

## PDF hosted at the Radboud Repository of the Radboud University Nijmegen

The following full text is an author's version which may differ from the publisher's version.

For additional information about this publication click this link.

<http://hdl.handle.net/2066/160983>

Please be advised that this information was generated on 2021-06-21 and may be subject to change.

The Islamophobic Inheritance of the Resurrected Saint Paul:  
From F.C. Baur's Judeo-Christianity to Badiou and Žižek's Event

In the conclusion to *What Paul Meant*, Gary Wills writes:

The heart of the problem is this. Paul entered the bloodstream of Western civilization mainly through one artery, the vein carrying a consciousness of sin, of guilt, of the tortured conscience. This is the Paul we came to know through the brilliant self-examinations of Augustine and Luther, of Calvin and Pascal and Kierkegaard. The profound writings of these men and their followers, with all their massive misreading of Paul, to a historic misleading of the minds of people down through the centuries.<sup>1</sup>

While Wills' conclusion is firmly established, he does not investigate the consequences of the 'massive misreading of Paul' for our own century. While many contemporary theologians, outraged by Badiou and Žižek's political resurrection of Paul, have begun to consider this question, it is my contention that an important connection (hinted at by Wills) is being disregarded. There is a substantial link, of politico-theological importance, between these 'five men and their followers' – their protestant positioning.<sup>2</sup> All five of these thinkers played a fundamental role in providing the philosophical and theological justification for the critique of the Catholic Church. This critique took a particularly violent and political twist in German Protestant universities in the first quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, most overtly in the writings of the founder of the Tübingen School Ferdinand Christian Baur (1792-1860). While there is a clear connection between F. C. Baur and 'these men' (and a direct one to Kierkegaard<sup>3</sup>), Baur's philosophical and political influence goes much further than the 19<sup>th</sup> century, even when his theological influence wanes. It is my aim to demonstrate that Baur's influence remains tangible in both Badiou and Žižek's readings of Paul, and how this contributes to Islamophobia in Europe today.

---

<sup>1</sup> Garry Wills, *What Paul Meant* (New York: Viking, 2006), 172.

<sup>2</sup> While it may be anachronistic and strictly speaking historically incorrect to refer to Augustine or Pascal as Protestants, there is no doubt that Augustine has been the central theological figure for Protestantism (a role played by Thomas for Catholics), and Pascal, closely associated to Jansenism, very much inspired by Protestantism, which was condemned by the Pope as heretical in 1653. Interestingly Žižek refers to Jansenism in relation to the notion of miracles at several occasions in his most recent writings on Paul. John Milbank, Slavoj Žižek, and Creston Davis, *Paul's New Moment: Continental Philosophy and the Future of Christian Theology* (Brazos Press, 2010), 83.

<sup>3</sup> "The 'Tübingen school' had a pivotal early influence on the development of Soren Kierkegaard's thought ... cited and parodied repeatedly in Kierkegaard's 1841 dissertation ... [nevertheless this relation] has been almost entirely ignored in the secondary literature" in Jon Bartley Stewart, *Kierkegaard and His German Contemporaries: Theology* (Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2007), 23.

This essay begins with a sketch of the historical, theological and political context of F.C Baur's writings. In a nutshell, Baur's Hegelian inspired reading of Paul is a highly polemic theological interpretation that limits true faith to a particular form of Protestantism that relies upon a violent orientalist (which itself is sexist) critique of Catholicism. Fundamental to Baur's reading of Paul is the explicit distinction between Pauline (or Gentile) Christianity and Judeo-Christianity, a term he coined in 1831 and which has a troubling history since, to refer to the undesirable influence the semitic traditions have had on Catholicism. I then move to a selection of Badiou and Žižek's writings on Paul in order to establish Baur's considerable influence. This influence is most tangible in their accounts of Paul's pivotal role as the militant revolutionary figure that brought about the paradigmatic truth-event. Their choice to establish Baur's Paul as exemplary leads to the importation of many of the problems with Baur's Paul that I outline in the first part of this essay. While much has been said of both Badiou and Žižek's antisemitism (limiting this term here to its references to Judaism), not enough attention has been paid to its antisemitism broadly understood, as it was in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, to refer to both Jews and Muslims. While there is undoubtedly a well-documented difference between Badiou and Žižek's writings on Paul,<sup>4</sup> which delves into their distinct analyses of the themes of law, resurrection and death, these differences only subtly affect the islamophobic inheritance they import from Baur,<sup>5</sup> which I will develop in the third part of this essay. Here I focus on how the universalizing Paul they define as paradigmatic for revolutionary action and for truth-events requires an excluded other, which today is the political role allotted to Islam.

### 1. *Who is F. C. Baur's Paul?*

The final point Badiou makes in the prologue to *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* is:

I would at least like to indicate two works from among the colossal secondary literature on Paul: Stanislas Breton's ... [and] Günther Bornkamm's *Paul* [books] ... A

---

<sup>4</sup> Geoffrey Holsclaw, "Subjects Between Death and Resurrection: Badiou, Žižek, and St. Paul," accessed November 5, 2013, [www.academia.edu/379171/Subjects\\_Between\\_Death\\_and\\_Resurrection\\_Badiou\\_Žižek\\_and\\_St\\_Paul](http://www.academia.edu/379171/Subjects_Between_Death_and_Resurrection_Badiou_Žižek_and_St_Paul); Pamela E. Klassen and John W. Marshall, "Saint as Cipher: Paul, Badiou, and the Politics of Ritual Repudiation," *History of Religions* 51, no. 4 (May 1, 2012): 344–363, doi:10.1086/664722; John D. Caputo and Linda Marten Alcott, *St. Paul among the Philosophers* (Indiana University Press, 2009); Milbank, Žižek, and Davis, *Paul's New Moment*. According to Žižek, "Badiou radically disassociates *Death and Resurrection*: they are not the same, they are not even dialectically interconnected. ... Here Badiou is openly anti-Hegelian: there is no dialectics of Life and Death ... The Truth-Event is simply a radically New Beginning" (2010, 93).

<sup>5</sup> Žižek's interpretation is closer to Baur's post-1838 dialectical analysis of Paul while Badiou's reading is closer to Baur's disjunctive 1831 Paul.

Catholic, a Protestant. May they form a triangle with the atheist.<sup>6</sup>

While I didn't allow my discomfort to this exclusionary triangle to prevent me from continuing my reading, I could not help but be bothered for two reasons. *First*, with the proposed shape itself, which clearly excludes significant participants. Undoubtedly, the most striking exclusion is of a Jewish source. The politically propelled return to Paul by left-wing continental philosophers at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, their search for a revolutionary figure and for a secular miracle was undoubtedly inspired by Jacob Taubes' *The Political Theology of Paul*.<sup>7</sup> It was Taubes who recognized the birth, and the ensuing complications, of the political Protestant Paul created by Luther's vitriolic attack on the Catholic Church, and its political potential to reanimate the left.<sup>8</sup> Less striking but nonetheless equally problematic is the failure to affirm the importance of other Pauline interpreters, such as those by Islamic scholars or those whose exclusion is all too often justified by being defined as non-monotheist, in this triangle. Ironically, the problem this poses for both Badiou and Žižek, is that their universalizing revolutionary Paul is far from universal. Their Paul is the politically, theologically and racially divisive Protestant Paul of the Tübingen School.

The *second* problem I have with Badiou's prologue also applies to Žižek as both philosophers act akin to Talmudic rabbis in their almost complete disregard for academic references. What Badiou's two references do establish is a theological tie between F.C. Baur's and his own Paul, via Bornkamm, and a political tie to Breton's Paul. This is clear from the fact that Breton wrote his work on Paul without a theological lens as he had no need to engage with theologians or their method of historical criticism. In this vein he differs from Günther Bornkamm who studied in Tübingen, under the tutelage of Ernst Käsemann, a fervent disciple of F.C. Baur. Käsemann further researched Baur's position that the different books of the new testament were written as party manifestos (and thus with a distinct agenda or *tendenz*) by one of the warring factions: the Judeo-Christians (James, Matthew, Peter) or their adversaries the Pauline or Gentile Christian.<sup>9</sup> While Baur's politically charged reading of Paul was theologically discredited by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, its political potential seems (like Paul) to have recently been resurrected. In order to establish F.C. Baur's theoretical influence on Badiou and Žižek's respective interpretations of Paul, I will focus on the language that Baur introduces to Pauline scholarship. This discourse, which we find – repeatedly – in Breton, Bornkamm, and in Badiou and

---

<sup>6</sup> Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003), 3.

<sup>7</sup> Jacob Taubes and Aleida Assmann, *The Political Theology of Paul* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> Christoph Schmidt, "Review Essay of Jacob Taubes' *The Political Theology of Paul*," *Hebraic Political Studies* 2, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 233.

<sup>9</sup> Ernst Käsemann, *Essays on New Testament Themes* (SCM Press, 1964), 95–105.

Žižek's texts, has been for the most part abandoned precisely because of its troubling political and supersessionist implications.

In 1831 F.C. Baur coined the phrase, which will serve as our red thread: Judeo-Christian by defining it in opposition to Pauline Christianity.<sup>10</sup> For this he is “widely and rightly credited with making a dichotomy [that] made its way into the standard vocabulary of the field.”<sup>11</sup> Genealogically this term has its roots in a return to Paul in the 1820s in Tübingen by Protestant scholars attacking Judaism, Islam, Paganism and Catholicism.<sup>12</sup> For Baur, Paul's importance lies in his ability to have brought about a victory between two warring factions or parties in the early church (approx. 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE). Paul was able to ensure that Pauline Christianity, in Baur's view Protestant Christianity, superseded Judeo-Christianity. The latter, for Baur, was the influence of Judaism (and all forms of Orientalism) on Catholicism. While there had been a long history of Christian supersessionism, Baur introduces a Hegelian inspired secondary supersessionism, that of Protestantism over Catholicism (which was too heavily influenced by other religions).<sup>13</sup> In an admittedly caricature-like fashion, Baur's Hegelianism can be summarized as follows: thesis – Judaism (associated with the semitic traditions and paganism); anti-thesis – Judeo-Christianity (connected to the Ebionites, Peter and James); and synthesis – Pauline Christianity (Protestant theology of the 19<sup>th</sup> century).<sup>14</sup> Baur saw these opposing parties as moving history. Käsemann, more polemically, perceived Judeo-Christianity to be impeding divine history. As such, the goal was to purifying Catholicism from the Judaic (as well as semitic and pagan) influences present in Judeo-Christianity. In order for Pauline Christianity to supersede Judeo-Christianity, it must be freed from all traces of bondage imposed by the law (which Baur associates with Abraham, Isaac and Ishmael and thus defines as semitic), all rituals (the worst of which is circumcision), and all forms of work.<sup>15</sup> It is this supersessionism that Baur inscribes into Paul that is political problematic. Supersessionism can be defined as follows:

The concept of a Judeo-Christian tradition comfortably suggests that Judaism progresses into Christianity—that Judaism is somehow completed in Christianity. The

---

<sup>10</sup> This term is to be differentiated from other similar terms that have a distinct non-supersessionist meaning such as Jewish Christians, Christians Jews as used by thinkers such as e.g. Spinoza, Toland etc...

<sup>11</sup> *The Rediscovery of Jewish Christianity from Toland to Baur* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 68, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=500998>.

<sup>12</sup> Baur was also influenced by several Oriental scholars such as Joseph Wolff (1795-1862), who was also on the faculty in Tübingen.

<sup>13</sup> Herman N. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1997).

<sup>14</sup> David Lincicum, “F. C. Baur's Place in the Study of Jewish Christianity,” in *The Rediscovery of Jewish Christianity from Toland to Baur* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 151, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=500998>.

<sup>15</sup> Ferdinand Christian Baur, *Paul, the Apostle of Jesus Christ: His Life and Work, His Epistles and His Doctrine. A Contribution to the Critical History of Primitive Christianity* (Williams and Norgate, 1875), chap. 5.

concept of a Judeo-Christian tradition flows from the Christian theology of supersession, whereby the Christian covenant (or Testament) with God supersedes the Jewish one. Christianity, according to this myth, reforms and replaces Judaism. The myth therefore implies, first, that Judaism needs reformation and replacement, and second, that modern Judaism remains merely as a ‘relic’.<sup>16</sup>

Baur’s original analysis and his coinage of the terms that reappear in both Badiou and Žižek, which have since then been rejected by the vast majority of Pauline theologians, are to be found in his 1831 article ‘The Christ Party in the Corinthian Community, the Opposition of Pauline and Petrine Christianity in the earliest Church, the apostle Peter in Rome’, published in the *Tübinger Zeitschrift* as *Die Christuspartei in der korinthischen Gemeinde, der Gegensatz des paulinischen und petrinischen Christentums in der ältesten Kirche, der Apostel Petrus in Rom*. While many of Baur’s ideas can be traced to other sources, his terminology and presentation of these ideas is unique.<sup>17</sup> The new language of parties is of great importance to the political-theological struggle between Protestants and Catholics as it attacks the latter’s claim that the church was one at the time of the apostles.<sup>18</sup> In addition, Baur’s Hegelian inspired reduction of four conflicting parties to just two parties is significant as it is the source of his coinage of the term Judeo-Christianity as well as his claims about Paul’s universalism and the need to supersede law and rituals.

With the above background in mind, let us now consider a few specific claims made by Baur that, as I intend to argue in what follows, have both evident and politically problematic traces in Badiou and Žižek’s writings. First off is Baur’s unashamed anti-Judaism in claims such as “Paul places Judaism and Christianity together under the light of a great religio-historical contemplation, and of a view of the course of the world before the universal idea of which the particularism of Judaism must disappear.” While some critics have gone so far as suggesting Baur’s rhetoric fed in to the Shoah, I would rather limit myself to the position that Baur’s reading of Paul relies on a supersessionism of Judaism.

Paulinism rebutted the aristocratic claims of Jewish particularism, and destroyed the very root from which these claims sprang; it made the principle of Christian universalism an integral element of the general Christian consciousness.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Stephen Michael Feldman, *Please Don’t Wish Me a Merry Christmas: A Critical History of the Separation of Church and State* (New York [u.a.]: New York Univ. Press, 1997).

<sup>17</sup> Lincicum, “F. C. Baur’s Place in the Study of Jewish Christianity,” 145–53.

<sup>18</sup> Jones, *The Rediscovery of Jewish Christianity from Toland to Baur*, 26. Worth noting is that the idea is by no means new as Semler puts forward the same arguments but uses the term dioceses (not used by either Žižek or Badiou).

<sup>19</sup> Ferdinand Christian Baur, *The Church History of the First Three Centuries* (Williams and Norgate, 1879), sec. 1:113, <http://archive.org/details/churchhistoryfi00baurgoog>.

This is equally true for his view on other semitic traditions and Catholicism. His reading of Paul imposes intensely depreciatory depictions of these other traditions. An example of his broader antisemitism is his claim that all the semitic peoples are enslaved to the law and to particularism, an enslavement that continues to exert its effects upon Catholicism; only Pauline Christianity or Protestantism is liberated from these 'Judaising' elements.<sup>20</sup> In this vein, he declares that "the relation of [Pauline] Christianity to heathenism and Judaism is defined as that between the absolute religion and the preparatory and subordinate forms of religion. We have here the progress from servitude to freedom ... from the flesh to the spirit."<sup>21</sup> His critique of Judaism's particularism is what paves the ground for his characterization of Paul as universal and free (from the law and rituals). "The Lord is the spirit: and the spirit is liberty [freedom]. That is to say, the principle of Paulinism is the emancipation of the consciousness of authority."<sup>22</sup> Thus while Baur's Paul is a universal and revolutionary free-thinker, he is also exclusionary, supersessionist and orientalist.

## 2. F.C. Baur's Paul in Badiou and Žižek Writings

In what follows, I offer an admittedly partial selection of Badiou and Žižek's writings as I have a precise agenda, which is to demonstrate how Baur's influence is both present and problematic in their respective uses of Paul. While there are undoubtedly significant differences between Badiou and Žižek's analyses, as they themselves often admit, their main goals and sources are shared. Both are inspired by Taubes' conclusion that Paul is the figure to turn to in search of revolution. For both, Paul is the figure and founder of true universalism. For both, Paul is a figure who refuses to be bound by authority, whether in terms of rituals or regulators (such as Peter and James). Already from this goal, it is clear how Baur's reading of Paul is very influential. In their respective readings of Paul, Badiou focuses more on Paul's person while Žižek focuses more on Paul's pivotal role in bringing about the separation of Christianity from Judaism.

Badiou's 1997 *Saint Paul: La fondation de l'universalisme* aims to critique the communitarianism of the public sphere.<sup>23</sup> Badiou is disingenuous in the formulation of his goals in that he does not explicitly refer to Muslims in Europe, although this is clearly central to his concern evident from examples he

---

<sup>20</sup> Lincicum, "F. C. Baur's Place in the Study of Jewish Christianity," 159.

<sup>21</sup> Ferdinand Christian Baur, *Paul, the Apostle of Jesus Christ: His Life and Work, His Epistles and His Doctrine. A Contribution to the Critical History of Primitive Christianity* (Williams and Norgate, 1875), sec. 2:212.

<sup>22</sup> Ferdinand Christian Baur, *The Church History of the First Three Centuries*, sec. 1:65.

<sup>23</sup> Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier, 1st ed. (Stanford University Press, 2003), 9.

provides in other writings and later in this text.<sup>24</sup> Instead he refers to Paul's project with regard to the Jewish community.

What are the conditions of universal singularity? It is on this point that we invoke Saint Paul, for this is precisely his question. What does Paul want? Probably to drag the Good News (the Gospels) out from the rigid enclosure within which its restrictions to the Jewish community would confine it.<sup>25</sup>

His discourse is revealing in that he sees Judaism as having a specific and negative role in bringing about the Event of Paul's foundational universalism, a role that is currently all too often levied upon Muslims in France. Likewise, his discourse in the following chapter where he partially engages Pauline scholarship, discloses Baur's influence in Badiou's choice of terminology as well as indirect critique of Islam. Examples of the former are his use of the terms Judeo-Christians and Gentile-Christians (p. 20) and large-scale struggle and party or faction (p. 21), his use of circumcision as the ritual emblematic of particularism (p. 22) and his view of the law as a form of bondage (p. 23).

Turning now to the specific role he assigns for Judaism in his account of the Truth-Event, which differs from that assigned to Judaism by Žižek, he writes:

The Judeo-Christian faction, which maintains strict observance, asserts that the Christ-event does not abolish the old order. Its conception of the subject is dialectical. It is not a question of denying the power of the event. It is a question of asserting that its novelty conserves and sublates the traditional site of faith, that it incorporates it by exceeding it. The Christ-event accomplishes the Law; it does not terminate it.<sup>26</sup>

It is here that the influence of Baur's Paul is most evident in Badiou's writings. The Judeo-Christian faction has a constitutive role in bringing about the Event in that its assertion of continuity is necessary for Paul's position to be acknowledged as an abolishment, an abrupt end, of the previous world order. Without this explicit opposition to Paul's claim, the breach of continuity cannot be proven. In addition, Badiou hints at the constitutive role he allocates for Islam with regard to this same truth procedure, which is the role of denying the power of the event. Islam does not start or stop with Paul; his role in

---

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 101, 105; Alain Badiou, *Portées du mot "juif"* (Paris: Lignes, 2005).

<sup>25</sup> Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 2003, 13.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 22–3.



the tradition is simply integrated. It is critical for Badiou's notion of Truth-Events that these be radical breaks, revolutionary, and unprecedented. Paul's radical singularity is only clearly demarcated in its opposition to those that deny this both before and subsequent to the Event.

This is further developed in Badiou's discussion of Galatians 2.1:10 in which he endorses Baur's highly controversial claim that Paul must be read as engaging in a political struggle. Badiou's struggle is in some ways analogous to Baur's, which was largely inspired by the struggles against Catholicism, which demanded the refusal of all forms of mediation present in paganism, Judaism, Islam and Catholicism (p. 48) as well as his emphasis on Paul's teaching that salvation comes from faith alone as opposed to law or works (p. 75). In this discussion, Badiou demonizes the other factions and equates the law with servitude while delineating three points he sees as indispensable for the event.

This is an entirely political text, from which we must retain at least three points: 1. Whatever the ponderous character of this discourse, we deduce that the struggle was a fierce one. The Judeo-Christians ... are denounced as 'false brethren,' .... 2. The key moment in the text is the one in which Paul declares that his opponents spied out the 'freedom which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage.' For freedom puts into play the question of the law, a question that will be central in Paul's discourse. ... 3. But in curbing zeal of those Gentile-Christians hostile to Judaism ... The Jerusalem conference is genuinely foundational ... It thereby holds tight to the thread of the event as initiation of a truth procedure.<sup>27</sup>

It is with regard to this structural aspect of the Event that Badiou and Žižek differ. While Žižek's earlier writings on Paul are much closer to Badiou's, there is clearly a re-thinking of Christianity's relationship to Judaism that occurs after Žižek reads Agamben and Santner. While for Badiou it is fundamental that universality arises from a complete rupture with tradition and with a rejection of particularism (p.57), for the later Žižek there is much more space for a Hegelian dialectic that allows for a 'full' realization of the law only possible from within the particularism of Judaism.<sup>28</sup> This is why in 2000 he begins to "read Paul from within the Jewish tradition."<sup>29</sup> In response to Badiou's claim above, Žižek writes:

The paradox of Judaism is that it maintains fidelity to the founding violent Event precisely by *not* confessing, symbolizing it: this 'repressed' status of the Event is what

---

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 24–5.

<sup>28</sup> Holsclaw, "Subjects Between Death and Resurrection," 161.

<sup>29</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (The MIT Press, 2003), 10.

gives Judaism its unprecedented vitality ... the Jews refused to *give up their ghost*.<sup>30</sup>

Likewise in Žižek's reading the same structural role with regard to the Event role is foisted upon 'the Jews' and as such he does not liberate himself from Baur's grips. Furthermore, he continues to endorse Baur's reduction to two factions, the Judeo-Christian and Pauline Christian, defining the former as including paganism and Islam (because of their failure to appreciate the revolutionary potential of identification with the son of God, as opposed to the Father or an orphan as well as their bondage to the law, carnality and claims of particularity or exceptionalism<sup>31</sup>). In his words:

The key dimension of Paul's gesture is thus his break with any form of communitarianism: his universe is no longer that of the multitude of groups that want to 'find their voice,' and assert their particular identity, their 'way of life.'<sup>32</sup>

It is this element of supersessionism, present in both authors, that is imported from Baur's Paul which is disturbing in terms of its reproduction of Baur's antisemitism (which includes what was then known as the semitic traditions – Judaism and Islam). This problem, as it concerns Judaism, has received its fair share of attention by scholars: theological, philosophical and political. "Saint Paul's fidelity to the event is figured largely as the supersession of Judaism and its law, most exemplified as ritual – such as circumcision and dietary practices"<sup>33</sup> and furthermore "the remaking of Paul into the destroyer and surpasser of Judaism is a persistent Christian thought process in which Badiou and Žižek are active participants."<sup>34</sup>

Badiou and Žižek have both repeatedly refused these accusations of Jewish antisemitism so much so that Badiou dedicates an entire book to this issue<sup>35</sup> and in most of his later writings on Paul Žižek explicitly refers to the Nazi movement as an inauthentic event.<sup>36</sup> What is disturbing about the later is that Žižek does not draw the obvious parallel between the figure of the Jew in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the figure of the Muslim today, which he does at other moments (e.g. his discussion of the film *Jaws*). Yet if one recognizes Baur and the Tübingen School's influence on Badiou and Žižek, it is hard to overlook the importation of the explicit antisemitism and orientalism in their *politico-theological*

---

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 128; Slavoj Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute, Or, Why Is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?* (London: Verso, 2008), viii, 89–90.

<sup>31</sup> Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 130–1.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>33</sup> Klassen and Marshall, "Saint as Cipher," 345.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 361–2.

<sup>35</sup> Badiou, *Portées du mot "juif."*

<sup>36</sup> Milbank, Žižek, and Davis, *Paul's New Moment*, 87.

interpretation of Paul (for more on this see Ernest Renan's reflections on Baur). Perhaps this is because, with the exception of a footnote by Dale B. Martin's, no one has identified Baur as a key influence in Badiou and Žižek's readings of Paul,<sup>37</sup> which is surprising given how clearly all the elements that characterize Baur's Paul are made explicit.

Badiou's arrangement of what he figures as distinct and natural entities – Judaism, Hellenism, and Christianity – retraces Hegel's supersessionist narrative of the departure of the world spirit from Judaism to Christianity by means of the dialectic counterpart in Hellenism.<sup>38</sup>

Saint Paul does not argue for the radical violence and break between these Judeo-Christians and Pauline Christians; Ferdinand Christian Baur's Paul did this.<sup>39</sup> Without F.C. Baur's contextualization of Paul as engaged in a revolutionary political struggle, Paul cannot be depicted as the revolutionary figure that founded universalism by rejecting all particularism and external authority. This is exactly what Badiou and Žižek need Paul to do for their own political projects (just as Baur did for his own political-theological project). Žižek clearly recognizes this to be true for Badiou's Pauline project (but does not admit the same for his own project).

For Badiou, *Truth itself is a theologico-political notion*: theological in so far as religious revelation is the unavowed paradigm of his notion of the Truth-Event: political because Truth is not a state to be perceived by means of a neutral intuition, but a matter of (ultimately political) engagement.<sup>40</sup>

It is sufficiently clear that Badiou and Žižek's importation of Baur's Paul is not without complications. This fact, at least with regard to Judaism and the question of supersessionism has been clearly acknowledged. "In their return to Paul as 'source' for philosophical reflection, the New Pauliners unwittingly participate in a traditional Christian enlistment of Paul as the container for Christianity's essential difference from Judaism."<sup>41</sup> That this supersessionism is imported from Baur's Paul is now

---

<sup>37</sup> Caputo and Alcoff, *St. Paul among the Philosophers*, 93n8.

<sup>38</sup> Klassen and Marshall, "Saint as Cipher," 358.

<sup>39</sup> Daniel R. Langton, "The Myth of the 'Traditional View of Paul' and the Role of the Apostle in Modern Jewish-Christian Polemics," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 28, no. 1 (September 1, 2005): 69–104, doi:10.1177/0142064X05057774; Daniel R. Langton, "Modern Jewish Identity and the Apostle Paul: Pauline Studies as an Intra-Jewish Ideological Battleground," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 28, no. 2 (December 1, 2005): 217–258, doi:10.1177/0142064X05060097.

<sup>40</sup> Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 183.

<sup>41</sup> Klassen and Marshall, "Saint as Cipher," 356.

unmistakable. In which case, it is time to consider the newly ‘resurrected’ Paul’s islamophobia.

### 3. *The Islamophobic Inheritance of F.C. Baur’s Paul*

In this final section, I intend to develop the troubling political implications of Badiou and Žižek’s philosophical importation of F.C. Baur’s theological Paul, which opens their theoretical edifice to the charge of Islamophobia. To be clear, my claim is not that Badiou or Žižek are islamophobic, this question does not interest me.<sup>42</sup> Rather, I am interested in the islamophobic inheritance (if I may be forgiven the anachronism) they have received, and failed to recognize, from Baur’s Paul. There are undoubtedly serious consequences “when late twentieth-century leftist European intellectuals such as Badiou and Žižek [sought/seek] to address increasingly pressing political claims made in the name of religious diversity by both Muslims and Jews, [by] turn[ing] to a Paul made in the mold of this Christian tradition, as a truth bearer”.<sup>43</sup> Concretely, if as Badiou and Žižek claim, the Event creates the subject; the narrative they offer of the Pauline event, and Baur’s influence, creates certain types of political subjects. Given Baur’s influence, what they have inherited from him has both practical and theoretical consequences for Muslims and the image of Islam in Europe. Before turning to the only explicit discussion of Islam in relation to the Pauline Event (in the 2008 preface to the new edition of Žižek’s *The Fragile Absolute* entitled ‘A Glance into the Archives of Islam’<sup>44</sup>), I wish to first dismiss the common objection made to this claim.<sup>45</sup> The objection goes that the link to Islam is neither as explicit in Baur nor in Pauline literature in general, which is the reason it is not made explicit by either Badiou or Žižek. While it is the case that Paul’s relation to Judaism is much more explicit, there are too many fundamental sources that both Badiou and Žižek refer to which take Islam into consideration to justify this objection. The two most evident examples are Taubes’ discussion of Arabic manuscripts, the Koran and Islam<sup>46</sup> and Agamben’s engagement with the figure of the Muselmann.<sup>47</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup> While there are many arguments in favour of this claim, both authors deny this quite clearly in their limited discussions of topics such as the veil etc. Slavoj Žižek, “A Glance into the Archives of Islam,” n.d., <http://www.lacan.com/zizarchives.htm>; “Le racisme des intellectuels, par Alain Badiou,” *Le Monde.fr*, accessed November 15, 2013, [http://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2012/article/2012/05/05/le-racisme-des-intellectuels-par-alain-badiou\\_1696292\\_1471069.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2012/article/2012/05/05/le-racisme-des-intellectuels-par-alain-badiou_1696292_1471069.html); Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* (London; New York: Verso, 2002).

<sup>43</sup> Klassen and Marshall, “Saint as Cipher,” 362.

<sup>44</sup> A year earlier a more developed piece (with four extra paragraphs and one minor deletion) appeared on his website [lacan.com](http://www.lacan.com) with the subtitle *The Antimonies of Tolerant Reason*. I will be quoting this piece throughout.

<sup>45</sup> These were also made by Žižek himself in our discussions at the Birkbeck Critical Theory Summer School held from July 1-12<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

<sup>46</sup> Taubes and Assmann, *The Political Theology of Paul*, 21–3.

<sup>47</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive* (New York: Zone Books, 2000), chap. 2.

The problematic consequences are only fully manifest when we consider the Paul they use as their model of revolutionary figure, that is Baur's polemical Protestant and supersessionist Paul. By allowing this Paul (Badiou), or this Pauline moment (Žižek), to define the constitution of the Truth-Event, they import the constitutive exclusion and reduced agency or limited political subjectivity of Baur's Paul. As such, Badiou and Žižek's Paul is also one that founds a universalism that requires two excluded subject positions: one that is to be superseded (either abruptly or dialectically) and one that denies the power of the event. These roles are assigned to Judaism and Islam respectively in Baur's writings, what he refers to as the semitic people, and the former clearly resurfaces in both Badiou and Žižek's Paul, yet the latter remains veiled. The problematic aspect of Baur, Badiou and Žižek's Jewish antisemitism has been properly acknowledged and addressed. It is now time to begin to do the same for Baur, Badiou and Žižek's Islamic antisemitism. With the publication of 'A Glance into the Archives of Islam', Žižek makes the link between the Event and Islam explicit. In so doing, he confirms Baur's residual trace, both directly and via their shared Hegelian inspiration. At the same time he provides an account of "the repressed Event which gives vitality to Islam"<sup>48</sup> that denies the agency and political subjectivity of Muslims both vis-a-vis the Pauline Event and in union with Judeo-Christianity (the faction Paul opposed). In short, Žižek's text exhibits its islamophobic inheritance. In addition to this theoretical problem, the practical-political implication of this inheritance is that Islam (the one vitalized by the repressed Event) cannot be included in the revolutionary project of Europe's left (and since we know the right won't include Islam this can mean only one solution to Europe's 'Muslim problem').

Žižek's text begins with a rephrasing of the problem Islam poses for Christian believers and scholars, and specifically for the Pauline Event: "how could it have emerged *after* Christianity?"<sup>49</sup> While Pauline Christianity clearly supersedes Judeo-Christianity in the substructure of the Event – what is the place of Islam, which comes after Paul and thus, according to the logic of the Event, should have been transformed by the Event. He also explicitly refers to the cliché of Orientalism – its symbolic role as the obstacle to be overcome by means of Hegel's Christian *aufhebung* (the same process that inspires Baur's Pauline struggle).<sup>50</sup> It is within this Orientalist framework that Hegel, Baur, and now Žižek construct a semitic union between Jews and Muslims.

---

<sup>48</sup> Žižek, "A Glance into the Archives of Islam," 1. Remember that "the paradox of Judaism is that it maintains fidelity to the founding violent Event precisely by *not* confessing, symbolizing it: this 'repressed' status of the Event is what gives Judaism its unprecedented vitality ... the Jews refused to *give up their ghost*."

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Ivan Kalmar, *Early Orientalism: Imagined Islam and the Notion of Sublime Power* (Routledge, 2013), 78, 92.

Francois Regnault defines Jews as our *object a* – but are here not Muslims this a-sexual ‘partial object? .... The *Jewish-Muslim civilization* as an axis opposed to Christianity ... Was Hegel not already on the trace of it with his insight into the speculative identity of Judaism and Islam? ... Hegel even designates Islam as THE ‘religion of sublimity’ at its purest, as the universalization of the Jewish monotheism ... The difference between Judaism and Islam [explicitly in Hegel and Baur and implicitly in Žižek] is thus ultimately not substantial, but purely formal: they are the SAME religion in a different formal mode.

All of these citations from Žižek substantiate the structural role of Islam in relation to Baur’s Pauline Event – Islam is formally part of the faction of the Judeo-Christians, in other words in opposition to the Pauline Event. In this vein all the accusations of Jewish antisemitism that have been launched against the new Pauliners ought to have been launched in terms of Muslim antisemitism. The lack of such accusations is doubly problematic because it not only reminds us of the Islamophobia rampant on the left but also further permits the politically convenient denial of a potential analogy between Jews (in the past) and Muslims (today) with regard to their belonging to Europe.

Yet, and this is the further tragedy of the resurrection of Baur’s Paul by Badiou and Žižek, it is not only that Islam is as wronged as Judaism in its structural role in the theorization of the Event, Islam is also allocated another disparate role to play in the constitution of the Event – Muslims are literally stuck between a rock and a hard place in terms of the idea of Europe. Islam, as Žižek systematically develops in the new preface, is also forcibly allocated the role of ‘witness’ to the denial of the power of the Event. This is a role in some ways similar to that assigned to the Jews in Augustine’s doctrine of Jewish witness (with respect to Jesus and not Paul). While Badiou explicitly distinguishes this role from that of the Jews (cited above), thereby leaving the question of whose role it is open – Žižek seemingly provides the answer here. The repressed Event that provides Islam with its vitality, its ghost, is not the Pauline Event – this Event does not have the same power on Islam as it does for Judaism and Christianity.

Žižek demonstrates this by turning to psychoanalysis and the story of the *akedah*, the sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham/Ibrahim. For Islam, “God remains thoroughly in the domain of the impossible-Real ... in contrast to both Judaism and Christianity, the two religions of the book, Islam excludes God from the domain of the paternal logic ... Islam, on the contrary, opts for the lineage of Hagar.”<sup>51</sup> And this in a nutshell is why there is no salvation for Islam in Badiou and Žižek’s paradigmatic Pauline Event. As

---

<sup>51</sup> Žižek, “A Glance into the Archives of Islam,” 1-2.

Žižek calls it: Muslims have failed to cut the umbilical cord. As I call it: the resurrected Paul is drenched in orientalism and sexism.

To prove that Islam's ghost is not that of the Pauline Event, Žižek engages in some comparative theology. Specifically he examines three accounts of the story of Isaac and Ishmael, and Hagar's role in it: the Biblical (Genesis 16:1-15), Pauline (Galatians 2 4:21-31), and Koranic (21:10-19), coming to the conclusion that:

*Only Christianity opts for the actual sacrifice (killing) of the son ... [and Islam because it comes AFTER Christianity is] without a proper time to 'work through' the trauma of impact, to construct a symbolic-fictional space/screen for it ... [with has a possible outcome that there is] a direct recourse to the violent Real ... with no space for symbolic mediation.<sup>52</sup>*

Žižek's conclusion which points towards the notion of mediation ties together the double bind of Islam's structural role in the founding of the Event of universalism – its double exclusion. On the one hand, Islam is excluded from the Freudian union of Judaism and Christianity in terms of their recognition of the Father. On the other hand Judaism and Islam are in union (as part of the Judeo-Christian faction) in opposition to Pauline Christianity. This faction, which of course includes Catholicism, fails to appreciate the direct power of the Event, a power that needs no mediation, no works, no law, no rituals - just faith and grace. In this way, Žižek's conclusion regarding Islam implicitly reaffirms Baur's influence. The latter struggle is precisely the struggle that Baur was engaged with in the 1830s, a violent political struggle between Catholics and Protestants, about the power of mediation and faith. The Catholic Church saw itself as the mediator between God and humanity, Luther – and most Protestants – rejected this role of mediation both of the Church and of the saints. Symbolically this was the target of Luther's Ninety-Five Theses on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences (*Disputatio pro declaratione virtutis indulgentiarum*), as indulgences are precisely the purchasing of mediation. This link is clear from Luther's lectures on the notion of righteousness between 1510-20 in the Books of Hebrews, Romans, and Galatians, which both Badiou and Žižek engage with in their writings on Paul.<sup>53</sup>

Rather than conclude by means of a rather lengthy historical detour to the Enlightenment, let me do so by considering what has now politically united both the left and the right in Europe: their holy crusade

---

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>53</sup> Luther claimed that no works could lead to salvation. Salvation was purely a product of faith – a position he supported by citing Augustine and Paul.

like quest to liberate both Muslims and women by resolving the ‘problem’ of the veil.<sup>54</sup> In his partial defense of the veil, Badiou parrots many of the claims that Žižek develops above with regard to Islam’s relation to the Event, such as the link between Islam and the feminine and the analogous roles Jews played (past) and Muslims play (present) in the fictional threat to the State (and all this in the context of his tirade on the racism of France’s leftist intellectuals from which he apparently excludes himself).<sup>55</sup> In his discussion of the veil, Žižek explains how the trauma of the Event for the Jews is not that of Islam. The prohibition of the veil, in his analysis, is “the prohibition of prohibition, there is no guilt, but this absence of guilt is paid for by an unbearable rise of anxiety ... a universal and thereby universalized prohibition, a prohibition of all actual otherness: to prohibit the other’s prohibition equals prohibiting his/her otherness.”<sup>56</sup> To be clear, according to Žižek, it is the prohibition of the veil by the State in the name of multicultural tolerance that is the source of the problem. Yet, the implication of what he says is that Islam denies the power of the Pauline Event (which Badiou first hints at), the Event at the foundation of universalism and thus remains rooted in its particularism.

While Žižek most likely wished to avoid these implications, his own ghost comes back to haunt him in the final paragraphs. In it, he offers the Islamic parallel to his repeated claim about Judaism’s repressed relation to the Event (being the source of its vitality).

This reliance on the feminine (and on the foreign woman at that) is Islam’s repressed foundation, its un-thought [its ghost], that which it endeavors to exclude, to erase or at least to control it through its complex ideological edifice, but what persists to haunt it, since it is the very source of its vitality.

Islam does not find its source in the Pauline event, or in its rejection. Islam denies the power of this event, it denies the foundation of universalism and remains fixated in its particularism. It is Islam that symbolises the contemporary communitarianism polluting the public sphere. The only conclusion one can draw from this is that Badiou and Žižek’s have smuggled F.C. Baur’s Paul, with all its antisemitism and sexist orientalism, into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

---

<sup>54</sup> Adrien Katherine Wing and Monica Nigh Smith, “Critical Race Feminism Lifts the Veil: Muslim Women, France, and the Headscarf Ban,” *U.C. Davis Law Review* 39 (2006 2005): 743.

<sup>55</sup> “Le racisme des intellectuels, par Alain Badiou.”

<sup>56</sup> Žižek, “A Glance into the Archives of Islam,” 3.