defined many of the sliding scales on which human beings are judged and positioned. It is the slaves who allow empires to exist; it is the poorest, least free, and subjects of forms of ownership that mine and grow the materials, stitch together the products, and allow the growth and spread of the basic forms of capital which drives expansion.

This was as true for the Roman Empire as it has been with modern capitalist, Islamic, or communist states; each, in its own particular way, have used slaves - workers left with little or no freedom or individual rights - to expand and dominate. In the Roman Empire it was slaves who would be volunteered for the army on the front lines of the battle when there were not enough freedmen. The Roman Empire depended on slaves for its very existence. In this context, to adopt for oneself the marker "slave" was absurd, yet it was also subversive. The social implications of Paul's rhetoric here should not be underestimated. To align his movement with slavery was a bold move. It was not surprising in the context of Paul's interpretation of the Christ-event: Christ claimed victory through dying a slave's death. Therefore it was the weak position which Paul also embraced. Paul, in this same way, also aligned himself with what were considered effeminate qualities (weakness, foolishness, being in pain of child-labour, and so on) in a time when virtue, and violence with it, was a masculine quality.

Paul transforms the slave, that "thing," into a part of the body of Christ. He undermines the Roman structure by placing slaves directly in the power of Christ, bypassing the rest of the social order; indeed, both Emperor and Slave were now placed together directly under the power inherent to Christ as Lord. This did suddenly transform their practical conditions, this was not what was at stake for in the truth of the Christ-event; the slave remained a slave while the free remained free. This was a transformation in the meaning of their position.

Reconciliation with God was now possible for the Gentiles from this marginalised position. This made the new movement popular among ‘those who felt disadvantaged in some significant way’ (Gager 1975, 24). These proto-Christian communities grew out of the disinherited of the Roman Empire; this included foreigners, women, and those oppressed on religious grounds.⁷³ This mirrors a contemporary problem which Žižek describes as ‘the automatic creation of excluded and dispensable individuals from the homeless to the unemployed’ (2008a, 12), the group which Vattimo and Zabala call the ‘discharge of capitalism’ (2011, 64).

Paul’s world was saturated in slavery. A great number of individuals lived their life in perpetual subservience to their master’s control. They were the possessed rather than the possessor, and with this came a particular, lowly, status. The practice and reality of slavery was ever-present throughout the region. For the Greeks, slaves were ‘the furnishing of their world’ (DuBois 2003, 6). Their lives were defined by service, and their status reflected this. They were always in the background of society, without the same rights as the free. Slaves did not have the right to get married, male slaves could not be considered to be fathers, and female slaves were the sexual property of their masters (actual practice differed depending on circumstances; there were slaves who were allowed to live as families, for example). Throughout the empire, however, slaves were little more than bodies; ‘available, vulnerable bodies’ that would be subject to their masters needs or wants (Glancy 2002, 156). They were little more than an object with specific purposes in the eyes of many masters.⁷⁴

Slavery was an integral and accepted part of the symbolic landscape of Paul’s world. Despite instances of violent resistance to their masters in the slave wars of the previous century, there is little to indicate that there was a slave class consciousness or a will for revolution. Keith Bradley

⁷³ Gager argues that this spreading of Christianity by the time of Constantine was such that ‘Christianity alone could serve as the religious basis of the far-flung empire’ which made his move a ‘shrewd political judgement’. (1975, 142)

⁷⁴ Herodotus’s story of the slave with a secret message tattooed onto his head exemplifies this point. The message was tattooed to incite action in another part of the empire, written on his scalp and hidden when his hair had grown back. The slave, the possessed body, was a tool for writing with nothing on the inside to interrogate.

asserts that slaves could never hope to 'effect a radical transformation of the social and institutional structures around them' (1994, 108). A full picture of slavery in the Roman Empire is difficult to create due to the lack of writings available from slaves themselves.

People seldom moved from being a citizen into slavery; they would come to this existence as captives of the wars of expansion, children of other slaves, or through being unwanted at birth. Many girls, in particular, were unwanted at birth; they were often considered a burden on the family, so were subjected to exposure (left in specific areas to be collected, usually for slavery, or to die).

The sale of slaves was another dehumanising experience, more akin to cattle markets. Slaves would be put on blocks and sold - a human represented as a thing, treated as little more than an animal with the appearance of a human. This reality of slavery was deeply embedded into the society and economy of the Roman Empire. This social hierarchy violently created the lowly image of the slave. They were all around, the cogs in the basement of an empire. Their occupations were wide-ranging and included 'estate managers,' 'shepherds,' 'craftsmen,' and 'domestic servants' as well as 'construction workers,' 'entertainers' and 'field hands' (Schiedel 2012, 90). A common occupation of female slaves was prostitution; and this profession forces an important point here, this was a system 'rooted in violent domination' (106). Manumission was uncommon, especially in rural areas, and brought with it its own problems; it could be better to be under the protection of a master, condemned to the existence of a slave, than to die outside of this protection.

The treatment of slaves was not seen as wholly negative. Seneca, from his position of rhetorical influence in the Roman Empire, was among those who advocated the fair treatment of slaves. More than being mere things, positioned as slaves through accident, slaves should be judged on a 'moral standing' (Bradley 1994, 102). The Roman agricultural writer Columella also advocated the fair treatment of slaves; noting that slaves are of more use when they are kept in good health, given warm clothing, and so on. Doing so 'contributes greatly to the increase of the estate'

(Bradley 1994, 22). This, though, did nothing to challenge the hierarchical arrangements of Roman society; it maintained the slave/master relationship through advocating good handling of slaves and the good behaviour of slaves. And while it would appear that such practices were encouraged in the treatment of slaves, there were many masters who ruled through threat. Flogging was a common punishment, but typically masters could punish their slaves as they saw fit and for what they saw fit. Varro, for example, tells the story of a slave who is beaten for being slow to bring hot water. For Paul it is the nature of Christ as the master that defines this identity as slave. This was the context in which Paul found the Messiah crucified as a slave.

4.4.2 Christ as Slave and Lord

Neil Elliot argues that an important factor in the idea of kenosis is not simply Christ's appearance as a human being, but as a slave. This was a subversive act which opposed the structures of the Roman Empire. This is what is at stake in kenosis: the slave resisting the logics of that which subjects the people to captivity. There is a power play in motion here. It is only the king who can make such a declaration. It is only the crucifixion of the true Messiah, God Himself, which contains the authority to subvert this power structure.

Elliot adds to this point through opposing the abundant 'symbolic representations of the spectacular violence, invincible military might, and inevitability of Roman hegemony' (2011, 43). He emphasises this overturning of the Roman rhetoric in placing Christ alongside the slave as 'an unmistakable expression (in the language of Jewish apocalypticism) of solidarity with the lowest classes' (43). While Paul's message subverted the order intrinsic to the Roman Empire, it is unclear how much of a threat his message would have been considered to be to this order. The violent force of the empire, however, did not require a threat to be real in order to exert itself; there was no necessity for its structural violence to

differentiate between a real threat and any other who attempted to exist outside its structure of dominance.

In aligning Christ with the figure of the slave, Welborn writes: ‘the crucified Christ was regarded by the cultured elite of his day as a coarse and vulgar joke’ (2005, 2). Within a reception history which has placed the emphasis on the *consequences* of the cross and the nature of Christ, the social statement of crucifixion has at times been overlooked. In a socio-religious marketplace where gods were venerated for their power, preaching Christ crucified was foolishness. The Messiah, who was and remained God, was killed in the lowest of places. His body was desecrated, hanging on a cross. Amongst the scandal of the crucified Messiah is a question that requires analysis: why did a strong enough collection of Gentiles wish to become part of this body?

The freedom bought through the cross entails servitude to Christ, and therein to the body of believers. And since Christ is Lord, what Paul is preaching is a radical religious devotion to God. Paul believed that all Gentiles should now serve in the body of Christ, the vessel of the messianic-era that carries Christ in the world until the end. Travis Kroeker describes this new responsibility:

for Paul the *ekklesia* is precisely this classless society where all are freed by becoming slaves of Christ. They became free...precisely by using the world “as if not,” in a dispossessive manner that assesses the value of each particular thing or relation with reference to the passage of God in the world. (2010, 61)

This freedom is found not by revolutionising the social and economic hierarchies of these disparate communities under differing levels of Roman rule. It is the introduction of a theologico-political novelty which undermines Roman rule as such. As Paul Griffiths asserts, ‘the *ekklesia*, the community of the called, is then the community of those whose vocations have been revoked but not erased, emptied but annihilated, removed from the juridical sphere to the sphere of life, of *zoe* reconfigured’ (2010, 184).

This creates an unsustainable volatility in the tension between life in the world and life in Christ. This only made sense to Paul in the imminence of the world in its current form passing away.

The striking question for Paul would have been whether or not these slaves could have participated in the body of Christ. Jennifer Glancy raises the issue of slaves being sexually dominated by their masters, and slaves held in the profession of prostitution. Were enslaved prostitutes 'beyond the boundaries of the Christian community' (2002, 67) due to their polluting of the body of Christ? This raises an important question for the theologico-political vision of Paul: did the designations of slave/free only dissolve for Paul after a person was found to be eligible for baptism? There were certainly unrecognised implications for marginalised groups such as these enslaved prostitutes who potentially contaminated the body of Christ through the dictates of their service (1 Cor. 7.12-20).

Paul undermined social conventions, but only in the context of the Christ-event. He did not order slaves to be released, but he did encourage it. He did not demand equality for women, but he did acknowledge the critical work they did in all areas of his mission. In this same way he did not abolish Roman rule, but he did show the Christian body to be incompatible with the hierarchy of the Roman Empire.

Elliot, in assessing weaknesses in Badiou's understanding of Paul's situation, asserts that:

it is even more important for us to recognise that the fundamental ideological requirements of Roman imperialism are directly opposed in Paul's representation of the body of the crucified and risen Christ in the world. (2010, 144)

The Roman Empire, underpinned by tributary states, is undermined through Christ's victory over death in Elliot's reading. Christ used the very mechanisms which the empire chose to crush resistance in order to show that God's weakness was stronger than man's strength. The key here, and what Badiou fails to emphasise in his reading of the resurrection, is that we should situate Paul within an apocalyptic tradition which believed in

the power of resurrection. This was an attack on the powers that crucified Christ. Elliot then adds to the sense in which Paul interprets the resurrection as the eventual site:

it follows quite clearly in the apocalyptic logic that if a crucified man is resurrected, there is neither slave nor free person, since resurrection *means* a divine intervention that interrupts the very system of significations that oppose slave and free, man and woman. (2010, 148)

Read in this way, Paul is inscribing the *actuality* of resurrection into the logics of the empire by turning the crucifixion of a slave from weakness into strength.

It is the reality of the slave's death which Elliot emphasises. He argues that Philippians 2:7-8 has 'traditionally been taken to refer generically to Christ's appearance as a human being, but surely refers more pointed to the manner of his death, the shameful subjection to a slave's death by crucifixion' (145). In this reading, Christ subverts the dominant symbolism that the empire enforced upon their enemies, dehumanised in the image of the conquered. It is this aspect of the Event, God subjecting Himself to being conquered, which creates the possibility for a new experience of truth to appear. And it is in the potential inherent to new truths which the Event finds its power. There is no immediate physical victory to come from the resurrection; it does not create a political situation in which the empire can be overcome by force.

Welborn points out, 'Badiou's attempt to disjoin death from resurrection leads him to place the Pauline concept of the Christ in dangerous proximity to the Nietzschean idea of the Overman as a figure of pure self-affirmation' (2013, 127). Through missing the acknowledgment of the weak and the poor inherent to the manner of Christ's death, Welborn argues, Badiou fails to notice that it is participation in this death which is as meaningful as the overcoming of it. This overlooking of the importance

of the cross is the ‘most significant failure to understand Paul [in Badiou’s work]’ (139).

This overlooking is not without reasoning; to focus on the suffering of Christ can lead to a Christian maxim of achieving redemption through suffering itself. Yet it is not suffering itself that is to be sought here, but a statement of God’s interest in those who were placed into a position of death by the ruling authorities. This place of the cross is that place where it is declared for all to see that ‘a slave is not really a man’ (135).⁷⁵ The cross was ‘the “situated void” of Roman society’ (136) from which it became possible for the Messiah to declare God’s love for the weak and the despised in spite of those who oppress and humiliate them in their very existence.

Welborn contends that ‘how deeply slaves lived in the shadow of the cross is illustrated by episodes from satires and novels’ (135); such works depicted slaves being humiliated and brutalized, often with the use of crucifixion scenes. Christ is situated in this position, as the slave humbled on the cross, the fool confounding the wise - as not only dying in his physical body but suffering the death of his political life being stripped of him through a slave’s humiliation. When Paul relates Christ to the lowly and despised of the world, it is with reference to the humiliated subjects of the Greco-Roman world.

On the stage, one encounters portraits of slaves and the poor in abundance, since, in accordance with the Greek and Roman theory of the laughable, their weakness and deficiencies, both physical and intellectual, were taken as subjects of ridicule.
(134)

It is with the figure of the slave that Christ aligns himself with at the cross. His death and subsequent resurrection are only possible from this site: as a subject of ridicule. Paul also aligns himself with this figure.

⁷⁵ Welborn uses the example of Juvenal’s description of a story in which a Roman matron crucifies a slave out of ‘a humour to do so’ (135), using the justification that a slave is not really a man.

It is from this site of crucifixion, Welborn argues, that 'Paul seizes upon the cruel and disgusting term that the educated elite of the Roman world least wanted to hear and pronounces it with a vengeance' (137). Paul attempts to invert the logic of the violence, symbolic as well as physical, enacted upon the poor, the weak, and the despised. The attraction of this Messianic cult to these groups in great part came from this theologico-political statement inherent to the manner of the Messiah's death. Neither the humiliation nor physical stripping of life could defeat the Messiah; Jesus could not have been Christ if that had been the case. The resurrection, then, was for Paul proof that death no longer had dominion over anyone who has faith in Christ (Rom 6.8-11).

Chapter Five

Creation as Original Sin

5.1 Žižek and Paul: Common Battles

There is something in the Christian legacy worth saving, and Paul is at the centre of it. This message is evident throughout Žižek's writings. At the forefront of this focus is a theory of violent love which has so often been deeply hidden within Christian traditions. He makes this point clear: 'Christian charity is rare and fragile, something to be fought for and regained again and again. Even among Christians, confusion about its nature abounds' (2001, 118). This confusion about its nature is a recurring feature of recent re-readings and re-imaginings of Paul springing from areas of continental philosophy. Among the theories and counter-theories, Žižek's descriptions stand out as the most forceful. As we have seen, Badiou, Agamben, Critchley, and others have made an important contribution to the re-contextualisation of Paul, but it is Žižek who is most provocative in his sense of Paul's importance. Could it really be, as suggested in the connection he has provoked between divine violence and Pauline love, that there is something in this theory of love which has the potential to speed the inherently unstable mechanisms of capitalism to their own spectacular implosion?

It is with great difficulty that an individual manages to transform, even after an encounter with an Event. This, though, is precisely the point of being subjectivised in the framework of a political struggle. For Paul this entailed being called into a new narrative dedicated to hastening the destruction of the powers that opposed God's promises. This was an attempt to transform the situation within the Symbolic realm of signifiers and representations. It is a narrative detailing the victory that developed out of the death of God at the hands of those powers. The resurrection, as the turning point of the narrative, dictated the purpose and character of the labour required in the now-time (1 Cor. 15-51-58).

At the heart of this theory is God's own transgression on the cross. The radical re-interpretation and re-situating of time itself, from *chronos* to *kairos*, was propelled by Christ 'becoming a curse for us' (Gal. 3.13). This was not a dismissal of the old law, as Paul is at pains to make clear, but a sign that the now-time had begun. A shattering hole punched through the symbolic formation of reality revealed God's frustration with the structures of "strength" in the world. It was only through a foolish proclamation (1 Cor. 1.21) that God could reveal the empty foundations of their claims to power. It is in this same way that Žižek claims that we should subvert the powers which, if remained unchallenged, will continue down a devastating path to its catastrophic conclusion.

Paul is such a compelling figure for Žižek due to his transformation from a parochial religious zealot to a universal subject of an Event. He disavows the previous site of his battle in order to attempt to connect all peoples in a common struggle against the powers of an apocalyptic age. The time had come to set aside differences and join a common fight; or be the enemies of this fight and face the wrath of God.

In this vein, Žižek claims that he is not being abstract when pointing to the violence embedded in the functioning of capitalism. He points to four basic antagonisms which prevents its indefinite reproduction:

the looming threat of *ecological* catastrophe, the inappropriateness of the notion of *private property* for so-called 'intellectual property,' the socio-ethical implications of *new techno-scientific developments* (especially in biogenetics), and, last but not least, *new forms of apartheid*, new walls and slums.
(2010, 212)

The excess created by the instability of the mechanisms required to reproduce the conditions of capitalist dominance creates instabilities. These antagonisms in the environment, in access to food, water, and medicine, and in the gap between the rich and the poor are not only produced by violent forces, they are also creating greater volatilities.

These stresses upon the material pressures, which create instability in the formation of ideological forces, are essential facets in the diagnosis of ongoing violence. Within the potential for such mechanisms to exist is the potential for them not to exist, yet this potential is covered-up and written out of the controlling narratives. Divine violence reveals the possibility of a different understanding of truth.

It is only when we can accept our own influence within the Symbolic, and see beyond the walls that violently manipulate our understanding of truth, that we can begin to participate in a transformation played out in a divine economy. For Paul this meant participation in the common body whose service was given over Christ. It was the transition from individual to community, echoing the story of Adam and Eve, which created subjects out of the Christ-event; yet understanding how to live within this body, participating in this messianic vocation, proved to be a difficult task for the Gentiles.

This final chapter draws together the theory of radical violence in this work and examines it in the context of Paul famous passage in Romans 7. Paul here provides an insight into the mechanisms at the heart of the battle at the heart of the Symbolic. The theory of original sin is drawn away from the individual and placed on the community. It is only, therefore, through the extension of the God's promises to the Gentiles that the Christ-event can overcome the condition of sin first realised by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

The Christ-event, like the Fall, allows the subject to gaze into the abyss at the heart of authority. The foolishness of God defeated human strength through the Messiah's death on the cross, and in the resurrection Christ unplugs from the world of masquerade and enjoins us to follow Him through participating in the power of the Holy Spirit. This economy of power made sense within Paul's imagined eschatological context. God revealed a new set of possibilities inherent to the nature of the time which had arrived. All peoples could now participate in these new possibilities, and it was this participation alone which would direct the wrath of God.

Žižek, and others writing from contemporary political, cultural and political perspectives, see something different at stake in this outpouring of new possibilities: the shift from the private to the commons. One of the most difficult tasks in contemporary radical political projects of the left come before such projects can properly begin; to allow the people to not only see the empty centre of the dominant “mainstream” of politico-economic power, but to be able to participate in its unmasking. This is the hermeneutics at the heart of a new communism.

5.1.1 Žižek, Paul, and a theory of Original Sin

Original sin, as eminent Christian figures such as Augustine would describe it, is the name for a deficiency in human nature caused by the sins of our ancestors, tracing all the way back to Adam and Eve’s original transgression. It creates the image of subjects who are in desperate need of redemption through a force which can only come from God. Paul did not think this way. Instead, Paul indicated that it was not a force internal to our being which was ultimately flawed but our proclivity for falling for false teachings which created the conditions for sin to multiply. Indeed, the Gentiles were now ‘dead to sin and alive to God in Jesus Christ’ (Rom. 6.11); not at some future point but in their life in the body of Christ. A key section here relates to Eve. In relation to the precise gospel which the believers in Corinth have received, Paul writes: ‘I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by its cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ’ (2 Cor. 11.3). The good news of Christ had the potential to free the Gentiles from this condition, while the false message did not.

Critchley argues forcefully against a traditional understanding of original sin, dismissing the idea that ‘there is something essentially defective in human nature which requires a corrective at the political and theological level’ (108). Yet we should not dismiss this idea completely. Critchley is very much interested in Paul’s message of love for the neighbour, but it is only in the context of sin that his message becomes

possible. What Žižek does is shift the focus on original sin away from the Augustinian reading which has dominated protestant Christianity. In doing so he also makes a step away from Paul, but remains an important interpreter of his letters. Original sin is not about a deviation from God, or a deficiency in the soul which creates a tendency towards evil. Original sin, and this is his distinctly Pauline point, is located in creation itself, inherent to that which makes us vulnerable to manipulation and coercion. Put differently, original sin is located in violent forces which direct the realities which they help to create.

It is in this context that the Fall can be understood as a narrative that details an Event which allows Adam and Eve to come to consciousness as humans, aware of the imperfection of the world around them which had previously been hidden from them. It is in this sense that ‘the Fall is “in itself” already Redemption’ (128). This is redemption understood as an ‘explosion of freedom, the breaking of our natural chains’ (128). Emancipation is only possible after the Fall. It initiates the inception into the ‘properly human universe’ (129). Here we understand that ‘the Fall never happens since it has always already happened’ (119); it is not a point located in history, guilt passed through generations, it is the awareness of our vulnerability.

5.2 The Divided Subject of Romans 7

In his letter to the church in Rome, Paul shows signs of being aware that there is something violent at work in the imagination. Before violence can be manifested physically, symbolically, or systemically, an aspect already exists in the deceptions that occur in our own (un)conscious. Žižek puts it this way: ‘every imagination is already violent in itself, in the guise of the tension between apprehension and comprehension: the second can never fully catch up with the first’ (1999, 42). There is a connection here to Paul’s explanation of the difficulties which the Gentile were troubled with in relation to the law in Romans 7, which Žižek calls Paul’s ‘(deservedly) most famous passage’ (1999, 148). Within the inability to comprehend

comes violence inherent to the zero-level of reality (we might not realise that we participate in it but do so all the same).

This is a critical passage in Paul's explanation of what it means to be a slave 'in the new life of the Spirit' (7.6). Paul believes that being 'slaves of righteousness' (6.18) is the path to freedom from death. It is the opposite path from that of sin and death which had fed upon the 'natural limitations' (6.19) inherent to the conditions of being separated from the promises of God. Stanley Stowers links this passage to Greek tragedy. He writes, 'tragedy emphasises the often evil consequences of these limitations, but it also claims that what is good and beautiful about human life is intrinsically bound to this vulnerability' (1994, 261). We hear in the voice of Rom. 7.7-25 that 'the very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me' (7.10). In this letter Paul is explaining the plight of the Gentiles who are struggling to come to terms with the truth of the Christ-event, and precisely how they can reclaim victory out of this vulnerability found in their encounter with the law.

Much of the study of Paul in the past half century has been dominated by the battleground epitomised in this passage; between the traditional readings of justification by faith which have cast a long shadow over the interpretation of Paul and the "New Perspectives" on Paul that battles against such readings. The claim here is that this was not Paul's voice. Put differently, this is not, as the Christian imagination so often has it, the voice of the Christian-convert breaking free from the law.

Krister Stendahl's essay on the *Introspective Conscience of the West* is at the roots of this turn in the understanding of the Pauline epistles. In this essay he argues that 'Paul did not have the type of introspective conscience' which had dominated readings of Paul up to that point (1963, 82). This was not about a Jew who had previously tried to be perfect through the works of the law and failed, as Stowers puts it:

the picture of Paul the Pharisee, who attempted that impossible task, clearly comes from reading the narratives of his conversion

in Acts through the lens of later Christian constructions of Judaism and the law. (1994, 269)

On the contrary this was about the nature of the Gentiles, who had been separated from God's people. Stowers goes on to argue, 'the view of gentiles as morally degenerate must be considered a fundamental feature of Jewish self-definition in antiquity' (273). This, therefore, was about the inability of the Gentiles to understand what was required of this new subjectivity of being a slave of Christ.

In Romans 7 we are presented with, as Emma Wasserman puts it, 'an internal monologue that depicts the radical disempowerment of reason at the hands of the passions' (2007, 794). She later adds: 'the appetites thus emerge as the fiercest and most dangerous part of the soul' (801). This move towards a "speech-in-character" (*προσωποποιία*) interpretation of this passage highlights the battle with the passions over the soul.⁷⁶ The voice in this passage is that of a Gentile who has been split by sin, and thus is thrown into a battle between the Spirit and the flesh (the will and the passions). This passage is a key text in the formation of the subject who is to be part of the body of Christ, which questions the ability of those outside the Jewish covenant to manage their carnal urges.

The subjects of the Christ-event struggled with understanding its truth (which was perhaps itself an impossible offshoot of thinking prevalent in Stoicism). Paul is attempting to relate the condition of being an Israelite under the law given by God to a new member created by the Christ-event as a slave of Christ. Each finds their righteousness under the promises of God. As Paul put it in his previous life, before Christ aligned him with the Gentiles:

circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. (Phil. 3.5-6)

⁷⁶ See Stowers (1994, 16-21) for an overview of this idea.

Wasserman uses the story of Medea from Greek mythology to exemplify what Paul is demonstrating. This is not the subject's struggle with sin as the basis of the human condition but the inability to make the correct choices because they have been deceived. Under the law Paul had not been deceived but since it was not designed for the Gentiles it deceived them. In the case of Medea, 'immoral actions result from competing claims about what is true...Medea kills her children because she holds false beliefs' (2007, 802). It is this deception - put differently, this transgression in the Symbolic - that is at the heart of violence. This is the responsibility that is thrown onto the community of believers; a responsibility over creation that extends back to its origins.

5.2.1 The Struggle against Original Sin

Who has not, at one time or around, found sympathy with the sentiment: 'I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but do the very thing I hate' (Rom. 7.15)? Was this not the very condition that had overcome Llewellyn Moss in his decision to take the bag of money? Moss knew what he was doing meant trouble, yet his desire for the money exceeded all other reason. He was possessed by the thought that the money would be a path to something greater. As with the fruit in the Garden of Eden, the prohibition only added to the forces driving him towards the object of desire. This is a condition of original sin: the nature of creation itself and our vulnerability to its violence.

Paul's words in Romans 7 have transcended cultures and eras to form a central cog of the Christian faith. We have here the very idea of imperfection (sin) that is at the heart of Christianity; this is the idea that we will always be in need of the redemption offered in God's grace extended to us through Christ's atoning death on the cross.

This, though, misses a crucial aspect of what Paul is attempting to demonstrate. It was about the effect on the whole community within a cosmological context which had reached its final days, not the soul of the individual. This is an integral aspect of Paul's evoking of Adam in his letter

to the Romans. It is not the effect of one man on his own soul as it is in works-righteousness model of reading Paul; which Neil Elliot rightly calls 'historically untenable and morally bankrupt' (2011, 44). It is instead the effect of that act throughout the entirety of creation. In comparing Adam to Christ by affirming that 'just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people' (Rom. 5.18), Paul is effectively testifying to the interdependency of the created world with regards to God's coming judgement (even Christ was subject to this economy). This is why it is so important for Paul to imagine the community of Christ as one body. It is not about the individual, but the effect of the individual on the society. Paul is deeply rooted in this understanding of the creation of humankind as the society that carries God through what he has created. As Paul puts it:

do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.
(1 Cor. 16-17)

Here we can see the connections between Žižek's interest in Paul and his continuing interest in the idea of communism. The statement is clear, act in the interest of the body of Christ or you will be destroyed.

Žižek's Paulinist theory of violent love is provocative. It conjures language of division in order to construct the battleground for a fight against the domination at the heart of the Symbolic structure of reality. He reads into Paul the type of violent fidelity which has epitomised many communist projects. He writes:

when Paul says, "there are no Greeks or Jews, no men or women...", this does not mean that we are all one happy human family, but rather that there is one big divide which cuts across all these particular identities, rendering them ultimately irrelevant: "There are no Greeks or Jews, no men or

women...*there are only Christians and the enemies of Christianity!*" Or, as we would have to put it today: there are only those who fight for emancipation and their reactionary opponents; the people and the enemies of the people. (2009b, 45)

This is a struggle within a community which places its purposes above those of the individual; likewise Paul's message is about the part that the people play in God's plan for His creation. Original sin, in this sense, is not about the condition of the individual but of the community. It is a theory steeped in theologico-political importance.

By remaining faithful to God through following the Christ-event, the community of believers could avoid false teaching, avoid destruction, and overcome their condition in original sin. Humans were condemned not by their own nature, but by their sinful participation in the world around them. Crucifixion, as a prominent symbol of the need to correct the nature of the people, typified the idea of controlling the population by force. The Christ-event undermined that culture of domination.

In describing the way in which 'anarchism is the political expression of freedom from original sin' (2012, 108), Critchley writes:

the idea of original sin is not some outdated relic from the religious past. It is the conceptual expression of a fundamental experience of ontological defectiveness or lack which explains the human propensity towards error, malice, wickedness, violence, and extreme cruelty. (108)

In overcoming the propensity to use this idea as the justification for the type of total dominance over life that was epitomised in the Roman Empire, Paul's Messiah tied all people under the command to love your neighbour. This, not the control of the state or the dictates of ritual or law, was how the Gentiles could overcome their condition in sin. This was the manner in which the emancipatory power of the law had been spread

throughout the world in the Christ-event. It was the power of love, and not Jewish particularities of law, which God intended for the Gentiles. For Paul it was not that the Gentiles needed to be controlled because of this condition; the attempt at correction (circumcision and so forth) through the old law was a false teaching (it was a sign the Jews special relationship with God). Rather, it was that they had to overcome the idea that they were trapped in this condition of sin without a hope of overcoming it. Participation in the body of Christ, dedicated to love for the neighbour, was the path to overcoming the idea that it was symbolic domination, and not a full experience of Christ, which meant emancipation. This was how Paul put it: 'there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus' (Rom. 8.1). Or, put differently, it was full participation in the foolish force of love, and not the law, empire, or any other power, which dictated the nature of the body of believers through the messianic era.

In this sense Romans 7 should be read alongside Genesis 2-3, confirming its description of the susceptibility to false teachings. Adam and Eve, as foreigners to the law, became fixated on this prohibited object causing their desire to increase and the violation of this divine command. The serpent, inherent to God's creation, seizes upon the prohibition placed upon eating the fruit from the tree in the middle of the Garden, convincing the woman to eat the fruit.

The violent appetite at work in the body of the Gentile sinner links desire to violence. For Paul, the community of believers could not be free from the violence internal to the community without its members freeing themselves from the power of the passions. And this power could only be overcome through the labour of the body of Christ. This link to the passions could not be broken without full submission to the Christ-event (a submission which, as we saw in Romans 13, was completely detached from the temporal system of authority). It was the coming to consciousness as part of the body of Christ, the life in the spirit, which was vital.

Joseph Blenkinsopp notes a similar idea in his reading of Genesis. He writes, 'the decisive event in the history of the garden is the passage from

individual to society' (2011, 68).⁷⁷ The choices and decisions made by the individual are not of consequence for that individual only. The important point, which reappears throughout the narratives of the Bible, is that 'disorder in social relations' (68) continually reappears because of the actions of individuals. This was an important aspect of Paul's Jewish background (the community acting in accordance with God's plan).

In the chaos of creation the will to choose means that the whole of society will be laboured with the consequences. If God does not want to continually destroy what He has created, as he did in the flood, then He must accept this reality. This is what makes Him so powerless in the narrative of Job. He is the creator of all things, more powerful than any other being, yet relies on the faithfulness of Job to justify His creation.

The author of Genesis 3 had already showed an awareness of this link between desire and violence; or, at least, the link between our actions and unintended consequences. The forging together of desire and violation caused the reality of shame, suffering, and expulsion from the garden. Genesis 2-3 tells the story of humankind's descent into creation and the compelling forces it encounters; Paul continues to tell this story in Romans 7. In the Garden of Eden the serpent helped tempt Eve into eating the fruit, but this was not an outside force tempting Eve - it came from *within* God's creation.⁷⁸ We are all driven, to an extent, by objects of desire but these objects are not only desirable because of their intrinsic properties. The fruit was turned into an object to be desired by factors inherent to God's creation. Eve's knowledge of good and evil only came *after* she ate the apple; what is the meaning of a transgression prior to this point? As Mark G Brett puts it:

⁷⁷Blenkinsopp argues for a coherent understanding of Genesis 1-11, in which the author brought together sources that would have had a cultural resonance in the context that the narrative was formed. It is a story of 'creation-uncreation-recreation' (17) and the drama of the struggle of humankind. This idea of creation, 'as a more complex phenomenon with several phases,' or alternatively, viewed from different perspectives and angles of vision, was developed not to scientifically or theologically trace our origins but to help reflect upon issues in the present, 'to add value and resonance to life in the present' (16).

⁷⁸This is a prominent theme of this passage. Even the tree is described by the narrator as '*nehmad*' (3.6) meaning 'that which is to be desired' (Alter 1996, 12).

This humbling of the humans is pointed up by the fact that, although *they* must first eat the fruit of a forbidden tree to gain wisdom, the talking reptile has wisdom to start with. (2000, 33)

This is the real irony of the story. Adam and Eve are betrayed by creation to the extent that it overwhelms them. The truth revealed in the fruit was that they did not know what they were doing; their naïve understanding was based on a command by God which was intrinsically conflicted with the world which God had created. The point the author is making here is not about the origin of the human race, but that this link between violence and desire is an aspect of creation itself. The deficiency does not belong in Eve, as if the guilt for eating the fruit somehow originates in her actions, but in her vulnerable position within the world of the serpent and the tree. She does, however, participate in this action, which allows her to come to consciousness as a part of the world as it is. She becomes aware of an infinite responsibility that was previously impossible for her to comprehend.

5.2.2 Eve's Voice in Romans 7

This is an integral aspect of original sin, and, for Paul, its overcoming was vital to God's plan for redemption. In Romans 7 we hear the voice of the Gentile still struggling to commit to the community of believers, still struggling to come to terms with this infinite responsibility. Stowers is one among many recent writers to insist that 'it is not the later Christian focus on Adam and Eve's moment of disobedience in the garden that stands behind chapters 1 and 7 of Romans' (1994, 275). It is certainly probable that, following Stowers, Paul is speaking in the voice of contemporary Gentile followers of Christ without Adam and Eve in mind. It is, however, the very idea of being betrayed by her own nature is that which makes Eve an appropriate prototype of the Gentile propelled into a new consciousness of Truth caused by the Event. Rom. 7.7-25, therefore, can be read as the confession of Eve. Not only the confession of being deceived by the

serpent, but of being betrayed by God. This struggle with desire was caused by the conditions of creation. If Paul was influenced by Stoicism in this passage, as has been suggested by Stowers, then ‘the passions were disturbed or diseased states of the soul engendered by false beliefs’ (262). The serpent disturbed Eve’s passions and increased her desire for transgressing God’s rule. We should, however, read beyond Paul’s intuition here. What Paul does not, or could not, acknowledge here is that this is the inevitable consequence of the Fall: it is creation itself that sells us into slavery under sin (7.14).

If God had not instructed Eve that she ‘shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden’ (Gen. 3.3), would the serpent have been able to produce in her all kinds of covetousness (Rom. 7.8)? Eve desired to be like God and so, along with Adam, ate the fruit from the tree. God did not deceive them with his warning; this act placed them in a body of death. As Paul would have understood it, until God’s promise made through Abraham, and the subsequent election of the Jewish people tied to God through the law given through Moses, humankind was separated from God. The Gentiles remained in this condition until Christ extended God’s grace to all people.

Austin Busch makes this link between Eve and Rom. 7.5-25, arguing: ‘Paul’s allusion to the Genesis episode is subtle, but it permeates the entire chapter and suggests a complex interpretation of Eve’s temptation and sin’ (2004, 12).⁷⁹ What makes Eve such a good fit for this passage is the tension between her ‘passive victimisation and active responsibility,’ that creates ‘a picture of the self split under sin’ (23). Eve ‘represents the dynamics of the self fragmented under sin’ (36), emphasising the complex nature of the moment of violation. This moment of violation was the moment when Eve comes to realise this split exists. She becomes suddenly aware of the absence and imminent presence of God and the freedom which this brings. God prohibition brought with it the possibility of

⁷⁹ Busch makes a number of indications why this passage is linked with Eve, including the link between sin’s deception in 7.11 and the serpent’s deception of Eve (mediated by the deception of the church members in Corinth in 2 Cor. 11) (15).

freedom, and the trespass revealed the consequences of this freedom - the emancipation from God's control but the responsibility over His wrath. The realisation of their nakedness was the realisation of their vulnerability and responsibility.

The Gentiles, who were isolated from the law, shared the particular vulnerability of Adam and Eve (or, more poetically, plays on the Hebraic words for "man" and "life"). These figures are manipulated towards eating the fruit from the tree. Adam is severely reprimanded on account of 'listening to his wife' (3.17) and Eve is cursed to be ruled by her husband (3.16). Paul, as we see throughout his letters, is deeply influenced by this story. What Paul cannot perceive, though, is that Yahweh Elohim appears as the archetypal villain of this text. Like Anton Chigurh in *No Country for Old Men*, Yahweh Elohim is the amoral force that acts without compassion, simply in the service of creation. This is what makes this such a piercing piece of wisdom literature; at once we are given life and death through the gift of a will that is bound to a volatile divine economy of choice and chance.

Circling back round to an important point Žižek's all too Lutheran-Lacanian reading of Romans 7, he understands this passage to mean that there was no sin prior to, or that exists independently of, the law: 'if it was not for the law, I would not have known sin' (Rom 7.7). Sin exists because of prohibition, Žižek writes:

here St. Paul and Badiou seem fully to endorse Hegel's point that there is Evil only for the gaze that perceives something as evil: it is the law itself that not only opens up and sustains the domain of sin, of sinful urges to transgress it, but also finds a perverse and morbid satisfaction in making us feel guilty about it. (1999, 150)

Here we find the idea that 'it is the very act of prohibition that gives rise to the desire for its transgression, that is, fixes our desire on the prohibited object' (1999, 148). Žižek reads this as Paul's assertion that 'the

law itself generates the desire to violate it' (2003, 104). For Žižek, the law holds the subject in a cycle of prohibition and violation, and it is only through the death of the moral God that we can break from this cycle (to see beyond the current world of masquerade).

Furthering his theological insight, in a connection between Paulinism and the story in Genesis 2-3, Žižek rejects the reasoning that '*Adam had to fall in order to come down to earth and dispense salvation*' (2014a, 130). He adds that, in this narrative line, God '*wants them to be miserable so that he will be able to help them*' (130). To avoid this perversity we must accept that it is the Fall, and not God Himself, which signifies the beginning. That, 'in Christianity, the true Event is the Fall itself' (126). In other words, the condition of the Gentile speaking in Romans 7 is the very same condition of Adam and Eve; they are vulnerable to the forces of this necessary freedom.

When Žižek argued, a decade earlier, that Christianity was 'probably *the example*' of how a Truth-Event can open up possibilities that did not previously exist in the Symbolic Order (1999, 147), he had not yet acknowledged this connection between the Fall and the Christ-event. For Žižek, again following G.K. Chesterton, the Christ-event *is* Original Sin (2014a, 129). It is a sign of our freedom and our responsibility. It reaffirms what always has been true: God is dead. It is in this sense that 'Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us' (Gal. 3.13). Christ went through this very experience himself to reveal the possibility of freedom of its condition. It is this insight that begins to take us back to why Paul is such a crucial figure in the diagnosis of violence inherent to capitalism.

5.2.3 *Objet Petit a*

In bringing Žižek and Paul together in this reading, the intention has not been to only understand Paul better in his own context. Our readings of Paul, and our understanding of his mission, can both challenge and influence ideas of political and cultural resistance. It is the diagnosis of

violence, and formulations of resistance, which are at stake in these readings; particularly the violence which exists at the zero-level of the symbolic construction of society.

Nudge theory, developed by Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein, has in recent years become a prominent theory in behavioural studies. It has wormed its way into the heart of political power, finding a place in the policy making of the administrations of Barak Obama as well as David Cameron. The basic premise is that in our everyday lives we can be, and are, “nudged” towards making certain decisions. Advertising campaigns, government policies, product placement, and so on, attempt to guide our decision making towards certain goals without revealing the little manipulations that have taken place. In utilising this theory the aim is to keep an illusion of our free-will intact while guiding (nudging) towards certain outcomes. In this sense, nudging is at the heart of the Symbolic Order; an attempt at influencing this zero-level of reality. The way we perceive the world is influenced, in no small part, by the way items are stacked on a supermarket shelf, the language used to describe government policy, the terms used to describe the victims of economic and social exploitation, and so forth. We are constantly nudged into making decisions and forming ideas that we believe are entirely created of our own volition. Our “free” will is bound to a lens on reality which is constantly manipulated by interested parties.

The prominently positioned tree with its good fruit (a delight to the eye and placed in the middle of the garden), the crafty serpent created by God, and the promise of the knowledge of good and evil - there are nudges at play in the manipulation of creation as encountered by Adam and Eve. As if it was not enough to create such a tree bearing this fruit, God then forbade them from eating from the tree on the penalty of death (a peculiar threat for those who had never experienced death). God redoubled the attraction of the object of desire by making it taboo.

The claim here is not one of pure determinism, that God designed the garden with only one possible outcome. We could end this story with Adam and Eve choking on the fruit, leaving Yahweh Elohim to ponder the very

literal deliverance of his threat. This is a narrative that demonstrates not only our limited frame of decision making ability but also the profound impact we can have even with that limited frame. Bartleby took this to its extreme - all he could do to jolt the lawyer's worldview was "prefer not to" do anything at all. Paul, in a similar way, could only fashion this critical disturbance within an eschatological framework. Their effect, however, extends beyond their own respective deaths.

What we have is a world with an infinite number of influences. Among those is what the serpent offered Eve: the missing object. Žižek exemplifies this in the idea of the 'totally useless' toy at the centre of a Kinder Surprise chocolate egg (2003, 145-171). The unknown toy at the centre of the egg replaces the chocolate as the object of desire; the mysterious X that is desirable precisely because it has been hidden. As Žižek puts it:

is this toy not *l'objet petit a* at its purest, the small object filling in the central void of our desire, the hidden treasure, *agalma*, at the centre of the thing that we desire? (145)

The fruit represents a void at the centre of desire; the promise of something beyond its ability to satisfy. Even living in the Garden of Eden was not enough to satisfy Adam and Eve, they required an unknown supplement to what they already possessed. This is the basic premise of consumerism: 'the more you have, the more you want' (Žižek 2003, 145). Adam and Eve were the first, in the Biblical narrative at least, to be exposed to the perversity of this truth.

Their discovery went beyond the uncovering of the empty centre of the excess in desire. The shattering nature of their encounter with the fruit came in that they actually encountered the raw Real of their desire. Eve, in eating the fruit, attained the impossible; she encountered the *Objet petit a* itself. In the case of the Kinder Surprise egg, what usually occurs is the dissolution of the object of our desire; a paradoxical mixture of mild satisfaction and disappointment which displaces desire onto a new

object. The Symbolic representation is experienced without any encounter with the Real. It is only an 'imaginary representation' that exists in *l'objet petit a*, 'it has no substantial consistency of its own, it is just a spectral materialization of a certain cut or inadequacy' (Žižek 2014a, 403). No object can exist without the Symbolic universe that shapes its understanding, meaning that the ultimate object of desire does not exist, it is already cut by what it is not, what it might also be; its potential to be *the* object is already denied because of its position within the Symbolic.

Eve experienced the monstrous void at the core of desire. She came to consciousness as the first atheist, experiencing not only the empty centre of the fruit but the empty centre of the garden itself. It is the horror of glimpsing the divine Real that causes the re-ordering of the world - not because it gives new, positive, meaning to a situation but because it dismantles all its previous claims to truth. In eating the fruit Eve became like God, emptied out into a chaotic and painful creation. The expulsion from the Garden revealed the infinite responsibility inherent to a world absent of the big Other.

Paul configures Christ as a new type of Adam; as an individual that reconfigures the societal. In his first letter to the Church in Corinth, he writes, 'for as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive' (15:22). He then adds to this idea in his letter to Rome:

therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned - To be sure, sin was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not charged against anyone's account where there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who is a pattern of the one to come. (Rom. 5.12-14)

Paul used this as an example for the Gentiles who had continued to suffer in the same sense as Adam and Eve. The kairotic moment of the

Christ-event revealed a reordering of identity so that all could share in the coming glory (Rom. 8.18). Paul believed that this could be attained by submitting oneself to Christ rather than the forces that bring death. He was enjoining the Gentiles to uncouple from the lies of the existing order, but instead of this leading to an Adamic separation from God it would lead to reconciliation in the Parousia (the divine outcome determined through the labour of the now-time).

5.3 Diagnosing Contemporary Violence

Looking back at Robert Hammerton-Kelly's argument that in Paul's worldview Adam symbolises the deformation of desire into rivalry, we can see his view that desire is intrinsically linked to violence.

The myth of the serpent, therefore, is also a scapegoating of the responsible self in the sense of the expulsion of responsibility onto an external fiction, and this scapegoating of the self is perhaps the most ironic moment in the story of the birth of consciousness. (1992, 95)

Is there not another way of reading this? The serpent does not represent the scapegoating of Adam but of God. It is the serpent, inside the body of creation, which reminds us of the nature freedom with regards to sin. This made the law necessary for the Jew and Christ necessary for the Gentiles. The narrative of the Fall provides an example of the way in which humankind is overcome by the desire necessary in God's creation.

Hammerton-Kelly acknowledges this point himself with regards to the market system that our desires are bound to.

We buy art for its investment potential and we write books for the market. The market defines our likes and dislikes rather than the other way around; there is very little free about the "free market system"; it is a network of bondage to one

another's imagined likes and dislikes, an essentially fantastic web of servitude to the phantoms of desire. (1992, 23)

This network of bondage is simply *what there is* - our actions have a rippling effect upon the world around us. Roland Boer takes this on a further stage with regards to our freedom.

My ability to choose from various products in a supermarket is therefore formal freedom: faced with a bewildering array of choices, I fail to see that the political economic structure that generates supermarkets has already set the boundaries of the range of choice. (2013, 203)

This range of choice only serves to tie us to an enslavement to desire - an obsession with the '(totally useless) plastic toy' at the centre of a Kinder Surprise chocolate egg (Žižek 2003, 145). These are the conditions of creation in the Garden of Eden that make the Fall the true source of creation. The problem of this "formal freedom" is its ability to hide the way we participate in systemic violence. Going back to Žižek's main antagonisms, this means that our freedom only allows us to continue to participate in *ecological* vandalism, in the *privatization* of the commons, in dangerous *new techno-scientific developments*, and in *new forms of apartheid*.

This systemic violence, that Žižek defines as the 'catastrophic consequences of the smooth functioning of our economic and political systems' (2008, 1), masquerades itself in our formal freedoms that really amount to the freedom to live inside of these systems or to die outside of them (like Bartleby).

Žižek tells the story of a man who is moving from Germany to work in Siberia. He establishes a code with his friend that if he writes to him in blue ink everything is true, but if he writes in red ink it is false. He soon writes to his friend explaining how wonderful everything is in Siberia - except there is no red ink in the shops (2002, 1). The punnchline here is that our formal freedom is always pinned to forces that are greater than

our ability to actually have freedom. These forces, furthermore, do not simply operate on their own. As Žižek puts it:

the experience of recent decades clearly shows that the market is not a benign mechanism which best works when left to its own devices - it requires a good deal of extra-market violence to establish and maintain the conditions for its functioning. (2009, 79)

This violence is hidden in the “bewildering array of choices” which we are faced with in a supermarket. If the spectacles that allowed such an array of choices were laid bare - if the condition of steroid injected chickens crammed together in small cages was placed behind the chickens on sale - then the boundaries of choices would be radically transformed.

5.3.1 The Violence of Capitalism

At the core of Žižek’s work is a desire to reveal and prevent the violence in the functioning of capitalism; to unmask the violence which manipulates reality and perpetuates systems of mastery to the benefit of private property and profit. In *The Fragile Absolute* he reveals this underlying impetus behind his work on violence.

(The) speculative dance of Capital, which pursues its goal of profitability with a blessed indifference to the way its movement will affect social reality. That is the fundamental systemic violence of capitalism, which is more uncanny than direct pre-capitalist socio-ideological violence: this violence is no longer attributable to concrete individuals and their "evil" intentions; it is purely 'objective,' systemic, anonymous. (2000, 15)

The earthquake that devastated parts of Haiti in 2010 is a reminder of such violence. The effects of natural disasters should not detract from the circumstances surrounding their appearance. In the case of Haiti, the social and economic circumstances which made the earthquake so devastating showed that the disaster already existed at the zero-level (in the already existing conditions). The contingent factor of the earthquake tore the veil between the outside and the disaster which already existed. The urgent demand for action can often hide the longer term need for our thinking and action that challenge the very structures which shape catastrophes. Countries such as Haiti should not be merely understood as “victim states,” as many, especially central, African countries are so often portrayed. This is precisely the point - they should not be understood as merely the subjects of Western charity, as if part of a separate world, but at all times as part of the same world.

This is one of the reasons why Žižek’s provocative language attacks those who give to charity. They create new walls and divisions before seeking to alleviate the problems exacerbated by such divisions.

The exemplary figures of evil today are not ordinary consumers who pollute the environment and live in a violent world of disintegrating social links, but those who, while fully engaged in creating conditions for such universal devastation and pollution, buy their way out of their own activity, living in gated communities, eating organic food, taking holidays in wildlife preserves, and so on. (2008a, 125)

The highest form of violence is perpetrated by those who have the power to manipulate what appears as normal in order to disguise the violent forces which maintain their lifestyle. The guilt of such self-serving living is alleviated by a capitalist notion of charity; “buy a Starbucks coffee, save a child in Africa” is an example of the pressure release valves through which this system can continue to function (Žižek 2011, 236). As this violence is anonymous, there is no longer even a need for those guilty of its

perpetuation to realise what it is that they participate in. The forces which preserve injustice, disruption, and violation are often inherent to the normal state of things, making them either invisible or appear as non-violent. Hidden from view are the exploitation of workers, the movement of capital with little regard for those it oppresses, and the preservation of the poor to serve the rich.

The so-called “enemies of capitalist democracies” (communists, Muslim extremists, socialists, corrupt individuals, and so on) are positioned as examples of the violent alternatives to this system. Winston Churchill’s famous statement on democracy as the “worst form of government apart from all others that have been tried” is an example of the way in which systems are maintained through the creation of powerful ideas; nudging the population into believing such ideas are self-evident. The statement assumes that all alternatives tend towards a greater disaster in a way that denies the opportunity to explore an alternative. This is something which Vattimo and Zabala agree with Žižek on. Such systems are ‘always prepared to exploit and dominate with a ‘human face,’ as Žižek often emphasises’ (Vattimo 2011, 134). Their argument is that it is the violent force of metaphysics which legitimises such exploitation and domination; a force that must be met by a ‘weak’ counter-force through a type of hermeneutics. Ethical action, trapped within this framework, can only begin to see clearly once the uncoupling from the symbolic mastery of the existing order has occurred.

5.3.2 The Infinite Demand

Critchley, an increasingly interesting figure in the turn to Paul, frames this resistance to an ideology of original sin in the idea of the infinite demand. The Christ-event, as a re-imagining of the world through a shift in time, exposed the truth of the powers who would even crucify God Himself in their attempts to gain mastery over the population. It is the infinite demand to love the neighbour which allows the faithful to participate in the truth of the Christ-event. This power message has been carried into

the secular era in many forms, including the powerful messages contained in science fiction (in many ways one of the bearers of the legacy of the Christ-event). Joss Whedon's *Firefly* and *Serenity* are heirs of this message of resistance.

In this fictional frame, a rusty old firefly class ship, built with smuggling in mind, enables this crew to survive outside the control of the Central Alliance (a multi-planet empire). Her captain (Mal) and first officer (Zoë) took up the vocation of smugglers after finding themselves on the losing side of a war fought for independence against the Alliance. This was a battle fought against the totalising claims of the Alliance over life itself. As explained by a young River Tam before her violation at the hands of the authorities:

People don't like to be meddled with. We tell them what to do, what to think: don't run, don't walk. We're in their homes and in their heads and we haven't the right. We're meddlesome.

After being trained, through force, by the Alliance as an assassin, River had locked within her head information about an experiment in population control carried out on one of the planets that was populated by the Alliance. In order to calm behaviour, restricting the boundaries of emotions, the air in planet's environment was manipulated with a form of mood suppressant. The consequences were catastrophic. Some of the population simply stopped living - they ceased all activity and waited for death. The rest of the population, however, reacted in such a way that they turned into violent creatures that are intent on raping, killing, and violently coercing others into their service.

Upon discovering the truth of this planet, the crew of *Serenity* become resolved to spread the information that they discovered: the determination of the Alliance to decide upon the limits of human potential. The crux of the matter, and a critique of Christianity itself, comes from Mal after defeating the agent sent to stop him from sending out the message throughout all the planets, in the form of a video sent in distress from a

scientist involved in the project before she is killed. He says, “I’m going to show you a world without sin.” Contained here is the message of the gospel: it is for the burden of freedom, of slavery to the neighbour, that Christ has set you free, no longer to be subject to any authority who would seek to control you through force or ritual (through their systemic and symbolic violence) (Gal. 5.1 paraphrase).

Freedom here is bound to the infinite demand to love the neighbour. At times Critchley’s *Infinitely Demanding* reads like a secret love letter to Paul, before this admiration for aspects of the apostle’s writings becomes more explicit in *The Faith of the Faithless*. According to Critchley, the same political disappointment that creates new ethical demands has also fuelled a return to Paul, precisely because Paul’s call to fulfil the law through love entails an infinite demand. It is this demand for the impossible which connects Critchley’s work to Paul. Despite the enormity of their differences in the perception of the situation and detail of this demand, they are connected by the imperative to create an immediate connection to the demands of the neighbour; for Paul in the community of the body of Christ, and for Critchley in ethically driven political communities. For both, this is the way in which the possibility arises for original sin to be overcome.

Critchley draws a comparison between this infinite demand and the idea of the commandment, identifying the Beatitudes as an important example of this connection.⁸⁰ He cites Benjamin’s example of the commandment not to kill as being distinct from the law; it does not entail punishment, rather it places a demand on the people to do their utmost to follow these commands. This demand, though, comes not from God but directly from the face of the neighbour. This places an ethical demand on us not to harm or exploit them. Critchley states: ‘conscience is the

⁸⁰ Despite the lack of interest in the living Jesus in Paul’s letters, Critchley writes at times as if the two are synonymous with each other. Jesus and Paul are both marked by an infinite demand; both called their followers to live by impossible commandments. He writes that ‘Jesus’ ethical demand is a ridiculous demand’ (2012, 220).

location of the ethical demand, a demand that is impossibly demanding, a demand to be infinitely responsible, a demand that divides us, that sunders us' (2007, 87). Whether Paul thought that the demand was impossibly demanding is a matter for debate, but at least many within the community of believers did. In a way that was reminiscent of Eve in the Garden, it tore them between a slave to the law of God and a slave to the law of sin.

This demand is tied to the Event. As Badiou puts it, on becoming a subject of the truth, 'that is to say at any given moment, everything he is - his body, his abilities - is called upon to enable the passing of a truth along its path' (1993, 40). Situated here is an example of complex relationships that drive continental philosophy. Critchley draws upon Levinas (the face of the neighbour) and Badiou (the Event) in order to help construct his idea of the infinite demand, despite the yawning (and often hostile) gap that separates Badiou and Levinas. In this stitching together of opposing figures, Critchley identifies faith as the 'lived subjective commitment' that is synonymous with the infinite demand which he associates with Paul (2012, 162).

The Christ-event placed an infinite demand on Paul, and the content of this demand was to bring the message of fulfilling the law through the love for the neighbour to the Gentiles. The crucifixion of the Messiah was at the centre of 'a political theory of the wretched of the earth' (2012, 159) through aligning God with the lowest place in the Roman chain of honour. The command to love the neighbour that was at the heart of the scriptures (Lev. 19.18) became the foundation of faith in the messianic era. As Critchley puts it:

if faith is the coming forth of the subject in the proclamation of an infinite demand, then love is the labour of the subject that has bound itself to its demand in faith. (2012, 165)

In a reading of Paul that follows a similar line to Agamben, we can see the neat tapestry of thinkers which Critchley stitches together here; he writes: 'the power of being in Christ is a powerless power... it gives subjects a potentiality for action through rendering them impotent' (160). Love is the

weak force which allows the potential for something else to exist outside the framework of the existing order. It is the fact of already being redeemed that makes us impotent; or, in other words, we do not seek power because we know that Christ has already taken such power away through the resurrection. Love is the essential action after accepting to participate in the unfolding truth of the Christ-event.

This demand is blocked in the global financial system by the demands to make profits, to grasp power, and to ceaselessly consume. In opposition to Critchley, Žižek insists that charity becomes a discharge of these demands, a placebo to allow these demands to continue to fuel the primarily self-serving system of capital. The type of argument that ethical philosophers align with the continuation of capitalist democracies are twisted here. Peter Singer narrates the example of a drowning boy and the question of whether or not you would ruin a new pair of expensive shoes to save that boy's life (conflating this situation with a decision between buying a new pair of shoes and giving the money to a charity which might save a young boy's life).⁸¹ Is this decision not already caught up in an ethical system which is already unjustifiable? If you buy the new pair of shoes you then aid the economy, therefore increasing the opportunity for someone else to give to charity - or do you give the money to charity and hope that it invests in the economy in some way as well as saving the boy's life? The dilemma is already wrapped up in the way in which the economy operates.

It is the economy which is the master of this situation. The attempt to create a fairer economy for all is also fraught with the contradiction of a market-driven economy which by its very nature is unfair. The split here is more than between the decision to gratify the desire to buy a new pair of shoes or to give to charity; the split is between what is possible within the economic restrictions of the market and what becomes possible when the violent forces defending those boundaries are exposed. Expensive shoes are usually no more than empty signifiers which are utilised within an economy of phantasmic desires, but they are empty signifiers which are nonetheless vital in the mechanisms of capitalism. This is where Critchley's

⁸¹ In the documentary *Examined Life* (2008).

idea of the infinite demand is particularly interesting, and, rather perversely (given his criticisms), what moves him towards Žižek's divine violence. It is not the withdrawal from charity that forces divine violence but the withdrawal from everything but charity. Capitalism, by its very nature, cannot survive if charity is moved to its centre.

5.3.3 Militant Weakness

Charity, as a facet of Pauline love, is understood here as a twisting of Bartleby's stance of pure negation. The violence at the centre of Paul's theory of love is situated in its militant weakness. Yet the hope that the powers will crumble under their own weight was indeed a foolish notion. The movement Paul was involved in was swallowed by the mechanisms of society under the Roman Empire. The idea that paying taxes (which did not matter as time was short) and loving the neighbour would hasten the Parousia turned out to be false; or, at least, the community lacked the sufficient faith to force the appearance of the divine. Žižek asks that we do the same - yet the practical questions that haunt Paul's letter to the Romans remain. Do we pay taxes or not? In the United Kingdom, taxes supported the war in Iraq at the same time as the National Health Service, it bailed out morally dubious banks while providing vital services to the poorest in society. Paul's militant weakness can only relate to such situations by moving towards the infinite demand on the individual in their impact upon society. As with Eve's condition relating to original sin, the situation can only be transformed through the transgression that reveals falsehood of the truth propagated in the existing order.

The important detail is in the way the Christ-event transformed the Symbolic Order for those like Paul. The resurrection of the Messiah after his brutal murder on a Roman cross transformed the economy of power. It is in this sense that Critchley goes as far to say that 'Nietzsche's call for a revaluation of values is based on a sheer jealousy of Paul's achievement in bringing about such a revaluation' (2012, 156). Nietzsche's valorising of the Roman Empire hides from view the fact that they too rely on a false

construction of truth. This uncovering of a genealogy of morals is precisely what Paul had already undertaken (if in a very different context to Nietzsche). This idea that power can come from a position of weakness is at the heart of the work of a thinker like Vattimo, but it is Kenneth Reinhard who articulates the idea best when he writes: 'a certain militant weakness constitutes the act of forcing - it is, we might say not exactly weakness, but playing from a weak hand' (2009, 82). This militant weakness should not be confused with the ethics of love related to thinkers like Levinas. Ethics is given in possibility, its boundaries, after the forcing of the limits of truth by this militant weakness which aims to destroy power itself.

Reinhard presses upon the crux of the matter here; turning the cheek (or paying taxes or not) in itself will not produce a new situation. It will probably create another victim. He argues that 'redemption requires something more revolutionary: the destruction of power as such' (2009, 105). This destruction comes from, in Benjamin or Žižek's language, an act of divine violence. To force such an occurrence requires participation in 'the process of forcing the logico-rhetorical expansion of the generic set of human and textual elements that will have implied the redemptive conclusion' (105).

For Paul, things are only complete when 'the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power' (1 Cor. 15.24). This destruction, this divine violence, comes through the love of your neighbour. In this new situation the truth becomes visible; the law is only fulfilled through love. This act of forcing undermines the current world powers by taking away the legitimacy of the source of their power. For Reinhard, the great mistake of the communist projects of the last century was to imagine Communism as an 'objective state construction' (2009, 104). Paul is not interested in taking that kind of power; his is a weak politics, focused on releasing the potential of love.

Clayton Crockett writes about this radicality in relation to the forcing of divine violence. He argues, in the same vein as Paul, that we must find a

way to undercut the powers that reproduce the conditions that create suffering.

In our contemporary corporate-capitalist world, the most difficult and maybe the most subversive act is to choose to not do something, not to shop, not to buy, not to consume, not to work. Only a drastic constraint of our incredible potentiality to produce, consume, and devastate natural resources can perhaps ward off social collapse and increased global warming. Such action seems incredibly urgent but virtually impossible given current political and economic arrangements. The effort required to stop or at least slow down our production, consumption, and proliferation of forms of violence is so enormous that it must be divine because “only a god can save us.” But if we await such a god it will not come; only if we find a way to realize this impotentiality of divine force or weakness can we preserve our transient happiness and be saved. (Crockett 2013, 59)

Divine violence undermines such authority and the foundations of its power. As Neil Elliot puts this type of idea with regards to Paul: ‘Read in apocalyptic terms, Paul’s proclamation of Jesus’ resurrection means, inevitably I think, that the biopower of the state is *not* sovereign, that its totalising claims can be resisted’ (2010, 147). Paul’s mission to the Gentiles, and his faith in Christ as Lord, was also based on the type of fundamental antagonisms that has led Žižek to the position that capitalism cannot be fixed but must be opposed. The pressures on God’s plan for creation had reached a point of rupture, making the appearance of the Messiah a necessity. Paul’s activity in forcing Jesus to have been the Messiah is played out in the idea of radical weakness; the Messiah became a necessity in creating the potential for the totalising control of the powers of that age “not to be.”

First and foremost it is the narrative of the age which is being resisted. The fictions which regulate reality are transformed for the believers in the Christ-event. It is this dramatic shift in the narrative, through the undermining of metanarrative of Paul's world in the Roman Empire, which makes Paul an important figure in contemporary discussions about violence. Yet, following Žižek, Crichtley, and others in their own distinctive ways, we move beyond what Paul could acknowledge himself. Indeed, it is the death of God that allows us to understand the trick which Paul plays on the existing powers. He, perhaps rather unwittingly, rips metaphysical certainty away from beneath their feet. It is Paul who allows Nietzsche to come to understand the death of God, even if Nietzsche himself was unaware of this. The world of manipulation and masquerade which he so forcefully describes in the *Genealogy of Morals*, is precisely the world which Paul described. Nietzsche's hatred of Paul is down to his own historical conditioning; the power of Christianity hides from him the genius of the trick played by Paul on the world around him.

5.4 The Blood turns Brown

One of the greatest lines of separation between Žižek and Paul is drawn in relation to the nature of the illusion at the centre of the Christ-event. Put differently, Žižek fully understands the trick inherent to kenosis while Paul is still very much in awe of God's plan for His creation. Yet both understand the possibility inherent to the God who humbles Himself to His own creation. It allows the subject of the Event to pass through an apparent impasse between the law (control) and sin (imperfection) by shifting the power of the narrative towards a power, indeed a (weak) violent power, which can only exist in the hands of the people.

In Rian Johnson's film *The Brothers Bloom* (2008), Mark Ruffalo and Adrian Brody play con-men brothers adept in the art of illusion. Stephen and Bloom employ a variety of tricks, large and small, in order to secure their pay-offs. In revealing the tell of one such sleight of hand, Bloom explains that the problem with fake blood is that it remains red. Real

blood fades to a rustic brown. In performing their final job together, in a nod to much used trope in film they encounter unexpected trouble from those they have previously conned. As this trouble builds towards the climax of the story, Bloom finds a bloodied Stephen seemingly dying on the stage of an abandoned theatre. Stephen reveals this to Bloom as his final trick: the staging of his own death to allow Bloom and his new found love, Penelope, to escape. This miraculous staging was designed to buy them their freedom. After a final embrace, Bloom and Penelope make their exit. The twist is revealed some time later, as Bloom glanced at the “fake” blood that had been transferred onto his coat - it had turned brown.

This final trick is the same one played in the unfolding of the Christian narrative. The triumph of the resurrection allowed Paul to understand his freedom, but, and we cannot be sure of the extent of Paul’s realisation of this, as Paul awaited death in Rome the real trick of Christ’s death was made clear. He would have been in no doubt that Christ’s body was subject to an actual resurrection, but hidden in this new body was the actual death of the God that took place on the cross. It was the death of the God that guaranteed the outcomes of our actions - the death of divine providence. This turn should be read back into Paul’s struggle with accounting for the economics of messianic time. In this sense, this death lives on in the responsibility of the community of believers, with no guarantee that their actions will result in the return of Christ.

Žižek relates this idea of the illusion to Christ’s death. Using Christopher Nolan’s film *The Prestige* (2006), he recounts the illusion of a disappearing bird.

A little boy in the audience starts to cry, claiming that the bird was killed. The magician approaches him and finishes the trick, gently producing a living bird out of his hand - but the boy is not satisfied, insisting that this must be another bird, the dead one’s brother. After the show, we see the magician in the room behind the stage, bringing in a flattened cage and throwing a squashed bird into a trash bin - the boy was right. (2009a, 286)

The trick here is the same as the one that occurs between the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. The resurrection is not merely a subsequent event that replaces the crucifixion to reveal that Christ managed to cheat certain death. Upon seeing the empty tomb and the risen Christ one must insist, as the little boy did, that this must be a replacement Christ. Of course, the actual physical resurrection of Christ was essential to the beginnings of the Christ movement. Indeed, it was essential to Paul's potential, as a Pharisee, to formulate the Christ-event. It was indispensable to the messianic event of a Pharisee. Yet the insistence here is that the crucifixion and resurrection occur simultaneously - Christ is both dead *and* alive.

Further on in Nolan's *Prestige*, the illusionist discovers a trick with a real centre; a replica of any creature can be conjured upon the death of the original subject in a machine created by the inventor and physicist Nikola Tesla. With this machine the illusionist himself is able to perform a version of the bird trick, dying in a pool of water each night with a replica appearing to the side of the stage. Each night the illusionist dies and is replicated - always remaining dead and always finding new life. It is in this way that Žižek understands the death of Christ: he must actually die, and remain dead, in order for his resurrection to occur.

Following Žižek, Peter Rollins uses this idea of the prestige (the twist/turn in the illusion) in relation to the moment of Christ's death. In *The Divine Magician*, Rollins argues that the moment of revelation occurs when the curtain in the Temple is torn. Revealed behind the curtain is nothing, an empty space. God is not present in the Holy of Holies but is actually out there dying on the cross in the body of a slave. This God is dead and cannot reappear in the resurrection in anything other than the body of believers.

The resurrection was not only a sign that the messianic age was about to begin, it was also revelatory in its proclamation of the nature of the relationship between the Messiah and the community of believers. It is in this way that these communities symbolically cannibalised the body of

Christ. The Lord's Supper not only remembered Christ's death on the cross, it also signified the acceptance of responsibility over that body. These communities of believers were 'answerable for the body and blood of the Lord' (1 Cor. 11.27); they carried the responsibility for the fate of Christ. This was a symbolic participation in the truth of the Christ-event: Christ must be consumed in order to give him life. In this act there is remembrance of death and a call to new life.

Žižek understands the death of Christ on the cross as the death of 'the "private" God, the God of "our way of life"' (2009a, 295). The universal appeal of Christ appears from this space: 'it appears as the "holy Spirit," the space of a collective of believers subtracted from the field of organic communities, of particular life-worlds ("neither Greeks nor Jews")' (295). This is the radically demanding revelation in the simultaneous death and resurrection of Christ; God dies in order that he might regain life within a new collective of believers. God announced his triumph and his death. The absence of an external moral or political force is coupled with the burden of responsibility over the divine economy; the burden of debt to the neighbour cannot be repaid in full. This, however, was not the shattering of the Jewish position; rather, it was the fulfilment of a sequence beginning with Adam and was also present in the narratives of Abraham, Moses, David, and the prophets.

5.4.1 The Commons

Central to this stripping of power is the idea of common access to the promises of God. The Roman Empire privatised the power over life and death through mechanisms such as crucifixion. Christ had to break the law to become a curse in order to show that they had no such power. As Michael Hardt puts it, 'Pirates have a much more noble vocation; they steal property. These corporations instead steal the common and transform it into property' (2010, 137). Paul was deeply concerned by any privatisation of God's promises, and this meant aligning everyone directly under Christ as slaves.

It can be of little surprise that Paul's name is evoked in the contexts of those seeking to re-imagine forms of communism; of alternative views of the world beyond its current condition. The determination to redeem some form of communism has a root in the will to see what should be common - food, water, housing, work, medicine - to all. Žižek, in summarising this idea, looks towards 'what Hardt and Negri call the 'commons,' the shared substance of our social being, the privatisation of which involves violent acts which should also, where necessary, be resisted with violent means (2010, 212). This inherent violence of privatisation is shown in the mega-rich, who own large amounts of intellectual and physical property; from drug or technological patents to the control over water supplies in drought ridden countries.⁸²

In general terms, the belief at play at the heart of capitalism is that human nature is essentially selfish, that people are dominated by the desire to seek their own interest before the interest of the other. In order to contain this propensity toward self-interest from spilling over into conflict, it becomes necessary to create networks of personal interest which forms a system that in turn necessitates self-interest only within its own contexts. In Christian theology the parallel is found in the defective soul in a theory of original sin which dictates that humankind cannot redeem itself.

Communism, on the other hand, tends more towards the idea that political, social, and economic redemption is possible only through the labour of the people. Paul, in this sense, is aligned more closely to communism: serve the people in the body of Christ or face the wrath of God. And the vital lesson of Paul, for Žižek, Badiou, and others connecting Paul with the idea of communism, is that the wrath always belongs to an external force which is only ever an indirect consequence of the actions of

⁸² A report by the Oakland Institute in 2011 claimed that 'it is alarming that investors are free to use water with no restrictions' in Ethiopia. According to the report, investors purchase large areas of land which leaves much of the local population displaced and with a lack of farmable land. The main production in many of these areas is the farming of land to produce the raw materials for bio fuels - so that wealthier countries can ease their concerns about human-made climate change. <http://www.oaklandinstitute.org/land-deals-africa-ethiopia>

the people. This is an idea of communism very much opposed to the Stalinist and Maoist projects of the 20th century. It is not for human authority to wield this wrath, it is only for God alone; the power which is always beyond our mastery. In this imagining, original sin is the name for the corrupting power of the forces founded within creation, and communism is the name for the collective struggle against this force. Yet it only through divine violence that it can hope to overturn the dominance of the existing order, through exposing its pretence at truth.

It is here that we can participate in redemption without any certainty of the outcome. This interpretation of redemption, of the hope of the overturning of present suffering, should be aligned with the activity of the community of believers working to overcome their oppressors. It is here that Vattimo and Zabala's hermeneutic communism should be read alongside divine violence. They claim:

hermeneutic weak thought is the thought of the weak, of those who are not satisfied with the established principles imposed on them and who demand different rights, that is, other interpretations. In this politics of interpretation, conversation becomes the realm where the powerful describers of the world can listen to the requests of the weak and perhaps change their selfish priorities. (2011, 107)

It is the ability to imagine the world in a different way - attempting to force change even in the most difficult of circumstances - which creates the possibility for a different world to exist. This is where hope is situated in the violent love which becomes possible after the Christ-event.

5.4.2 The Domain of Pure Violence is the Domain of Love

Žižek is the Christian-atheist who provokes something which is easy to forget about Paul: his aims are divisive, radical, and, at the symbolic level, violent. This is clear for Žižek through the parallel which can be drawn

between their respective battles. They participate in the labour of the destruction of the existing order through participating in the revelation of its untruth. They enjoin other to unplug from the symbolic restraints inherent to that order, so that the labour of the people can begin. Love is what ties the subject to a demand outside of the demands of the current order, bypassing systems which dictate that the people must be controlled from above. The power is displaced from on high and distributed among the people, but only to the extent that they remain answerable to a divine force. It is the realisation that original sin is not a deficiency in the individual which needs to be controlled, but the name for the nature of what is generated within the created world. It is the consequences of the simultaneous death and resurrection of God.

The connection between Žižek and Paul is not found in a historical reconstruction of the apostle, but in a re-contextualisation of his message. Paul was a radical Pharisee who believed he was living in the end times; in an era where the messianic labour of love was vital to God's plan for creation. For Žižek the modern apostle is found in figures such as Julian Assange and Edward Snowden, who leaked state secrets through mediums such as WikiLeaks. The crux of the motivation here is not found in ethics or morality, though they remain important categories, but in the revelation of truth and its ability to shatter the boundaries that are imagined in the existing order. In other words, to disrupt the systemic and symbolic violence of the powers and allow a new labour to begin which will create the foundations of what will inevitably follow.

Žižek pushes this connection further, to their meeting in communism. He argues that 'WikiLeaks is doing the practice of communism. WikiLeaks simply enacts the commons of information' (2014b, 52). The job of the whistle-blowers here is the contemporary technologico-political version of Paul's theologico-political pitting of God against the state through the death and resurrection of Christ. Its message is clear, a God willing to give up his sovereignty and be humiliated at the hands of the governing authorities has real power. The power of crucifixion held no threat over the self-defined slaves of Christ in the context of the time that had arrived.

This foolish power of weakness, therefore, situates the fulfilment of the law (the whole point of creation) in the body of Christ bound to the love of the neighbour. The split subject of Romans 7, the victim of sin, therefore is not read, as Paul reasoned, as the subject on the cusp of perfection through weakness (2 Cor. 12.9) but as the subject already striving against the powers of the Symbolic Order.

This is not only the struggle to radically reconfigure the zero-level of our world, but also the very participation in this reconfiguration. In Paul's case, taking the revolutionary impact of the Christ-event and participating in its unfolding truth. Žižek and Paul, in their respective ways, write in the service of a difficult and demanding message which would attempt to violently jolt the world out of its current state. What is acknowledged here is the connection between all actions, and the necessity of the community being connection in the possibility created in the unplugging from the boundaries created by the existing order. With this foundation the potential is released to participate in the revolutionary labour which makes no specific demands for power. This requires a leap of faith; that the actions of the community can force the possibility for something new to occur, without any pretense that the actions hold any guarantees.

Paul's focus, given his religious and eschatological context, was very different to Žižek's contemporary political and cultural context of writing. Yet they converge on this demand on labour of faith and truth. Paul's imagined God is a loving God, undoubtedly, but also a violent God. Not violent in a will to punish or destroy, but as an amoral God who deals in consequences alone. He is the absent God poured into creation. The demand is on the ability to act, to break beyond the confines of the Symbolic Order; to work against original sin and participate in the labour of love of the now-time which serves a divine violence.

Conclusion

Chigurh, the Shopkeeper, and Original Sin

This brings us back to Cormac McCarthy's *No Country for Old Men*. McCarthy through his novels, despite no particular religious affiliation, displays a fascination with the nature of God. The figure of Anton Chigurh evokes a theory concerning the connection between violence and original sin in the inevitability and interconnectedness of our actions. This is his explanation.

Anything can be an instrument, Chigurh said. Small things. Things you wouldn't even notice. They pass from hand to hand. People don't pay attention. And then one day there's an accounting. And after that nothing is the same. Well, you say. It's just a coin. For instance. Nothing special there. What could that be an instrument of? You see the problem. To separate the act from the thing. As if the parts of some moment in history might be interchangeable with parts of some other moment. How could that be? Well, it's just a coin. Yes. That's true. Is it? (57)

When the proprietor of a filling station crossed paths with Chigurh he faced an unexpected and potentially decisive moment in the course of his life. The outcome of that moment, whether or not Chigurh would kill him, was placed on the toss of a coin (a call which landed in his favour). His short yet traumatic encounter with this mercenary might have ended the other way if it were not for the toss of the coin. This moment was fraught with the fragility and volatility of luck; the shopkeeper could see that his life was not in his own hands.

Ostensibly at least, he had done nothing to warrant this visit from Chigurh. He had taken on the isolated filling station from his father-in-law, placing him directly in the path Chigurh was being propelled through. There was no moral judgement being pronounced over the man himself in

this encounter. He is put in this position by a myriad of “things,” small and large, which have brought both him and Chigurh to this point.

The response of Job’s accusers in this situation might be that he was being judged on the morality of his past deeds, and that the coin had found him innocent. We should, however, resist asserting such pronouncements of meaning in relation to the amoral force of Chigurh; his terrifying presence is not one of moral judgement but of excess turned into force.

Chigurh, in many ways, brings into being the unintended consequences of those acting within his world. This is not unrelated to moral or ethical sensitivities; he is directed most of all by the greed and selfish actions of others. Yet his violence, furnished elsewhere, is unleashed upon all who lack the luck to avoid his force. It is in the coin toss that potentiality moves into actuality; a move which has no guarantees in the big Other which would suture it to a type of justice. It is propelled by a series of transgressions, charting back to the original sin - found in the nature of creation itself.

The Road

This sense of risk is ever-present in our ethical, political, and religious activity; there are no guarantees in the decisions we make, the protests we participate in, or the ideals we put our faith in. It is with faith, often a foolish faith, through which we commit to resisting powers without resorting to physical violence. On this point Critchley is correct to follow Levinas in asserting that it is the infinite demand placed on us to love the other that drives this faith. Yet this is not possible without the type of perversity with which Žižek engages. The question that is most pertinent here is the very same question that Paul addressed: how can the narrative of the existing order be disrupted in order to make real change possible?

McCarthy’s *The Road* confronts us with a very different world than that of *No Country for Old Men*. In *No Country for Old Men* we are confronted with a violent force which rips through the world, in *The Road*

we are confronted by a violent world in which any sort of peace is hard fought for. Goodness struggles to find any foothold in this post-apocalyptic world of violence. A man and his young son travel through a landscape of gray in search for food, shelter, safety and, above all, hope.

In the aftermath of a catastrophic event, the United States has been turned into a cold, colourless wasteland. Any source of food is cause for great joy as the father and his boy attempt to reach the ocean, in search of anything beyond the hopeless landscape. Unlike many of his other works, McCarthy's post-apocalyptic nightmare ends in a peculiar hope. After the boy's father dies, which seems to re-affirm the absence of goodness from the world, the boy is taken in by a group of strangers who happened upon his plight. An unexpected, and quite foolish, hope had appeared as if out of no-where.

Is this a false hope of a world that can never be repaired or a true hope of emancipation from a seemingly insurmountable defeat? There are no guarantees either way. In comforting the boy after the death of his father, the women assures the boy, 'the breath of God was his breath yet it pass from man to man through all time' (306). This is the intense and infinite responsibility which we are charged with; in solitude, without the promise of the big Other that our endeavours to end oppression, inequality, and acts of destruction will succeed.

There is a sense in which both the outcome for the boy and the shop proprietor only leads to a false sense of hope; that avoiding the figure of death for another day does not change the hopelessness that pervades the worlds they inhabit. The issue here, as pertinent today as it was for Paul, is how to redeem a sense of hope within such landscapes. The wager of this work is that what makes Paul a potentially valuable figure for radical social and political movements is the way in which he configures a Messiah which cuts through the theologico-political stranglehold of the a historical monster, the Roman Empire. His articulation of a symbol that transformed a site of death into the foundations of life is a powerful subversion of the ideology of the age. In the same way as *Bartleby* reveals an example of radical resistance, Paul uses Christ as an impetus to resistance which

subverted the symbolic domination of the powers. Put differently, the Messiah resisted the ideological domination that pervaded the Symbolic; and this hope survives even beyond Paul's own death at the hands of these authorities.

In returning to the problem of disappointment, the issue was not with the force that was exerted but, rather, why this force did not accomplish its goal. In other words, the question is not about whether or not we should turn to physical violence to radically change the situation but why our force was rendered as nothing more than a footnote in a larger narrative. In this point Žižek is correct. Without the dismantling of the powers which control the parameters of our actions, they are ineffective, futile, or even assimilated into their narrative for its continuation. Žižek's accusation is that there is a lack of sufficient faith among those who resist contemporary economic and political powers. As Sheriff Ed Tom Bell would put it - you can't have wars without an arms trade, and you can't have an arms trade without ordinary people participating in it through their everyday-lives.

Where Žižek's interest in Paul and in violence converges is in the search for a type of revolutionary action which avoids the impotence of the tolerance of liberalism while also avoiding the destructive violence of fundamentalism. A response is demanded not just from the face of the neighbour, but also the systemic and symbolic violence of the ideological mechanisms, such as neoliberalism and consumerism, which are sustained under the general banner of capitalism; creating inequalities, divisions, domination over the poor, and environmental instability. Žižek's broad answer is to withdraw from these mechanisms and expose them to the divine; which contains the potential to reveal the (un)truth of the symbolism which sustains their functioning. Through this there is a revelation of alternative possibilities. Paul's Christ, in this sense, can be read in the same way as Bartleby; a disruptive force which revealed the way in which the powers regarded God's potential as their own. And ultimately Paul's mission also ends in the same way as Bartleby; death in, what one would assume was, a forgotten place. Paul could only invent a

guarantee which existed beyond his revolutionary and messianic moment in time. In this way Paul follows the path of Bartleby; he opens up the potential to overcome the identities ruled by the power of death, yet he dies in the service of his proclamation, only to then be consumed in greater narratives (beginning with the later epistles and the book of Acts).

It might appear as foolishness or perversity to follow this path without the certitudes embedded in fundamentalist religious thought, but it is also entirely enticing to thinkers such as Vattimo or Critchley, who have lost faith in the overbearing solutions of traditional religion or the totalitarian far left of the political spectrum. Paul's call to love the neighbour to fulfil the law has been of particular interest to such thinkers for this reason; he offers a narrative based on the subversion of authority, and a radical hermeneutics embedded in the compulsion to fulfil the law through love on the basis of God's judgement on the powers which propelled his death and resurrection. It is a religion after the death of the big Other, with no guarantees under natural law, and the onus placed fully on the capacity of the subject of the Christ-event to understand what it means to participate in this love for the neighbour.

There has been a wide variety of, often conflicting, ways in which this revolutionary potential has been assessed in continental philosophy. The tension between these thinkers, as with the dispute between Critchley and Žižek, has at times spilt over into conflict. Yet Žižek's divine violence, Critchley's infinite demand, Badiou's Truth-Event, and Agamben's potentiality of messianic time are all indebted to this radical thinker who opposed the biopolitical power of the Roman Empire with his articulation of the crucified Messiah who defeated the powers of death.

To follow the God who dies on a cross - being an active part of the community of believers as an integral part of the body of the Christ in the now-time - implies not escalating a situation by resorting to physical violence, but through declaring war on that which obstructs our servitude to the neighbour and the very participation in the body of Christ.

The Example of Bonhoeffer

The question is, in this context, what makes Žižek an important figure in this legacy of Christianity? There are certainly figures in Christian history who have exemplified what it means to dedicate themselves to the demands of participating in the body of Christ. In the example of Dietrich Bonhoeffer we find a Christian whose thought moved around the edges of the moulding of this thesis. The essence of ethics in Bonhoeffer's interpretation of what it means to be a Christian is that we 'must take our share of responsibility for the moulding of history in every situation and in every moment, whether we are the victors or the vanquished' (1997, 9). Bonhoeffer provides a similar provocation to the understanding to the Christ-event as many of the interpreters of Paul in continental philosophy: the responsibility of living within a world without the direct cover of the big Other, sharing in responsibility and suffering of Christ.

Critchley turns to Bonhoeffer as an example of a figure dedicated to an infinite demand rather than law-like principles. Indeed, in his participation in the plot to assassinate Hitler, his ethics rest on the position of a 'freely assumed responsibility that, in extreme situations and as a last resort, [he] is willing to act violently' (2012, 236). This, according to Critchley, is not a celebration of violence but 'an infinite responsibility for violence that, in exceptional circumstances, might lead us to break the command "Thou shalt not kill"' (237). It is the 'willingness to become guilty' which 'is the price one pays for freedom' (237).

The point which is particular to this thesis is that while the call to physical violence might only occur in exceptional circumstances, the subject of the Christ-event must always be willing to participate in forms of violence. That is to say, the real power of Bonhoeffer's example is not that he was willing to resort to physical violence, but that the demand to love the neighbour extended to all circumstances he encountered, even if that included breaking the commandment to kill. The lesson from Žižek here is vital: such exceptional action, indeed violence, must also be

participated in when confronting the systemic and symbolic violence which underpins the situations we encounter.

In discussing the turn to Paul, Jens Zimmermann reminds us that 'Bonhoeffer's political resistance to the Nazi regime on the very unity of incarnation and participation found in Paul' (2010, 248). Zimmermann's description of Bonhoeffer's particular understanding of the Christian legacy, centred on the idea of the church acting as 'Christ in community' (248), resonates with Žižek's interest in the idea of the political force of the body of Christ. Zimmermann, however, concludes that Paul has not yet been allowed sufficiently to challenge continental thought; that figures such as Žižek, Badiou, Taubes have not yet fully realised the power of Paul's theologico-political position. Bonhoeffer, in this sense, had already grasped precisely what was at stake in the subversive message of the Christ-event: that it created a community not only dedicated to the example of Christ but responsible for the continuation of Christ in the world; yet it this "new creation" which Žižek pointing towards in his turn to the apostle (even if he has not explicitly made the connection to Bonhoeffer). Žižek already shows an awareness of Bonhoeffer's idea that 'whoever from now on attacks the least of people attacks Christ' (251). It is this principle which brings him to the potential of divine violence in *Bartleby*, and the opposition between the people and the enemies of the people on the basis of the symbolic and systemic violence carried out against the least among us.

Bonhoeffer, like Paul, is less concerned with moral absolutes than he is with being involved in that same struggle to become a subject of the Christ-event. It is the responsibility of the Christian to live in a 'godless world,' to 'share in Christ's suffering' and the 'powerlessness of God' (1997, 190). In this same sense, there is also an echo of Bonhoeffer's critique of power and of ideology in Žižek's work. Is this not a little bit of Žižekian provocation already prefigured in Bonhoeffer: 'like a bull he rushes at the red cloak instead of the person who is holding it' (1997, 1)? This is why Žižek can call himself a Christian with a great sense of legitimacy. They are both, following Paul, captivated by the shattering of

God's omnipotence caused by Christ's simultaneous death and resurrection.

Bonhoeffer's own participation in the body of Christ took on a devastating relevance in the political and humanitarian disaster of Nazism which developed around him. The plot to assassinate Hitler was a small yet remarkable part of the response to the demand to share in the experience of Christ, which did not define the exception to his ethics but an example of it. In such moments we see how questions of morality lose their grounding in a desperate move that is compelled by the debt of love to the neighbour.

What would it have meant to be part of a successful assassination attempt on Adolf Hitler? Harry Mulisch, through his novel *Siegfried*, asks the question, 'to what extent was Hitler really a human being?' (151). Mulisch's character Rudolf Herter casts Hitler as some sort of antichrist, but more than this.

The only thing I can think of is with Hitler we are dealing with something like a metanatural phenomenon - comparable with the impact of that meteorite in the Cretaceous period that wiped out the dinosaurs. Except that he was not an extraterrestrial creature but an extraexistential being: Nothingness. (148)

This man equated with Nothingness held a responsibility for unconscionable hatred and suffering. Yet in killing him there would have been no guarantees of what the outcome would have been. It could have led to a disintegration of the ruling powers or, conversely, it could have led to a more cautious replacement regime which might have prolonged the suffering under Nazism. The question at the heart of this demand for action was how to divert or destroy the long history of violence that led to this point. Put differently, how a rip might be torn in the Symbolic curtain of the ruling powers in order to expose their very untruth.

This is precisely Žižek's Pauline point with regards to divine violence: we are already participating in violence, and we cannot hope to break from

its coils without radical, even violent, action of our own. What we require is the perversity of the community of adherents to the Christ-event who would ritually consume their own Messiah in order to remind them of their responsibility to carry the body of Christ through the messianic era.

Žižek and the Christian Legacy

Like Paul, and like Bartleby, Bonhoeffer lives in the service of the hope of the possibility of something which exists beyond the current boundaries of the world conditions. This is why Žižek can claim to be a significant contemporary voice in the tradition of Christianity. It is a reminder of the impossible demand of the Christ-event and the attempt to cling onto its unfolding truth. Christianity is a name for the necessary betrayal of Paul's eschatological context. His message could only live on if it could break out of its perceived time scheme. The act of betrayal and the act of giving life are connected here; Paul is given life in the death of his past certainties. This is the mechanism at work in the trick of the Christ-event. God has to die, and remain dead, in order to continue to live on in the actions of the community of believers. This was the responsibility which defined Bonhoeffer's life as a Christian. This is the figure that accepts responsibility for their part in the world, but also understands that they are bound to the service of a faith in something beyond their immediate control. There are no guarantees in the outcomes, but the possibility of something other than the current violent structures which dominate political, economic, and cultural narratives.

This is an uncomfortable legacy. It requires the body of believers to live beyond the service of their own desires. It, as Žižek puts it, 'madly insists on the impossible' (2011, 116). It demands of its subjects an impossible mandate to fulfil the law through love, lived in the service of the possibility of a new world. This provocation leads us to Paul's own theory of divine violence encapsulated in Romans 13. This is the relationship between the actions of the people with divine wrath. Paul's imagining of Christ was designed to illustrate that the authorities were not

absolute; that the real power existed in the subversive act of the death and resurrection of Christ. Yet outside of a Pharisaic tradition which believed that the resurrection of the dead was a sign of the coming end, we are left with an even more troubling and demanding narrative.

Žižek's Bartlebian example of resistance, of refusing to participate in the symbolic and systemic violence of the ruling ideology through refusing to participate in any of its mechanisms, is also impossibly demanding. Yet through doing so there is the possibility to participate in the forcing of something new; something beyond what the current situation allows. This is why the decisions to cease participating in charity or to participate in a plot to kill Hitler can remain emphatically Christian. They are dedicated to the possibility of emancipation for the neighbour. The Real and the Symbolic replace God and creation in this narrative, but they point towards the same goal. The divine intervention reveals a new possibility for creation.

The Christian legacy is bound up in a leap of faith: a fidelity to the hope of a new world forged out of love which forever struggles against the existing order. It is the conflation of means and ends which makes the imagining of Christianity the religion of divine violence which struggles against the original sin of creation.

A central part of the construction of this thesis, indeed one of the reasons that this project was embarked upon, was the will to connect threads of thought in the philosophers' turn to Paul with ideas from more traditional (or more expected) areas of Pauline research. The question has not been directly about what the philosophers have said about Paul, but about the ways in which this can be used to construct new, or at least revived, possibilities surrounding Paul as a radical thinker. The provocation of the philosopher draws Paul back into a theologico-political context which mirrors that of his own: the struggles against the manipulative powers of the existing order.

The idea pursued in this thesis is that Paul is an important figure in the diagnosis of contemporary forms of violence. As well as developing a deeper project surrounding the violent potentiality inherent to Romans 13,

and moving towards fulfilling the potential of a genealogy of violence in Christianity which has only just begun in the scope of this work, it is here in the thinking of the potential of the Christ-event in conjunction with our own battles that this project begins to move beyond its initial site in this thesis. Paul's radical voice, which brought the Christ-event to the Gentile world, is still as relevant today as it has ever been.

This work is about the manipulative power of symbolic and systemic forces which combine to furnish experiences of reality, and the potential to push back against these forces. A great deal of what has been done here is an attempt to push against preconceived ideas and stubbornly held positions; to provoke the possibility of better understanding violence. The symbolic substances of this work will always be trapped within a horizon of language, but it has hopefully participated in the disturbing of its boundaries. To see something beyond many of the current discussions on religion and violence, or the place of Christianity in a post-secular age, or the influence of the apostle Paul on radical leftist political projects, has been a principal aim of this work. Hopefully we can begin to blaze a path beyond the Girardian context of thinking about religion and violence, some of the all too comfortable narratives of Christianity, and place the political back at the heart of our discussions of Paul. Yet above all this, the thought that this work seeks to disseminate is that we all serve the divine. Even after the death of God we must understand that our interconnected activity is all thrown back into the tumultuous power of something beyond it all, ready to strike back in its divine rage. And in this we struggle in the fight against original sin, the imperfection of the world.

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