

ERZSÉBET KEREKES

THE FIGURE OF THE APOSTLE PAUL IN CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHY
(HEIDEGGER, BADIOU, AGAMBEN, ŽIŽEK)

Erzsébet Kerekes

Babeş-Bolyai University, Department of Hungarian Philosophy, Cluj, Romania.
Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Research Centre for the Humanities, Institute of
Philosophy, Budapest, Hungary.

Email: kzsoka@yahoo.com, Kerekes.Erzsebet@btk.mta.hu

Abstract: In this paper, I attempt to discuss the role played by the figure of Apostle Paul inside several texts of four authors: Heidegger, Badiou, Agamben and Žižek. My hypothesis is that Heidegger and the contemporary philosophers do not turn to Apostle Paul guided primarily or exclusively by theological interest or perspectives, yet they pose a great challenge to the religious thought. Heidegger's return to Saint Paul has a philosophical-phenomenological aim: highlighting the carrying structures of the temporality of factic life. Badiou, Agamben and Žižek are interested in Paul as a political personality, a poet-thinker of an Event, who has to enforce a universal singularity both against the current legal abstractions and against communitarian and particularistic claims. They rely on Paul when confronting the postmodernism and when examining what constitutes the political. Against the postmodern doxa (that we live in an age deprived of metaphysical certainties, in an era of contingency and conjectures, in a „risk society”, in which politics is a matter of strategic judgements and not a matter of references to fundamental cognitive insights), Badiou, Agamben and Žižek aim at the revitalization of the politics of universal truth.

Key Words: Apostle Paul, Event, hermeneutics, Heidegger, contemporary philosophy, universality, Badiou, Agamben, Žižek.

Introduction

The wider context of my paper¹ examines the importance of the figure of the Apostle Paul in the philosophy of M. Heidegger² and in the works of three contemporary, antipostmodern philosophers:³ Alain Badiou, Giorgio Agamben, and Slavoj Žižek. Within their works, they aim at reconciling the categories of being, truth, history, and the subject in a new way. They try to find answers to contemporary questions and problems with the help of the figure of Saint Paul. The fundamental questions of my research are: why do the authors included in this research all turn to the Apostle Paul? Why is Saint Paul so relevant in the present, and why do these authors attribute philosophical proximity to this remote figure?

My thesis is that Heidegger and these contemporary philosophers do not turn to the Apostle Paul guided primarily or exclusively by theological interests or perspectives, yet they pose a great challenge to the religious thought.

On the one hand, we must say that Heidegger's return to Saint Paul had a philosophical-phenomenological aim: he had seen in Paul's letters a kind of proto-phenomenology. Heidegger reached back to the figure of Paul for the analysis of the inseparability of time and being. Heidegger's lecture on the phenomenology of religion is part of his series of lectures from his early Freiburg period, in which he worked on the hermeneutical turn of phenomenology. Its key feature is the notion of „actualization-historical understanding” (*vollzugsgechichtliche Verstehen*), which is related to the problematic of the actualization-aspect of understanding, the discovery of actualization-sense (besides the husserlian content- and reference-sense). This turn emerges from the encounter with the Aristotelian and principally Christian (Pauline) notion of *kairos*. With the term *Vollzug*, Heidegger opens a new way of thinking together time and being. His phenomenological research resorts to the Paulian texts in order to highlight his own fundamental intention: the deeper understanding of the structure of life. In order to achieve this phenomenological goal, Heidegger's analysis is not restricted to the explanation of Paul's Epistles. Instead, it moves in the direction of the *reductio ad essentiam*, through which the essence of these concepts can be found in the structure of life experience. For Heidegger, early Christianity becomes a preferred phenomenon for highlighting the carrying structures of the *temporality of factic life*. He carries out a series of bracketings in order to carry out the leap from the real intent of Paulian expression, i.e. the carrying out of faith, to the basic theme of phenomenology, the temporal structure hidden at the ground of factic life experience. However, we can put here a legitimate question: in how far can the theological content be effaced thusly from these texts, whose experiential basis is interpreted by

Heidegger, with good reason, as a carrying out of faith, as an event of recognition inscribed in time, and as the embodiment of the eschatological openness awaiting the second coming of Christ; respectively, can that which remains after the deduction of these contents be viewed at all as a philosophically relevant structure of being-time?⁴

On the other hand, Badiou, Agamben and Žižek rely on Paul when confronting the postmodernism and when examining what constitutes the political.⁵ Frederiek Depoortere⁶ distinguishes between two trends in the contemporary philosophical reading of Paul:

The first trend goes back to the German-Jewish philosopher of religion Jacob Taubes, who, in the months before his death in 1987, gave a series of lectures in which he argued for the apocalyptic-revolutionary potential of Paul's Epistle to the Romans. Taubes considered these lectures as his "spiritual testament"⁷. According to Éva Kocziszky, "Taubes was the first to enter into debate with the Protestant interpretation of Paul, considered as one-sided, and to take issue with the image that Paul only teaches the intimacy of faith, otherwise calling for mere submission to authority in the political dimension."⁸ In opposition to the falsification of Paul's message by the Nazis, Taubes points out that Jews, who appear in public/social space as *enemies* of Christianity, *have to be loved*. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount made the love of the enemy not only into a theological, but also into a political principle.⁹

Taubes's book is highlighted by the contemporary Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, who also published a commentary on the Epistle to the Romans in 2000. Agamben's commentary on Paul focuses on the structure of the messianic experience of time and is reminiscent, in its theme and method, of Heidegger's researches. He also pays special attention to Paul's influence on poetry.

The second trend in the contemporary philosophical reading of Paul starts with Alain Badiou. In his book *Saint-Paul: La fondation de l'universalisme*, he presents Paul as an eminent example of a revolutionary subjectivity that emerges in the wake of an Event, who remains faithful to this Event throughout his life. Badiou was interested in Paul as a political personality, poet, and anti-philosopher. Thus, similarly to Heidegger, Badiou does not turn to the Apostle Paul from a theological interest. In the introduction of his book, he writes:

"For me, truth be told, Paul is not an apostle or a saint. I care nothing for the Good News he declares (...). But he is a subjective figure of primary importance. (...) Basically, I have never really connected Paul with religion. (...) For me, Paul is a *poet-thinker* of the *event*, as well as one who practices and states the invariant traits of what can be called *the militant figure*."¹⁰

The significance of the concept of the *Event* also connects (in this case, the later) Heidegger with Badiou. At the centre of Badiou's theoretical construction lies nothing else than the chasm between being and the Event.

Even though in the current paper, I am focusing on Badiou, it is important to mention, for the second trend, the works of Slavoj Žižek.¹¹ Several researchers, like Dominik Finkelde¹² and Eleanor Kaufman, compare these two major trends. Thus, Kaufman, focusing on „what are probably the two most diametrically opposed approaches to the politico-theological, both articulated through readings of Paul's epistles: on the one hand, Badiou's claim that Paul represents a model of revolutionary universalism, and on the other, Agamben's use of Paul's epistles to outline a theory of messianic time”¹³, claims that „there is a latent messianism embedded in Badiou's consistent preoccupation with questions of number”.¹⁴

Agamben and Paul. The experience of messianic time

One of the important themes of Agamben's works is messianic time as experienced and promulgated by Paul. The Jewish apocalyptic tradition distinguishes between two ages and two worlds: the *olam hazzeh* (the time spanning from creation to the world's end), and the *olam habba* (the coming world, the atemporal eternity). The tradition of Greek-speaking Jews distinguished two *aiones* and two *kosmoi*: this *aeon*, this world and the coming age. Both terms appear in Paul's texts, but the time lived by the apostle, messianic time, is neither the *olam hazzeh* nor the *olam habba*: neither chronological time nor the apocalyptic *eschaton*. It is a remnant: the time that is left between two time periods, the time of resurrection and the end of times; the partitioning of time by the *caesura of the messianic event* (which for Paul is evidently the *resurrection*). Therefore, messianic time (the time of the end) cannot be reduced to eschatological time (the end of time). Agamben seeks to clarify the confusion between messianic time and apocalyptic time. The apocalypse, which contemplates the end of time, is a misunderstanding of messianic revelation. It positions itself within the final day, the day of judgement: it sees the end happening and describes what it sees. However, the time which Paul refers to is not the *eschaton*, the end of the world. Messianic (messianistic) time is not the end of time, but the relationship of each moment to the end of time and to eternity, the time of the end. The apostle is not interested in the last day, the moment of the end of time, but in the time which starts to shrink and to end; the remaining period between time and its end.

To experience the “remaining time/rest of time” and the “end of time” means a radical change of the usual experience and representation of time. We are dealing with a time which functions within chronological time, expanding, leavening and changing it from within.

For Paul, profane time, *chronos* spans from creation to resurrection/ the messianic event. At this point, time contracts itself and begins to finish. This shrunken time – which Paul calls *ho nyn kairos* (the present time/age), the technical term for messianic time – goes on up to the *parousia*, the full presence of the messiah. Here time explodes – or rather implodes into the other aeon, into eternity. Messianic time (*ho nyn kairos*) is not identical either with the end of time and the coming age or with profane, chronological time, while it does not fall outside the latter. In fact, it is a part of profane time that is contracted and thereby completely changed. Agamben does not so much emphasize the difference between *kairos* and *chronos*¹⁵ as their relation conceived on the basis of the *Corpus Hippocraticum*: “the *chronos* is where we have *kairos* and the *kairos* is where we have a little *chronos*”.¹⁶ *Kairos* does not have another time at its disposal: what we take hold of when we seize it is not another time, but a contracted and abridged *chronos*. *Kairos* is a *chronos* which has been taken hold of.

An important merit of Agamben is that he applies the linguistic concept of *operational time* (Gustave Guillaume/1929) to the problem of messianic time. Within each of our representations of time and discourses that define and represent time, a time which cannot be exhausted by them is also implied. It is as if man, insofar as he/she speaks, would create an additional time – posterior to chronological time – that precludes him/her from completely identifying with the time in which he constructs representations. However, this posterior time is not another time, something like an additional time which joins chronological time as if from the outside. It is an interior time, a time within time, which only measures my belatedness related to the time represented by me, but precisely due to this it represents a chance for me to grasp and accomplish it. Agamben defines messianic time as the time needed to end time and to complete and end our own representations of time. It is an operational time which puts pressure on chronological time, works on it and transforms it from within; the time we need to condition the ending of time (our remaining time). Our representation of chronological time as the time *in* which we are separates us from ourselves and transforms us into powerless observers of ourselves. Messianic time as operational time in which we seize and fulfil our own representations of time is the time in which we ourselves are and therefore the only real time that is truly ours.

Paul has split the messianic event into two moments of time: resurrection and *parousia*.¹⁷ Interpreted correctly, according to Agamben, *parousia* does not mean a second messianic event/coming that supplements the first. In ancient Greek, *parousia* simply means presence. Paul uses the term in order to describe the innermost structure (unidual structure) of the messianic event as the link between *kairos* and *chronos*, two heterogeneous types of time, an operational time and a represented time, which are not added up to each other.¹⁸ Messianic presence neither

coincides with a specific chronological moment nor is it added to such a moment. Still, it seizes and carries the moment from the inside toward fulfilment. The Messiah has already come, the messianic event has already happened, but its presence contains in its interior another time, which dilates the *parousia*, not in order to postpone it, but in order to render it perceptible. The Messiah always creates his own time: he simultaneously creates and accomplishes it. Operational time – which time needs in order to fulfil itself – should not be confused with an additional time that would supplement and complete time in an undetermined way. The *Saturday* represents one type of the *messianic model of time*: it is not just another day like the rest; rather, it is that innermost disjointedness in time through which we can grasp and accomplish time for a moment.

The often repeated opinion of theologians about the “seeming delay of *parousia*” always seemed to Agamben a blasphemy.¹⁹ According to this opinion, the members of the early Christian community awaiting the inevitable return of the Messiah and the end of time ultimately realized that there is a delay that they could not explain. Thus, they supposedly changed their standpoint on the issue in order to create a stable institutional and legal environment for themselves. This would mean that the time of *parouikousia*, or temporary dwelling, has ceased for the Christian community, and the time of *kataikousia*, or dwelling as citizens, has begun, similarly to any other worldly institution. If this would have been true, then the Church would have omitted the messianic experience of time which defines its essence and is consubstantial with it. In fact, messianic time does not designate a mere chronological duration, but first and foremost the qualitative transformation of experienced time. Within this type of time chronological delay (in the sense in which we say of a train that it was late) cannot even be thought of. In the same way in which messianic time implies that one cannot stably dwell in it, delays are also not possible within this type of time.²⁰

Agamben emphasizes that Paul defines the innermost relation of messianic time to chronological time (the time spanning from creation to resurrection) with two fundamental notions: *type* and *recapitulation*.²¹

1) The first notion is that of *typos*. In the case of Paul the determining passage is 1 Corinthians 10:1-11. The Apostle mentions here a series of episodes in Israelite history under Moses.²² Auerbach has shown the importance of the typological/figural way of thinking in the Christian Middle Ages, when it becomes the grounds for a general theory of allegorical interpretation. Through the concept of *typos*, Paul establishes a relation (a typological relation) between an event from a past time and *ho nyn kairos*, messianic time. (For example, in Romans 5:14, Adam, through whom sin has entered the world, is defined as *typos tou mellontos*, the “figure of the future,” meaning, the figure of the Messiah through whom grace will abound for men.) For Agamben, the decisive factor here is the

transformation of time implied by the typological relation. It is an area of tension that joins together and transforms past and future, type and antitype, within an inseparable constellation. For Agamben, the messianic is not just one of two terms in this typological relation, it is the relation itself.²³ This is the meaning of the Pauline line: “for us, upon whom the ends of the ages are come to face each other” (1 Corinthians 10: 11). The two ends of the *olam hazzeh* and the *olam babba* contract into each other without coinciding while coming to face each other: this coming face-to-face and this contraction is messianic time, and nothing else. Once again, for Paul, the messianic is not a third eon situated between two times; but rather, it is a caesura that divides the division between times and introduces a *remnant*. For Paul, messianic time is a zone (a remnant) in which the past is dislocated into the present and the present is extended into the past. Messianic time is neither the complete nor the incomplete, neither the past nor the future, but the inversion/transformation of both into each other and their coming into the same constellation of *ho nyn kairōs*.²⁴ The Paulian typological relation expresses this converse movement perfectly. Here, the past/the complete rediscovers its actuality and becomes incomplete, while the incomplete, the unfulfilled acquires a kind of fulfilment.

2) The other concept through which Paul articulates messianic time, and which complements the notion of *typos*, is the concept of *recapitulation* (*anakephalaiōmai*). The determining passage here is Ephesians 1:10. Paul, while presenting the project of divine redemption, says that all things, in heaven and on earth, are repeated in the Messiah. This verse is laden with so much meaning that several fundamental texts and concepts of Western culture could be viewed as fragments that exploded from it: for instance, the doctrine of *apocatastasis*²⁵ in Origen and Leibniz, Kierkegaard’s concept of repetition, the eternal return in Nietzsche, and Heidegger’s concept of repetition. What does Paul say here? He says that the fulfilment of time (*plērōmatos tōn kairōn*) is at stake in messianic time. Messianic time produces a recapitulation, an inventory of all things, a census of everything that happened from creation until the messianic “now”, the past as a whole. In other words, messianic time is a summarizing recapitulation, an all-encompassing judgment of the past. This repetition of the past anticipates the eschatological *plērōma*, the moment when God “will be all in all”. Thus, messianic *plērōma*/fulfilment is an abridged recapitulation and simultaneously the anticipation of eschatological fulfilment. It is not a simple coincidence that *recapitulation* and *plērōma* are found next to each other.

Repetition is nothing else than the other facet of the typological relation. It is of a crucial importance because the events of the past acquire their real meaning precisely through their messianic recapitulation and thereby prepare themselves for redemption. The

ordinary conception that messianic time oriented exclusively toward the future is false – according to Agamben.²⁶ We are used to hearing that in the moment of salvation we have to look forward to the future and to eternity. However, for Paul – according to Agamben – recapitulation means that past and the present contract themselves as they enter into the constellation of *ho nyn kairōs*. Thus, in the decisive moment the account with the past has to be settled. Of course, this does not mean nostalgia or attachment to the past, but to the contrary, the pronouncement of an encompassing judgment on the past, and the recapitulation of the past, in order for us to be able to let go of the past and face the future.

Sestina

Agamben also presents a specific literary example as a miniature model of the messianic structure of time identified in the Pauline texts: the sestina and its rhyme scheme. Classical poetry rarely rhymed. However, in Latin Christian poetry beginning with the 4th century A. D. rhyme develops up to the status of an essential structural principle in early mediaeval poetry. The sestina contains six six-line stanzas, thirty-six lines in total, followed by a three-line *tornada* that recapitulates the rhyming words and combines them. At the end of the thirty-six lines the same six rhyming words reappear in a complicated organized sequence. The end word of the first stanza is the rhyming end word of the first line of the second stanza (see f of the first stanza), the first rhyming end word of the prior stanza becomes the second rhyming end word of the new stanza (a), the next to last rhyming end word moves to the third line in the new stanza (e), the second word to the fourth line (b), etc. The rhyme scheme is a b c d e f / f a e b d c / c f d a b e / e c b f a d / d e a c f b / b d f e c a.

If the movement would last, the seventh stanza would have the same rhyme scheme as the first. However, instead of the seventh stanza the three-line tornado follows. The sequence of the thirty-nine lines could be thought of as a homogeneous and linear chronological temporal sequence, but, in fact, it is animated from within through the alternating interplay of the rhyming end words. Every rhyming end word recalls another (or more exactly, itself as other) from the other stanzas and simultaneously announces its own repetition in the following stanzas.

The linear temporal sequence changes into rhythmic constellations that they themselves are in motion. However, according to Agamben, there is no other time, coming from who-knows-where, which would substitute for chronological time. It is the same time that organizes itself through its own – somewhat secret – inner pulsation so that it can make place for the time of the poem. At the end of the sixth stanza, when the cruciform intensifying movement ends, it seems as if the poem would be condemned to repeat itself. However, within a new scene, the *tornada*

recapitulates in a new way the rhyming end words, thereby highlighting their singularity and their secret connection. According to Agamben, the repetition of the rhyming end words in the sestina corresponds to the typological relation between past and present: the mechanism transforms chronological time into messianic time. There is a connection between the sestina and the number six in Genesis. The creation and the fall of man take place on the sixth day. The *tornada* corresponds to the Shabbat as the fulfilment of messianic time. The seventh day is not a day like any other, but rather the recapitulation and messianic abbreviation of the story of creation. In its three lines the *tornada* repeats the internal structure of the whole poem.

Agamben's hypothesis is that rhyme comes into being in Christian poetry as the metrical-linguistic transcoding of messianic time, structured according to the play of Pauline typological relations and repetitions. The text of Paul itself, if we partition it according to the units of classical rhetoric, is animated by an inner play of rhymes, pervaded by alliterations and rhyming words. According to Agamben, rhyme is a Pauline legacy, and its history and fate coincide in the poem with the history and fate of messianic revelation. As an argument, Agamben mentions that when, on the threshold of a new century, Hölderlin (1770-1843) elaborates the doctrine of the withdrawal of the gods (especially the last god, Christ), his hymns lose their form and shatter. The disappearance of the gods coincides with the disappearance of fixed metrical forms.

Let us note here that Agamben himself structures his work *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, published in 2000, as a sestina: according to the messianic time structure. His analysis is partitioned into six chapters/days. The first analyzes the concepts involved in the expression "Paul, slave of Christ", the second analyzes the concept of *klētos*/called, the third the concept of *aphōrismēnos*/chosen, the fourth the concept of *apostolos*/apostle, the fifth and the sixth analyze the expression *eis euaggelion theou*/separated unto the Gospel of God. These six chapters are followed by a *tornada*. The commentary is an interpretation of the first verse of Paul's Epistle to the Romans. Agamben's thesis is that each word contracts within itself in a recapitulation the complete text of the Epistle (as we have seen, recapitulation is an important term of the messianistic dictionary). Thus, understanding the introduction means to understand the text as a whole.²⁷ Agamben analyses the words in this sequence. We will also present some of them in the following.

1) Agamben calls our attention to the self-interpretation of Paul, who always calls himself Paulos, changing one letter from his name, sigma to pi (the messianic event produced only a letter-change, a repetition with only a small deviation, but this small shift changed radically the whole meaning).²⁸ The young man carried originally the beautiful biblical-Palestinian name of Sha'ul (this emphasized his family's descent from the

tribe of Benjamin). Saoulos was a kingly name, meaning 'great' (the king Saul surpassed all Israelites in stature and beauty). Paul has become "insignificant", since *Paulos* means 'small', 'of small value' in Latin. Paul's self-definition is: "I am the least of the apostles". Thus, Paulos is the derogatory nickname, *supernomen* that the Apostle (humbly) gives himself when he fully assumes his messianic vocation. A messianistic principle is realized here (through the *metanomasia*), according to which, in the days of the Messiah, the weak and worthless things have primacy to those considered great and important by the world (First Epistle to the Corinthians 1:27-28). The Messiah separates the proper name from its bearer, who can only bear an alien name, a nickname in the future. All this is confirmed immediately by the word "servant" (*doulos*) that comes after the word "Paul". In classical antiquity the slave is not have any legal status or a true name of his own: the master could call him as he liked. In the moment when the call transformed Saul into "the slave of the Messiah" from a free man, the Apostle has to lose, as any other slave, his original name (no matter whether the name was Roman or Jewish) and he must be called by a simple nickname.

2) The importance of the term *doulos* ('slave', 'servant') is also highlighted by the fact that it appears 47 times in Paul's texts, which is more than a third of its occurrences in the New Testament (127). Paul presents himself to the Romans rather as a slave than an apostle. But what does it mean to be "the slave of the Messiah"? Legally it is associated, in general, with the authority of the *dominus-despotes*, to which the concept of the slave is presented in contrast with. Here, *doulos* is opposed to *eleutheros* (the free man). Paul mentions to basic divisions of people. The first is according to Hebrew law (Jews and *goyim*, circumcised and uncircumcised), and the second is according to Roman law (freemen and slaves). *Doulos* acquires a technical meaning in Paul, because he uses this word to express the neutralization of all categorical divisions, juridical and social conditions by the messianic event. The key to understand this expression lies in the First Epistle to the Corinthians 7:20-24. The expression "slave of the Messiah" defines the new messianic condition and it is the principle of transformation of all juridical conditions. To live messianically means to use the vocation, and vocation is something that can only be used and to be lived with, and not possessed. Messianic vocation is not a right and it does not form an identity: it is a generic potentiality that can be used without ever being possessed. To live in the Messiah implies becoming propertyless, the loss of all juridical-factual property, but this expropriation does not lay the foundations of a new identity; the new creature is nothing else than the messianic vocation and use of the old one. Use/enjoyment and right are not identical: the slave uses his owner's things without being an owner of them. At this point, Agamben refers to a legal institution, the *fictio legis*, an unprecedented product of Roman civil law. According to Roman law, captivity implies the

loss of free citizen status, and thus also the right to make a testament. In order to deal with this problem, the *Lex cornelia* establishes that if a Roman citizen fallen captive already had a testament, it must be viewed as “as though he had not been made captive”. Paul pushes to the extreme this “as though not”: you should remain a slave in the form of “as though not” (he renders it inactive, and does not substitute it with another vocation). The slave who is invested through messianic vocation is *hyper doulos*: “super-slave, a slave squared”.

3) The word *klētos*, ‘called’ (Paul called as slave; *klēsis*: ‘vocation’, ‘calling’) stands in the middle of the ten words as a conceptual middle player that can refer either to the first part of the verse or to the second. Be that as it may, messianic vocation is a central event of Paul’s personal story, just as it is a central event in the history of humanity.

For Paul, *ekklēsia* means literally a messianic community, the community of *klēseis*, of messianic callings. Nevertheless, messianic calling does not possess any specific content, it is first and foremost, a nullification: circumcision is nothing, and being uncircumcised is also nothing. That which made someone a Jew and someone else a goy, one man a slave and the other a free man, is now annulled by the messianic calling. What Paul subsequently says in I. Corinthians 7:29-31 passage may be the most precise definition of messianic life.²⁹ The “as though not” (*hōs mē*) is the formula of messianic life and the final meaning of the *klēsis*. Messianic vocation is the revocation of every vocation/calling. At this point, the *hōs mē* becomes the essential technical term of the Pauline dictionary (I. Corinthians 7:20-31).³⁰ The Pauline *hōs mē* brings something into tension with itself: crying with crying, joy with joy, the factual state with itself. In bringing each thing into tension with itself in the “as if not”, the messianic does not wipe out “the fashion of this world”, but makes it pass, prepares its end. This is not another fashion of this world or another world: it is the passing away of the fashion of this world.

4) *Aphōrismenos*: ‘segregated’, ‘chosen’, ‘separated’/*segregatus*. Why is it that Paul, who preaches universalism and announces the messianic end of all separation between Jews and pagans (The Epistle to the Ephesians 2:14: “For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us...), refers to himself as “separated”? According to Agamben, Paul ironically alludes to his own past, since *aphōrismenos* is the Greek translation of the word “Pharisee” (Hebrew: *parush*).³¹ Paul was a Pharisee and as such separated not only from the pagans, but also from the *am-hares*, the people of the earth, who do not keep the law. For the Pharisees, the law consisted not only of the written *Torah*, but also of the oral one: a tradition functioning as a “dividing wall” or “fence” surrounding this *Torah* that should protect it from any unclean touch. The Pharisees became the dominant social class

in Palestine in the first century. Paul recapitulates and negates this separation in the name of another separation that is not according to law, but according to the messianic vocation. Thus, *aphōrismenos* is a separation to the second power, the separation of separation. If the principle of the law is separation, then the Messiah is the par excellence locus of the conflict with the law. Agamben calls to our attention to an interesting fact: the division of men into circumcised and uncircumcised leaves no remnant. But Paul makes another cut on the division: *sarx-pneuma* (flesh and soul). Paul cuts through the former division itself with a new cut. Thus, the real Jew is not necessarily the one who seems to be so, the real circumcision is not according to the body/flesh. “They *are* not all Israel, which are of Israel.” (Epistle to the Romans 9:7) This introduces a *remnant* that is not a numeric part, but is capable of transcending the differences. Paul takes over the term “remnant” from the dictionary of the prophets, who paradoxically talk to the whole people, to Israel, but declare that only a remnant will be saved (the messianic remnant). The remnant is – according to Agamben – neither the whole nor a numerical portion of it; on the contrary: it signifies the impossibility for the part and the whole to be identical with themselves or with each other.³² In fact, the point is that it is impossible for Jews and pagans to coincide with themselves. In the Pauline texts this concept of the remnant does not refer anymore to the future, as it did for the prophets, but is a present experience that defines the “messianic now”: a remnant was produced in the present. Epistle to the Romans 11:5: “Even so at this present time (*en tō nyn kairō*) also there is a remnant (*leimma*) according to the election of grace.” With the introduction of the remnant the messianic *katargēsis* (suspension) of the law takes place: the remnant is neither inside nor outside the law, but a cipher of the messianic suspension of the law. Paul radicalizes the state of exception, in which law is applied by not being applied.³³ For Paul, the “law of faith” is that which both suspends and conserves the law through love. The Good News (Gospel) means the possibility of salvation for everyone, the deactivation of the law and of death: not their abolishment, but their suspension.

5) *Apōstolos* (envoy, delegate) is related to *aphōrismenos*. It is a legal expression, meaning an envoy with a specific purpose. The maxim that applies to him is: ‘A man’s emissary is like the man who sent him’. Here, the apostle is not sent by men, but Jesus the Messiah and the will of God, on behalf of the messianic revelation. But why does Paul define himself as an apostle and not as a prophet? In messianic times the place of the prophet (*nabi*) is taken by the apostle. The *prophet* stands in a direct relation with the breath/inspiration of Jehovah, who receives a word from God which does not in fact belong to him (“Thus speaks Jehovah”). The prophet is the mouthpiece of God, who is distinct from the apostle. The latter is sent with a specific purpose that he has to follow and he must find the words for the message by himself. That is why Paul can say: “my

gospel". (Epistle to the Romans 2:16) The prophet can essentially be defined through his relation to the future. The coming of the Messiah is for him the future, not the present. The apostle, however, speaks forth from the arrival of the Messiah. Prophecy must become silent at this point, since it has been fulfilled. The word passes on to the apostle, the envoy of the Messiah, in who the time is no longer the future, but the present. Paul's technical term for the messianic event is *ho nyn kairos* ("the present time"). That is why Paul is not a prophet, but an apostle.³⁴

In the *tornada*, Agamben writes about the connections between the Pauline Epistles and Benjamin's *Theses*,³⁵ or more specifically, about the fact that the two great messianic texts of our tradition, born two thousand years apart, form one constellation.³⁶

Badiou and Paul

Badiou has discovered in Saint Paul the perfect example of his philosophy of the Event. Through his philosophy of the Event, that is at the same time a new theory of the subject and a new understanding of truth, Badiou aims at *curing contemporary philosophy*, considered by him sick, as well as the economic and social condition of the contemporary world.³⁷ According to Badiou, the philosophical trends of our times (hermeneutics, analytical philosophy, postmodernism) have in common: i) the idea of the end of metaphysics: they renounce the idea of truth; philosophy has renounced its ideal of truth as traditionally understood and substituted it with the ideal of the variety/plurality of meanings; ii) language-centeredness: contemporary philosophers consider language the decisive aspect of thought, in which the question of meaning is at stake. Because of these two common characteristics, Badiou states that contemporary philosophy is sick: it has been infected by linguistic relativism and historical pessimism, so that it cannot fulfil its task. These orientations are all too compatible with our world for them to be able to sustain the distance or the interruption that philosophy needs. Badiou proposes two ways of forcing the interruption. i) It is necessary to abandon the erroneous idea according to which language is the final horizon of human existence. The linguistic turn needs to be overturned. ii) Philosophy needs to interrupt the fast flow of history by establishing „a fixed point within discourse". This is an unconditional point, a point of interruption and discontinuity. According to Badiou, this is what the world asks from philosophy. The sickness of philosophy is not fatal; philosophy can become healthy again by rediscovering its task. Badiou views as his own task the healing of philosophy: he wants to make it again into true philosophy and considers that this can be achieved through the doctrine of the Event.

Badiou's system of ideas has two main pillars, as can be seen from his *L'être et l'événement/Being and Event* (cited in the following as EE).³⁸

Badiou defines ontology in accordance with the tradition that goes back to Aristotle, as the science of being qua being. It is a classic definition that is not subversive. Being designates the positive ontological order that is accessible to knowledge, the infinite variety that presents itself in our experience, which we classify according to genus and species. Badiou also links to this the concepts of ontological order, structure, state, and knowledge. It is all the more subversive, however, that Badiou identifies ontology with mathematics: “mathematics is ontology”. This equation that can be found in the introduction of *EE* provides the basis for the entire book and for Badiou’s whole philosophical system. *EE* consists of 37 meditations that remind us of Descartes. Badiou begins his first meditation by alluding to the most ancient philosophical problem of the “one” (*l’un*) and the “many” (*le multiple*).

Badiou’s thesis is: the multitude is not the multitude of ones before counting has taken place. He uses the term “situation” for any particular consistent multitude (e.g. French society, modern art). A situation is structured, and it is its structure which allows us to “count” the situation “as One”. Here, the reduplication proper to the symbolization of the situation is set in action: in order for the situation to be counted, its structure must always already be a metastructure. When the situation is counted as one, it is identified with its symbolic structure. This is the “state of the situation”. Another meaning of this term (“the state”) is the state in the political sense: there is no “state of society” without a “state” in which the society is re-presented/repeated. Symbolic re-duplication involves the minimal dialectic of void and excess/surplus. *Void* has been a central category of ontology from the atomism of Democritus onward: “atoms” are nothing but configurations of the void. Excess/surplus takes two forms. 1. Any state of things involves at least one excessive element which, although clearly belonging to the situation, is not properly included in it, not counted by it. This element is present, but not re-presented. 2. We can speak about an excess of representation: the agent which brings situation to its state (e.g. the state in society) is always in excess relative to what it represents, it never simply represents what it structures. Thus, it does not simply represent society (it is not reduced to a service of civil society, but acts with aggressive intervention in what it represents). This is the structure of its being.

From time to time, however, in a wholly contingent, unpredictable way, outside the scope of our knowledge about being, an *Event* takes place which belongs to a completely different dimension, that is, thus, the dimension of non-being. Let us take, for example, French society in the eighteenth century: the state of society, its stratification, economic, political, and ideological conflicts are all accessible to knowledge. However, no knowledge datum enables us to deduce from it the unaccountable, mysterious, and unexplainable event that is called the French Revolution. In this sense, the event emerges *ex nihilo*. Yet, even if it

cannot be explained or accounted for in the terms of a situation, this does not mean that it is simply an outside intervention: it attaches itself to the void or the excess of the situation. Truth is always the truth of a specific situation. E.g. the French Revolution is the event that has rendered visible the lie, the excesses and inconsistencies of the *ancien régime*. This is the truth of the *ancien régime*, it is attached to it and localized.

In Badiou's interpretation, the event is unforeseeable and unpredictable, an extraordinary act that can be individual or collective. The preeminent sites of the event are politics, science, art, and love. The event enters the order of being with brutal force, the agents are compelled to invent new modes of acting and being as they enter into the situation. The event becomes an event through historical subjects experiencing themselves as constructors of events.

The subject is defined by his loyalty to the Event, the subject emerges from the event and persists in searching for its traces within the situation. However, truth is not subjective in the sense of being subordinated to the subject's whims, but the subject himself serves the truth which transcends him or her. Christianity is a preeminent example of the truth-event. The Event is the incarnation of Christ, his death and resurrection; its ultimate goal is the Last Judgment/the final redemption; the operator within the multiplicity of historical situations is the Church; its subjects are the believers, the corpus of those who intervene on behalf of the truth-event, searching for divine signs. (Badiou's other example: when I passionately fall in love, I become subjectivized by remaining faithful to the event and by adhering to it.)

The question poses itself: in how far is it important that Badiou's ultimate example for the event is Christianity (or Paul)? Badiou is fully conscious of the fact that in our era of modern science the sites of the Event are: scientific discovery itself, the political act, artistic reaction, psychoanalytic confrontation with love.³⁹ Although Saint Paul's message is no longer operative for us, the terms in which he formulated Christianity are relevant with a universal scope for every Truth-Event. Every Truth-Event leads to a kind of rebirth/resurrection/renewal. Writing about the Event and the subject associated with it, Badiou describes, in fact, the experience of each of us when fully engaged, subjectively, in a cause that is our own: when we become subjects from the fragments of an existential situation /from individuals: the carriers and adherents of a (fragile) truth.

The message of Christianity is this: the positivity of being is not all there is. The order of cosmos regulated by laws, which is the domain of finitude and mortality, is not everything (from the perspective of the cosmos/the totality of positive being, we, as particular beings, are determined by our specific place in the global order – the Law is ultimately another name for the Order of the cosmic truth which allocates to each of us our proper place). There is another dimension: the dimension of True Life in love, accessible to all of us through divine grace, in which

we can all participate. We human beings are not compelled to the positivity of being. The Christian revolution is an example of how a Truth-Event can occur, from time to time, in a contingent and unpredictable way, opening up for us the possibility of participating in another life by remaining faithful to the Truth-Event. Badiou inverts here the standard opposition of Law as universal and grace as accidental (the usual idea that we are all subject to a universal divine law, and only some of us can be touched by grace and reborn). In Badiou's reading of Paul, on the contrary, the Law itself, which can seem universal, is ultimately "particularist": a law/legal order always prescribes for us specific duties and rights, and defines a specific community with the exclusion of other communities and members of other ethnic groups, while divine grace is truly universal (i.e. nonexclusionary, addressed to all human beings regardless of ethnicity, gender, social status, etc.). For Badiou, Christ's death on the cross simply signifies that "God has become a man", eternal Truth is something immanent in human life, accessible to any human being. The message of the fact that God had to become a man and had to die in order to be resurrected is that Eternal Life/Immortal Truth is something accessible to humanity, to all men as finite mortal beings. The Truth-Event is simply a radically new beginning. What ultimately matters is only the resurrection of the dead (mortal human) Christ, signalling that every human being can be resurrected and can enter into the domain of eternal Life, which is participation in the Truth-Event. The Truth-Event announced by Paul is self-referential. The sole criterion of the Truth-Event is fidelity. The Apostle does not continue any pre-existing tradition, but is born within the reality-event, and this "birth from nothing" makes him – in Badiou's interpretation – the par excellence political subject.

According to Paul, we have two lives: the finite biological life and the eternal life of participation in the Truth-Event of the resurrection. Correspondingly, we also have two deaths: biological death and obeying the way of the flesh. When Paul opposes Life and Death (the spirit brings Life, while the flesh brings Death), this has nothing to do with the opposition between biological life and death as stages of the generation and corruption/decay cycle, or with the standard Platonic opposition between Soul and Body. For Saint Paul, Life and Death designate two subjective attitudes, two ways of life, or the coordinates of the fundamental existential attitudes. For Badiou, the opposition of the subjective existential attitudes of Life and Death is covered over by the opposition of the Law and Love.⁴⁰

One of the characteristics of the Truth-Event is that it is undecidable from the point of view of the system, of the ontological state of things. The Event does not have an ontological guarantee: it cannot be reduced or deduced from a prior situation. It originated from nothing, and the neutral gaze of knowledge cannot perceive the event in its consequences and effects. A *decision* is always already here: one can perceive the signs of the

Event in the situation only from a previous commitment to Truth.⁴¹ The engaged subjective perspective on the Event is part of the Event itself. Thus, the Event is cyclical in the sense that its identification is only possible only from the standpoint that Badiou calls the “interpretive intervention”;⁴² in other words, if someone speaks from a subjectively assumed position, or more formally, if we include in the designated situation the act of denomination itself.

Insofar as the Event is self-referential (it includes its own designation), it will remain forever doubtful if there had been any Event at all. It is certain only for the intervening one (*l'intervenant*), who chooses to belong to the situation.⁴³ Yet how can we distinguish the real Event from its semblance/pseudo-event? The answer follows from the way in which the Event relates to the situation the truth of which it articulates. The French Revolution and the October Revolution have been real Events, for they were able to tear apart the exterior “texture” of society, showing the until then well-hidden lies beneath. For Badiou and Žižek, the October Revolution was an authentic Event, because it touched upon the very foundations of the capitalist order and destroyed them. National Socialism was a pseudo-event: it wanted to save capitalism, the existing capitalist order. The Nazi strategy was to change things in order that they remain the same. The Event emerges out of the void of a situation, and it is related to that symptomatic element (*élément surnuméraire*, excessive element) that has no place of its own in the situation, although it belongs to it, while the simulacrum of the event negates/refuses the symptom.

Badiou, Agamben and Žižek confront deconstructionist fictionalism: they radically challenge those trends in social philosophy that relativize truth (truth-effects). “Truth is contingent; it hinges on a concrete historical situation; it is the truth of this situation, but in every concrete and contingent historical situation there is *one and only one* Truth which, once articulated, spoken out, functions as the index of index and of the falsity of the field subverted by it.”⁴⁴ Truth reveals that which knowledge mistakes for marginal malfunctioning. With regard to the *ancien régime*, Truth has revealed that injustice is not a marginal malfunctioning, but pervades the complete structure of the system, which is, thus, corrupt in its essence. The “abnormality” misconceived by the system as local is called in the Marxian-Freudian tradition the *symptom* (in psychoanalysis, dreams and lapses). These symptomatic torsions of being render the truth of the subject, inaccessible to knowledge, accessible.

The last problem we will deal with here in our discussion of Badiou is the problematic character of the concept of God. For Badiou, the term “God” designates three different things:

a) The living God of religion. The living God, as any other living beings, is someone other living beings have to live with. The living God is always somebody’s God: the God of Isaac, Jacob, Paul, or Pascal. The subject relates to it as to a power experienced in the present, and he has to

meet and confront Him as his own. However, this living God has died, says Badiou. We no longer have the possibility to meet him (no thought can deduce anymore its rights to favour something from such an encounter).⁴⁵ According to Badiou, true religion is simply impossible today (which is a great challenge to theologians). Everything we live with today is a simulacrum of religion, a play with our phantasy about that which religion could be if God still lived.⁴⁶ The name of God has become as empty for us as the name of our great-great-grandfather, who in most cases is nothing more for us than a mere name, and of whom nothing more remains than perhaps his grave. We only know that we can no longer experience them in the present.

b) The conceptual God of metaphysics. For Badiou, it is not the God of metaphysics who is dead, because he cannot die, since he never lived at all.⁴⁷ The God of metaphysics is only a concept, which can be called outdated, but not dead. Now, if God is dead, it means that he was alive once and then he died. When and why did this happen? According to Badiou, God has been dead for a long time, his process of dying started right after the sermons of Saint Paul.⁴⁸ His agony already started with the first Greek metaphysician. Badiou emphasizes that the God of metaphysics has always been the central weapon in the rationalist war machine directed against the living God of religion. When this metaphysical God loses his credibility, and people try to turn back to a more original God, they discover that meanwhile He has disappeared and can no longer be found.

c) The God of the poets. How can we react to this fact? A possible direction that our reaction can take is that of Heidegger, which leads us to the third meaning of the term "God". When Heidegger says that "only a god can save us", he does not speak, of course, about the God of metaphysics, since his entire thinking has been directed against onto-theology. Neither does he talk about the Christian God, since he agrees with Nietzsche that the Christian God is dead. The God of Heidegger is the God of the romantics, and especially of Hölderlin. Essentially, this is a standpoint which could be described as nostalgic. This nostalgia speaks about the temporary disappearance of God. (Maybe contemporary religious fundamentalism can also be interpreted as nostalgic, since fundamentalists act as if God would still be alive in order to provoke His reactions. According to Depoortere, Heidegger has become vulnerable to National Socialism because of his nostalgic temperament.) Badiou vehemently refuses this nostalgia. This entails the refusal of the theme of finitude, which brings into the foreground the concepts of solitude and mortality. To the contrary, we could say that we are living always already in an infinite, since our universe consists of an "infinity of sets", as set theory has demonstrated. We can also speak about the death of this third God: after the passing away of the God of religion and the deconstruction of the God of metaphysics, the God of the poets is also dead. "Here is the

place where truths come to be. Here we are infinite. Here nothing is promised to us, only to be faithful to what befalls upon us.”⁴⁹

Closure

In conclusion, we can say that although our authors turn to the Apostle Paul guided primarily by non-theological interests, yet they pose at least two types of challenges to theology:

a) Christianity awaits the final realization of the kingdom of God as the free gift of a transcendent Giver. In how far does this new Christian passion for the new differ from the Heideggerian romantic nostalgia?

b) Is true religion and real faith still possible today, or only the pretence of faith and the semblance of religion?

Related to the philosophical relevance of the researches on Paul, we can say that Badiou, Agamben and Žižek clearly and radically challenge the faith of postmodern antiplatonists, whose basic dogma is that the age when it was possible to base a political movement on the direct reference to an eternal metaphysical or transcendent truth is gone forever, because the experience of our own century has proved that the reference to any metaphysical a priori can only lead to “totalitarian” social consequences. Therefore, the only possible solution, according to the antiplatonists, is to accept that we live in an age deprived of metaphysical certainties, in an era of contingencies and conjectures, in a “risk society”, in which politics is a matter of *phronesis*, of strategic judgements and dialogue, and not a matter of references to fundamental cognitive insights. Against this postmodern *doxa*, Badiou, Agamben and Žižek aim at the revitalization of the *politics of universal truth*.

Starting from Paul’s Epistles, the contemporary philosophers examine how can we establish a real universality in our present world. Paul’s question is: what kind of law can structure a subject who, devoid of any identity, is dependent upon an Event whose sole “proof” consists in the fact that it is affirmed by this very subject. With a radical gesture Paul has put an end to the monopolization of truth by any community, be it a nation, a city, an empire, a region, or a social class. He wants to preclude the possibility of it being determined by the available generalities, be they statist (the categories of Roman law: slaves, women, people of different occupations and nationalities, etc.) or ideological (Greek philosophical and moral discourse). Paul has to enforce a universal singularity both against the current abstractions (legal then, economic now) and against communitarian and particularist claims.

Notes

¹ *Acknowledgement*: This paper, as part of my postdoctoral research project at the Institute of Philosophy, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Research Centre for Humanities, was presented at the conference “New orientations in the philosophy of religion: phenomenology, hermeneutics, continental metaphysics” (Budapest, Hungary, Pázmány Péter Catholic University, December 18, 2014).

² For a comprehensive analysis of the kairological characteristics of Heidegger’s philosophy, see Erzsébet Kerekes, *Az idő kairologikus jellege a heideggeri hermeneutikai fenomenológiában/The Kairological Character of Time in Heideggerian Hermeneutical Phenomenology* (Kolozsvár/Cluj-Npoca: Egyetemi Műhely Kiadó – Bolyai Társaság, 2013).

³ Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul. La fondation de l’universalisme* (Paris: PUF, 1997), Giorgio Agamben, *il tempo che resta. Un commento alla Lettera ai Romani* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2000)/ *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject. The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London – New York: Verso, 1999), *The Fragile Absolute, or Why is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?* (London: Verso, 2000), *On Belief* (New York-London: Routledge, 2001), *The Puppet and the Dwarf – Christianity between Perversion and Subversion* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2009).

⁴ See: Béla S. Visky, “Heidegger és az idő, avagy egy elcsendesedés anatómiája”, review of *Az idő kairologikus jellege a heideggeri hermeneutikai fenomenológiában*, by Erzsébet Kerekes, *Erdélyi Múzeum*, 2014/3, 112.

⁵ Such non-Christian philosophers as Derrida, Lyotard, Žižek, Badiou, and Agamben turn toward Christianity or toward the concept of the *messianistic/messianism* when examining *what constitutes the political*. They all think that political consequences can be drawn from the Christian message, and that contemporary political philosophy needs Christianity.

⁶ Frederiek Depoortere, *Badiou and Theology* (London: T&T Clark International, 2009).

⁷ These lectures were published in 1993 as *Die politische Theologie nach Paulus* (The Political Theology of Paul).

⁸ Éva Kocziszky, *Antifilozófusok – huszonöt éves kérdése a kereszténységhez* (Budapest: Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem, L’Harmattan Kiadó, 2014), 129.

⁹ Kocziszky, 130.

¹⁰ Alain Badiou, “*Saint Paul. La fondation de l’universalisme/ Szent Pál: az egyetemesség apostola*” (Budapest: Typotex, 2012), 8. Other important works: *L’Être et l’Événement* (1988), *Théorie du sujet* (1982), *Manifeste pour la philosophie* (1989), *L’Éthique* (1993), *Petit Manuel d’Inesthétique* (1998); *Le siècle* (2005).

¹¹ The Slovenian philosopher discusses Badiou’s book on Paul in his 1999 major work *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London – New York: Verso, 1999). He emphasizes its merits and compares it to Lacanian psychoanalytic researches. Ever since then, references to Paul continue to appear in his works: *The Fragile Absolute, or Why is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?* (London, 2000), *On Belief* (New York-London: Routledge, 2001), *The Puppet and the Dwarf – Christianity between Perversion and Subversion* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2009).

¹² Dominik Finkelde, *Politische Eschatologie nach Paulus. Badiou-Agamben-Žižek-*

Santner. (Wien: Verlag Turia + Kant, 2002, 2007)

¹³ Kaufman, Eleanor. "The Saturday of Messianic Time (Agamben and Badiou on the Apostle Paul)". *South Atlantic Quarterly* vol. 107, issue 1. (2008): 37.

¹⁴ Kaufman, 37.

¹⁵ Generally, *kairos* and *chronos* appear as opposites, with two great, separate traditions of thinking about time behind them. The tradition of *chronos* produces the representation of time stream and timeline, which both perceive time as the procession of "nows". According to the definition of Aristotle, time is the number of motion; and all later attempts at defining time start from this definition (especially Augustine, Kant, Bergson, Husserl). Compared to this main trend – designated by Heidegger as the vulgar/inauthentic conception of time – the tradition of *kairos* stays in the background as secondary. In this tradition, the "nows" are not viewed in their multiplicity, as moving from the future toward the past (quantitatively), but in their individuality/particularity. In ancient Greek, *kairos* means the right time for something. The term is employed in this sense in the Gospels and in the Letters of Paul, and it also plays an important role in the thought of Kierkegaard and Paul Tillich.

¹⁶ Cited by Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans* (Stanford PB: Stanford University Press, 2005), 69.

¹⁷ Interpreting the Paulian *kairos*, Heidegger has come to the conclusion that *parousia* signifies the fulfilment of time that opens itself up for those Christians who live kairotically in their factic way of life. To live kairotically means to hold ourselves open to the moment of Christ's return, a supreme moment characterized by its quality of not being at our disposal: it cannot be foreseen. This quality spreads over to the present, which also becomes *kairos*. According to Heidegger, the present has to be lived in a way that the possibility of the second coming is not eliminated as a possibility: each moment has to be lived within the horizon of this possibility. Thus, the main point of Paul is not the future content (the eschatological representation), but the eschatologization of life experience, the fulfilment of the present pervaded by the future in every moment. Heidegger recognizes that the Gospel of Paul has the character of *carrying out* (*Vollzugscharakter*), it is not only a theoretical doctrine, but closely related to the "how" of life. Paul's formally signalling language also calls our attention to the fact that the meaning has to be accomplished, carried out and actualized separately by each listener/reader.

¹⁸ Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, 70.

¹⁹ See Giorgio Agamben, *La chiesa e il regno* (Roma: Nottetempo, 2010).

²⁰ The translation of the ancient Greek term *parouikousia* is 'to dwell', and it refers to the temporary dwelling of someone banished, a colonist or a stranger. The first epistle of St. Clement of Rome to the Corinthians opens with the sentence: "The Church of God which sojourns (*parouikousia*) at Rome, to the Church of God sojourning (*parouikousia*) at Corinth..." *Parouikousia* is opposed to the dwelling of a citizen with full citizen rights, designated with the term *katoikein*. *Parouikein* is the term that refers to the Christian's dwelling in the world and to the messianic time which characterizes it. It is almost a technical term that appears as the definition of the Church in 1 Peter 1:7: "And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear..." The word "parish" means even today the (temporary) dwelling of a stranger. The fact of the dwelling does not imply anything regarding the duration.

The dwelling of the Church on this earth can last – and it indeed lasted – for centuries or even millennia without altering in any way the specific nature of the messianic experience of time.

²¹ Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, 74.

²² English Standard Version

(<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Corinthians+10&version=ESV>) 1 Corinthians 10:6, 11: “Now these things took place as examples (*figura, typos*) for us, that we might not desire evil as they did”. Now these things happened to them as an example (in a figural way, *typicōs*), but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come”. – In the translation of Agamben: “upon whom the ends of the ages are come to face each other.”

²³ Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, 74.

²⁴ Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, 75.

²⁵ The New Testament expresses with a Greek term *apocatastasis* (Acts of the Apostles 3:21, 2 Peter 3:7-13) the moment when Christ will return and re-establish the original state of the kingdom of God that was blemished by sin. This also entails the return of man to the perfect happiness in which he was created by God. The thesis was embellished with colourful images by Origen and other ecclesiastical writers after him (Gregory of Nyssa, Theodore of Mopsuestia, etc.), so that it periodically resurfaced in theology.

²⁶ Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, 77-78.

²⁷ The first verse is: “Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God”.Gr.: *Paulos doulos Christou Iesou, kletos apostolos aphorismenos eis euangelion Theou*. Lat.: *Paulus servus Jesu Christi, vocatus apostolus, segregatus in evangelium Dei*. Syntactically it forms a single unit, it is uttered in a single breath and follows the crescendo: Paul, servitude, calling, separation, apostle, gospel...

²⁸ In his *The Coming Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) Agamben mentions a parable about the Kingdom of the Messiah as told by Walter Benjamin, who has heard it from Gershom Sholem: “A rabbi, a real cabalist, once said that in order to establish the reign of peace it is not necessary to destroy everything nor to begin a completely new world. It is sufficient to displace this cup or this bush or this stone just a little, and thus everything. But this small displacement is so difficult to achieve and its measure is so difficult to find that, with regard to the world, humans are incapable of it and it is necessary that the Messiah come.”

²⁹ “This is what I mean, brothers: the appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, ³⁰ 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 goods, ³¹ 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.”

³⁰ In the Synoptic Gospels, *hōs* is used for creating tension between two concepts and for attracting semantic fields – for instance, according to mediaeval grammarians, the tension between “man” and “child” (Matthew 18:3).

³¹ Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, 45.

³² Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, 55.

³³ In his *Stato di eccezione*. Homo sacer, II, 1. (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2003) Agamben examines in detail the paradoxical status of law in the state of

exception, especially under the Nazi regime. The suspended law simultaneously suspends and fulfils the law; the law paradoxically specifies the conditions for its own suspension. According to C. Schmitt, the paradigm that defines the functioning and the structure of law is not the norm, but the inclusive exception.

³⁴ We can differentiate between three types of discourse: a) Jewish discourse (the discourse of the sign); the subjective figure constituted by it is the prophet; b) Greek discourse (the discourse of cosmic order); the subjective figure constituted by it is that of the wise man; c) the Pauline Christian discourse (the proclamation of a new event: the possibility of conquering death); the figure constituted by it is that of the apostle. While the politically inspired Greco-Roman discourse and the religiously motivated Jewish discourse was based on the calculability of the cosmic order and emphasized – although in very different ways – the fidelity to the law, Paul the Apostle proclaims the *incalculability* of God's entering into the world and announces an unfalsifiable truth.

³⁵ Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Werke* (1974-1989), I-VIII (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkampf,) V.

³⁶ At the end of this first part of my paper, I would like to refer to Catherine Mills's researches. Mills examines the influences of Walter Benjamin and Carl Schmitt on Agamben's theorization of law. „Agamben's work (...) can in fact be read as an attempt to extend or perhaps fulfill Benjamin's critique of Schmitt's theory of sovereignty, developed in his *Theses on the Philosophy of History* for instance Catherine Mills, “Agamben's Messianic Politics: Biopolitics, Abandonment and Happy Life”. *Contretemps* 5, December (2004): 42-62. See also Giorgio Agamben, “The Messiah and the Sovereign: The Problem of Law in Walter Benjamin,” *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, ed., trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1999), 160-174.

C. Mills, “Playing with Law: Agamben and Derrida on Postjuridical Justice”. *South Atlantic Quarterly* 107: 1 (2008): 15-36. For discussions of Benjamin's relation to Schmitt, particularly on the question of the state of exception, see Samuel Weber, “Taking Exception to Decision: Walter Benjamin and Carl Schmitt,” *Diacritics*, 22:3-4 (1992) 5-18.

³⁷ Badiou traces a parallel between the American global domination of our time and the late Roman Empire, also a “multiculturalist” global state in which ethnic groups were held together by a non-substantial link (in this case not by capital, but by Roman law). Therefore, what we need today is the gesture that would undermine capitalist globalization from the standpoint of a universal Truth, as Pauline Christianity did to the global Roman Empire. Badiou talks about the (re)assertion of the dimension of universalism against capitalistic globalization (breaking the vicious circle of globalization and particularization).

³⁸ Alain Badiou, *L'Être et l'Événement* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1988).

³⁹ What should we do of the fact that Paul's conversion as event does not fit precisely in any of his for subdomains that generate events/truth (love, art, science, and politics)? Žižek proposes that we should examine Badiou's thought itself as a situation of being that has Christianity as a symptomatic element: it belongs to the domain of Truth without being one of its acknowledged parts or subspecies..

⁴⁰ The central doctrine here is formulated in Epistle to the Romans 7:7-18. There is no *Sin* prior to or independent of the *Law*. In the world in which we live, Sin and Law, desire and its prohibition are inextricably interlocked: it is the very act of

prohibition that produces the desire of its transgression (it fixes the object of our desire in the prohibited object). The Christian spiritual path is a magic break, a new beginning that makes it possible for us to open ourselves to the Eternal Life without Sin (that is generated by the Law). This is probably the reason why, for Saint Paul, everything is permitted to the Christian believer, because the God of Love exists. This means that the Law which regulates/ordains and prohibits certain acts is suspended. For a Christian believer, the fact that he does not do certain things is not a matter of prohibitions which then generate the desire for transgression and indulging oneself precisely in these things. The reason of his refraining lies in the positive and affirmative attitude of love, which deprives of essence the accomplishments of those actions which attest to the fact that I am not free, but still dominated by an external force. The First Epistle to the Corinthians 7:12: "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any." This departure from the rule of Law and of its transgression is best highlighted by a very provocative analogy taken from marriage (Epistle to the Romans 7:1-6: if the spouse dies, I can marry someone else, because it does not count as adultery): for someone to become a true Christian, they must die to the law, in order to break up the vicious circle of sinful desires, aroused precisely by the Law. According to Žižek, it is of essential importance that Badiou (similarly to Lacan) has two divisions of the subject: 1. The division of the subject of the Law into: a) his *conscious ego* (that follows the letter of the Law) and b) his *decentred desire* (that functions automatically, against the subject's conscious will, persuading him to do "what he hates", to transgress the Law and indulge himself in prohibited *jouissance*); 2. The much more radical division into: a) the entire domain of the Law/desire (in other words, the domain of the prohibition that generates the transgression of the Law) and b) the characteristically Christian way of Love, which designates a new beginning, a breakout of the dead end of the transgression of the Law. (Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 151.)

⁴¹ An important remark: in the case of Christianity, the Event (the crucifixion) becomes a Truth-event after the fact leading up to the establishment of a faith community. This is a committed community that is held together by faith in the Event. Thus, there is a difference between the Event and its denomination: the Event is a traumatic confrontation with reality (the death of Christ, the historical shock of the revolution, etc.), while its denomination is its inscription into language (Christian doctrine, revolutionary consciousness). The denomination establishes the new Order, the new reading of the situation, which is based on the decision.

⁴² EE p. 202.

⁴³ Žižek also asks what happens if that which Badiou calls Truth-Event is purely a formal act of decision, for which it is indifferent if the Truth-Event it refers to is real or fictitious. What if we are dealing with an inherent key component of the Truth-Event: true fidelity to the Event is "dogmatic" in the sense of unconditional Faith, of an attitude that does not search for good arguments and cannot be refuted by any argument?

⁴⁴ Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 131.

⁴⁵ See: Depoortere, 19.

⁴⁶ Alain Badiou, *Court traité d'ontologie transitoire /CT* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1998), 12-13.

⁴⁷ Badiou, CT, 14.

⁴⁸ Badiou, CT, 10.

⁴⁹ Badiou, CT, 23.

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