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Angels and Grass: Church, Revival, and the Neo-Pauline Turn

Said Rabbi Simon: “Every single blade of grass has a corresponding ‘mazal’ in the sky which hits it and tells it to grow.”
—Midrash Rabbah, Bereishit 10:6

Alain Badiou’s 1997 book *Saint Paul: The Foundations of Universalism* has certainly been provocative. While engagement with Paul has been by no means unique to Badiou during the twentieth century, his rereading of Paul as a “philosopher of the event” and a paragon of the proper militant subject has triggered healthy discussions, both within and without Continental philosophical circles.1 Much of this discussion has been on the adequacy of the reading of Paul that Badiou presents, but such concerns may miss the point, given how Badiou makes Paul his own to such a degree that it is difficult to situate properly the border between the two. This style of creative reading, while part of a very long tradition, of course, also has other recent precedents, with one of the more contemporary champions of this form of exegesis-as-argumentation being Gilles Deleuze. This may not be a coincidence, but it may be a (mild) surprise. The expected aspect of this Deleuze-like appropriation of Paul by Badiou...
lies in the fact that the other book Badiou penned in 1997 was *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*, a study of the then recently passed philosopher’s ethics and metaphysics. There are reasons to suspect a resonance between these two books—it is hard to credit to pure chance that while writing a book on the Apostle to the Gentiles, Badiou should close another book by describing Deleuze as “a most eminent apostle” of Spinoza, whom Deleuze himself had called the “Christ of philosophy.”

The surprising aspect lies in the fact that Badiou would take up this tactic of reading as “taking from behind” from a thinker with whom he had such sharp differences. Unlike his reading of Paul, Badiou’s reading of Deleuze is in the end critical and almost dismissive. Rather than being a thinker of difference and multiplicity, which is how Deleuze is more commonly received, in Badiou’s eyes Deleuze’s insistence on the univocality of being that runs through multiplicity makes him a thinker of the “One,” a “monotonous” anti-Platonist. More important, for Badiou this makes Deleuze’s conception of the event to be just another perturbation in being, rather than a singular exception that inaugurates a new universal, as Badiou would have it. This antipathy to Deleuze can also be found in those who number themselves as influenced by, or at least fellow travelers with, Badiou. Peter Hallward, perhaps Badiou’s chief English-language explicator, describes Deleuze as a gnostic of the virtual, so entranced by the possibility of creation and flight that he has nothing to contribute to the struggle against the exploitative politics of the “actual,” where real confrontation must occur. Slavoj Žižek has also offered his own purposeful “misreading” of Deleuze that resonates with Hallward’s, although it is supplemented by a narrative of a fall in which Deleuze’s concept of the virtual slowly drifts from effect to cause as Deleuze distances himself from structuralism. This leads Deleuze, under Félix Guattari’s baleful influence, to produce an ideology that mirrors that of the late capitalism that Deleuze and Guattari imagine themselves as standing in opposition to, a thought unable to effect the change that it desires because it already is a mirror of what it stands against. The irony inherent in this last charge of Žižek’s is heightened by the fact that Éric Alliez, in his role as Deleuze’s defender, has made a parallel charge against Badiou—that the evolution of Deleuze’s thoughts shows the sterility of any “hyperstructuralism” (and particularly of Badiou’s, as exemplified in *Saint Paul*), a sterility that can only be overcome by a politics of difference capable of producing heterogeneity and multiplicity. Because of this, Alliez sees the choice between Badiou and Deleuze as “the extreme
polarities, not only of the contemporary domain of French philosophy, but perhaps of the real of thought as such,” in that they confront us with absolutely “antagonistic” ways to take up what Alliez sees as the challenge of the present moment—the charge against empire.6

It is here that we come to the true importance of all these bandied accusations. These differences between Badiou and Deleuze, in a broader view, may consist of the side of philosophy of “Platonism and anti-Platonism, basically,” as Badiou puts it, but it is also a debate regarding praxis, of committed militancy versus an anarchic, decentered liberatory politics of the multiple.7 Inasmuch as both Deleuze and Badiou are thought of as resources for those who have an interest in profound change, it would be beneficial to have some way to adjudicate between these vying ontologies and politics. Since nearly all parties involved claim to abhor philosophical debate (in this, they are all close followers of Deleuze), it would seem best to look elsewhere for clarification. The location of one such arena is hinted at in the occurrence of both Saint Paul and Clamor of Being having been published in the same year—Badiou’s case study of concrete militancy during a different empire two thousand years earlier suggests that the radical growth of contemporary Christianity may be a fertile ground for thinking through what Deleuze and Badiou offer us when confronting empire today. Looking to the anthropology of Christianity and reading (somewhat) against the grain the work of anthropologist Joel Robbins, which has been influential in this quickly developing subfield, I trace out the contrasting, and to a degree disjunctive, modalities that inform the latest theologically informed version of Pauline militancy, the twentieth- and twenty-first-century explosion of Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity. I cast this against Badiou’s reading of Paul, and the tensions between Badiou and Deleuze, to argue that while Badiou and Deleuze may present “antagonistic” arguments at the conceptual level, the vying forms of praxis that they implicitly or explicitly champion, when read synoptically, hint at a powerful means of reconfiguring the social, the cultural, and the political, and those interested in alternatives to the current order would do well to keep this in mind when imagining different forms of politics.

It is only recently, though, that we could even marshal enough ethnographic evidence to have this discussion. For reasons that would take too long to explain here, the groundswell of Christianity, both as a political force in
the global North and a demographic force in the global South, took an inordinate amount of time to be recognized by anthropologists; it was only within this last decade that an anthropology of global Christianity as a self-conscious comparative project began to establish itself. If we are going to look for an inaugural moment for this recent concern and also for an illustrative figure of use in thinking this turn through, it seems that Robbins’s work is an apt place to start. Robbins certainly was one of the first to argue for the timeliness of an anthropology of Christianity, and he was pivotal in foregrounding recurrent concerns such as temporality, language ideology, social transformation, and ethics within the anthropology of Christianity.

Given this status, we should take seriously his arguments regarding the reasons behind the current global growth of Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity; this is especially true since in part it is the vertiginous demographic explosion and resulting global influence of Christianity that have forced anthropology to engage directly with the religion in the first place. Examining two of Robbins’s recent essays side by side—“Pentecostal Networks and the Spirit of Globalization” and “Is the Trans-in Transnational the Trans-in Transcendent?”—we feel that we are shuttling rapidly from one perspective to another, or perhaps that we are looking at an object that cannot be captured by one perspective alone.

The disjunction here is a driving tension between immanence and transcendence; this seemingly abstract opposition is one that, for all its hoariness, is not incidental but goes to the core, and despite the seeming opposition in how it is presented, it is not an either-or but rather a both-and. Robbins’s concern in “Pentecostal Networks” is to identify the engine behind the growth of Pentecostal/charismatic churches in the global South, a more difficult task than it may first appear. As he sees it, the problem is that other explanations predicated on “environmental” factors, such as the denudation of various forms of social support under an unchecked global neoliberal regime, as well as functionalist accounts of what these churches offer to fill this social void, all fail. They fail not because they are untrue, but because they are not specific enough; these arguments neglect to tell us what it is about these particular religious forms that allows them to garner the high level of participation required to meet the social needs or how Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity manage to achieve such a high level of participation in the resource-poor neoliberal landscape that caused these needs to be so acute in the first instance. For Robbins, this specificity and effectiveness can be found in the same seeming contradiction, that of anti-
ritual ritual. Foreswearing ritual, as many Pentecostals/charismatics do, does not remove ritual but rather allows it to grow stronger. In these anti-ritualized rituals lies the power of this ritual form; this kind of religiosity owes its vigor to the endless small, affectively charged interactions, both in the community and between individuals, that proliferate under the nominal rejection of overtly marked ritual, which characterizes much of Pentecostalism and charismaticism. In Robbins’s eyes no ritual enmeshment is too minor; he addresses in surprising detail for such a short paper the ways in which hand gestures during prayer are transferred through intradenominational ties, even when they have to cross hard linguistic barriers. This promulgation of form and affect is important. Antiritual’s power is in the way it propagates and transforms, as those who have contact with it fall into a becoming-other of what they encounter. For ritual not marked off as ritual or as the property of any limited clergy, but rather open to the mass of believers, ritual interaction here serves as an excellent fount for Durkheim-like effervescence, an affective surge produced and conveyed in one moment of synchronized, intersubjective activity that can serve as the motor for another ritual moment farther down the line. Robbins, following Randall Collins, calls these “interaction ritual chains,” thick social webs formed by the very affect that they serve to canalize.11

It sounds reasonable to claim that the social milieu formed by these Pentecostal/charismatic populations are not merely transected by improvised, spiritually oriented quotidian interactions but are predicated on them. This explanation, though, is a social one, based not on an appeal to an imaginary but rather on a transfer of energy that forms or ratifies lateral ties between actors. What is striking about this emphasis on energetics, as opposed to representation, is that it stands at a right angle to the logic put forward in a not irreconcilable but very different explanation Robbins has given for the power of Pentecostal/charismatic Christianity. In “Is the Trans- in Transnational the Trans- in Transcendent?” Robbins suggests that the appeal of a Christian heaven is that it is located somewhere in the sky or, rather, that the positioning of the divine as something ontologically other, marked by “difference and distance,” is key, at least among politically and geographically marginal populations.12 More generally, Robbins sees globalizing religion working on a schema in which the picture of reality is that of a world sundered by a “split that is both radical and hierarchical, with the transcendent being more valued.”13 Robbins’s claim is predicated on a reading of classical global religions as “axial age” religions in the manner of Shmuel
Eisenstadt, albeit a typological as opposed to a chronological one. The important difference here is that universalizing, ethically oriented religions with pretensions of global reach are set forward as a different modality of religion to “nonaxial” religions, rather than as evolutionary successors or historical-teleological capstones. This typology of world religion (or at least of Pentecostal/charismatic Christianity) is predicated on a set of characteristics that Robbins sees as being particularly apropos to what he found in his fieldwork with the newly Christianized Urapmin of Papua New Guinea. Through a process of continual moral education and debate, the Urapmin gain a sense of agency over their spiritual project of becoming a kind of universalized Christian subject (in heaven, there will not be white and black and perhaps not even men or women); to them, this drive toward agency seems to contain at least a possibility of success that greatly exceeds their subjectively measured capacity to realize their other postcontact dream, that of material development.

To those in the global South who are far from the world’s metropoles, Robbins asserts, this cosmology makes sense because it mirrors their sense of their this-worldly situation, where an otherworldly, modern, global, developed, and morally exalted elsewhere determines how their peripherally situated lives unfold, while granting their lives little to none of the glory of the global center. This model is quite different from the model Robbins focuses on in “Pentecostal Networks,” where the religion’s engine is centered around an economy of affect, traced over, or forming, particular networks. It is a dynamic, social, embodied, and altogether nonideational model; in short, it is immanent. The model in “transcendence,” by contrast, is very much about the imaginary and the reflective, expressed through a collective ethical act of adjudicating how much their practice and categorical determinations are adequate to a transcendent that still has this-worldly effects, and though such effects exist, it is the idea of a value that exceeds the day-to-day that makes Christianity a compelling project to the Urapmin. Of course, given that one is a social explanation and one is an explanation centered on an imaginary (one inflected by the Urapmin’s macrosocial positioning, but an imaginary nonetheless), we are not exactly in the realm of contradiction but rather something more interesting: two contrasting framings that subtly pull Robbins’s argument in two different directions.

One might suggest that too much is being made of the difference here; these were, after all, occasional and observational pieces, and neither essay put itself forth as a major position paper. This claim would carry more
weight if Robbins’s own ethnographic monograph, *Becoming Sinners*, did not sequentially trace out, albeit in a relatively unmarked manner, these two modalities in its description of the Urapmin’s incorporation of Christianity. Robbins’s concern with affect and the extension of social networks can be seen in his account of how a charismatically oriented revival traveled laterally from the United States to inner Papua New Guinea; here, specific nodes (for instance, the Australian-trained but indigenous Telefolmin New Guinea evangelist Diyos) capture and transmit the revival’s energy as it sweeps across Oceania, ultimately directing it to the Urapmin. In this instance, Diyos’s Urapmin missionaries took the already occurring Urapmin strategic dalliances with this strange faith of white people and catalyzed an ongoing conversion process by bringing to the Urapmin the emotional crisis with which revival was associated—referred to by the Urapmin as being “kicked” by the Holy Spirit. This contagionlike spreading of intensity was so successful that within a few years of the introduction of revival, the Urapmin had all converted. Further, this affect-laden contagion opened up a period in which dreams, visions, glossolalia, and even collective possessive dances were common, gifts that in part served as the warrant for acts of creative destruction that upturned the entirety of the preexisting Urapmin ritual infrastructure (none of these practices has any pre-Christian analog among the Urapmin). At its height, this wave even partially erased a sense of self; during the early days of this transition, the Urapmin, who, like many Papuans, find the psychic interiority of others so unfathomable that they react with open disgust when asked to posit even a passing hypothesis regarding the interiority of another, found themselves for a brief period capable of supernaturally intuiting and announcing during public meetings the secret actions and thoughts of neighbors and family members.14

The other transcendent modality appears later in Robbins’s book, when we see the Urapmin struggling with how to take an ethical and universalistic individualism as their guiding imperative, where the constant slighting and extortionate influence that was the backbone of local sociopolitical organization under the big-man system is rendered impossible now that all are to be treated equally and anger, the regulating emotion used to persuade under that system, is purportedly foreclosed. The very relational and network models of the self that in fact would have allowed the Urapmin to trace in part the inter- and intracommunal networks that brought Christianity to them in the first place have been replaced by an obligation
not to think of one’s enmeshment with others but rather to consider their personal responsibility and the obligations that arise from their new status as Christians; for the postconversion Urapmin, the problem of “cutting the networks” has now become ontologically easy but deontologically fraught.\(^{15}\) Having abandoned with their conversion the prior set of miscellaneous taboos that served to give the Urapmin a sense of their own law-abiding nature and having the colonial law denatured by Papua New Guinea’s independence, they now must navigate by their own lights, which fills them with anxiety.

This last point is important. Before widening our scope, we should note that the tension between the pre-Christian and Christian senses of self and sociality, not the different “Christian” modalities discussed here, is central to Robbins’s narrative. The essence of Robbins’s book is this: before conversion, the Urapmin were sociocentric and dividual, governed by kin obligations, and now they are not and do not know how to think through the politics or ethics of this new order. This is undoubtedly true and important. But we should also note that if we take seriously the idea that there are multiple modalities of “Christian” selves, then it was only after Christianity arrived to the Urapmin when the borders of the self were overridden by glossolalia and prophecy, and ecstatic moments and affect-rich microrituals pulsed through them; in some ways, they were now more dividual, although in a different and much more visceral way, for their having become Christian individuals.

\[\text{Is there any wider significance to these contrasting tendencies that can be found in Robbins’s work? Other anthropological thinkers have commented on the tensions and oscillations between immanence and transcendence in self-confessed Christian populations. In the few times in the past when Christianity has been addressed as an anthropological object, this differential has been commonly seen as being fundamental to the logic of Christianity; more recently, authors have called into question a reliance on one if not both of these poles as a description of a generic tension in world Christianities, fearing that such a procrustean scheme is not sensitive enough to the possible range of social variability found in diverse modes of Christian life throughout the world.}\(^{16}\) There is sense in this skepticism; it resounds with anthropology’s imperative for an attentiveness to the always-present possibility of multifold human difference, and it also keeps our own per-
haps unconscious (but therefore also all the more powerful) theological imaginations from blinding us to what may actually be present. However well-grounded the rejection of transcendence or immanence as categories may be in particular cases, there are several reasons why we should not be too quick to exclude these two modalities from ethnographic analytics. These two modalities—let us temporarily call the one that leans toward immanence *revival* and the one that leans toward transcendence *church*, even though these are inexact terms and may not entirely map onto the everyday or historical use of these words—are in fact common to Christian practice. Viewed synoptically, they appear as such recurrent (though often inexplicit) organizing formations in ethnographic discussions of Christian populations that it appears to be more than chance.

Of these two modes, there is reason to believe that church is something that is indeed overrepresented, in part due to the way that its own temporalities interact with the temporalities that arise from anthropology’s slower-than-journalism, quicker-than-history participant-observer methodology, in part due to the retrospective foreclosure of lost potentialities that often occurs in backward-looking accounts. Either way, ethnographically, we have a much better idea regarding what church looks like, and indeed, we have enough of a picture to be able to sketch something along the lines of a family resemblance of the way that church, as a modality, is structured. Some of its core features we’ve already identified in Robbins’s essays: church is engaged in producing properly regulated ethical subjects, both in action and in the assumptions regarding what is counted as ethically grounded speech. Not unrelated is the fact that these communities often produce a sometimes rule-based and to a surprising degree open-ended collaborative hermeneutic practice through which collective discussion, under the guise of exegesis, can occur. Also important to this discussion (and grounded not only in Robbins’s work) is the manner in which the recently Christianized tend to characterize their relationship with their non-Christian past as a sharp break. This sense of a temporal break often points to a changed relationship with global exteriority, usually presented as the possibility of an ethical universal. We have seen in the positing of an overarching truth and a wider community of *abstract* belonging, both of which have important effects at the level of ethical practice, a kind of universalism that does not deny the historical-particular situatedness of the population that upholds it. In fact, the local population can be acutely aware of its situation, as in the Urapmin case. What is vital is that these populations see
their situated particularity as their point of entrance to the universal. Extra-religious or extrasect consociates appear as near others in this material, walled off by the participation of these others in what appears as ethically questionable forms of political action and participation with spirits—in short, from these others’ failure to adhere to a purportedly universalistic moral imperative grounded in Christianity. This gap between universalism and particularism also means that boundary maintenance becomes a vital issue (indeed, some have even seen it as the chief mode through which an anthropology of Christianity can be conducted). Finally, these barriers—between those who are included and excluded, between the temporality of an eschatological event that is not complete, and within the demographic partiality of a conversion that is not total—allow for a space in which social criticism of the wider, local “secular” can occur; where breaks from colonial logics or institutional control have been achieved, previously extant religious formations, including at times Christian formations, can also be the target of such ethical criticism.

Looking at the ethnographic record, then, church is a religious modality easy to articulate, centered on imaginaries and classifications—though not without heavy elements of practice—constituted by self-disciplinary-oriented ethical imperatives, which are thus individuating and yet at the same time collective in that they are concerned with the contours and limits of belonging formed by joint commitment. It is more difficult to say what revival is like, and there is something ironic about this. The ethnographic dominance of church accounts is a function not only of the success of church as a model for socialization, metacognition, and practice, but also, it would appear, a function of the previous success of revival. While it would be a mistake to see revival as the only gateway through which populations enter Christianity (sometimes conversion appears to be driven as much by economics or politics as by passion and to have a celerity more along the lines of trench warfare than blitzkrieg), we know that it is how some enter, and this entrance has effects.

Perhaps part of the difficulty with documenting revival is the narrative framing used to discuss it, both in anthropology and in other social sciences, where it is presented as a punctual event with a beginning and ending, and thus as transient. Despite the fact that revival thus seems as graspable as a shooting star, there are some broader characterizations that we can make about it, more thanks to disciplines like history and religious studies than to ethnography. Our earlier characterization of revival as rhizomic
and acephalous, running across various geographic and social borders, is echoed here. Revival is described as having a “diffuse and non-institutional character,” as being quick to jump over denominational and other social boundaries, and at least in the initial phases, it is seen as “often . . . accompanied by a lowering of racial, gender, and class barriers.” Even more telling is that the self-reports of revival suggest that the language of energetics and flow we encountered earlier is not off the mark: experience of revival was articulated by those who had gone through it “in terms of physical sensations, . . . liquid similes” and “electricity.”

I would like to focus here on the experiential and subjective aspects—not merely because the embodied pleasure of participating in these flows makes it successful in the first place (according to Robbins’s argument), but also because here ethnographic data allows us to see what is truly radical in what transpires in these moments and how great the epistemic, ontological, and ethical gaps between revival and church really are. Although revival has its own relationship with the global and the pan-Christian, here it is not a space of universalizing ethics but rather a warren of connections, often with particular individuals as nodes, that gives the global its contours and shapes. This is beautifully captured by anthropologist Simon Coleman, who notes that in the rapidly growing, Swedish-centered but effectively transnational Livets Ord (Word of Life) movement, religious practice can be framed as a form of circulation. In this movement, participants understand spiritual pedagogy as a hollowing out of oneself so that one can receive and physically incorporate the words of the other; these words are taken in and assimilated not as some kind of abstract referential code but as a material and sensual transmission, where one can “build up” a certain kind of spiritual puissance through repeated exposure to the same verbal material. This transmission is not unidirectional; Coleman sees the interest in the prosperity gospel as another part of this flow, where through the fungible medium of money one externalizes oneself and places this externalization in outward circulation through the gift, in the hope that it will return for reincorporation.

This erasure of personal boundaries can be seen perhaps most clearly in the Toronto Blessing, a Pentecostal/charismatic revival that broke out in a small charismatic church near the Toronto airport in January 1994 and continues to this day. This is a recent moment when revival was documented in its full unfolding and in which we can see some of the particularities of these (anti)rituals carried to a point where the category of the subject itself
becomes problematic. Many of the other aspects associated with revival can be identified in the Toronto Blessing as well. While technically associated with a small church (the Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship), those in attendance on any given day are visitors from across North America, and indeed the world, brought through the transportation infrastructure associated with the airport but making this trip due to a world-bridging Pentecostal/charismatic information network. It is only natural that there should be pilgrimages to this site. Here, the spirit itself is an immanent force, folded into and through other processes—it has a kind of topology, felt more strongly in some regions and even in some parts of a building or room. Affect also has its own shaped intensities, in the heightened emotional plateaus created by worship music and in the ecstasy of worship, such as “holy laughter” (riotous laughing for no particular reason), being “drunk in the spirit” (a quickly spreading behavioral contagion marked by staggering, falling, giddiness, and confusion), and being “slain in the spirit” (spontaneously collapsing onto the ground, often lying still for hours at a time). More telling are manifestations in which affected individuals slip, however temporarily, into another way of being—it is not uncommon for overtaken worshippers to roar like a lion or bleat like a lamb and to have these vocal eruptions matched by embodied performances. While these more baroque spiritual manifestations are by no means uncontroversial in a wider Christian community, in its absence of a strong leader, in the rapidity with which it developed, and in the affective energies and challenges to a certain kind of bounded individualism, it seems almost like a pure moment of revival, if such a thing were possible.

Having laid out these ideal types, we have reached the usual moment where the author starts making caveats, and I would not wish to disappoint: this binary is certainly not the only means, imaginable or extant, by which these communities can be measured; these populations are transected by other vectors that not only are independent of this set of concerns but may end up skewing how this particular opposition plays out. Further, although I would argue that this is a wide-ranging description, capable of covering numerous different Christian groups, it is not an exhaustive one: many populations, such as the Eastern Orthodox, have not been well represented in this discussion, and it would not be too much of a surprise to find that they would not be particularly capable of being assimilated into our typologies.29 Also, this opposition is about formal categories and, hence, is not a causal narrative; specific histories, economies, politics, geographies, and
technologies are what give rise to the conditions that allow and sustain these two different modalities, though these formal modes, once inaugurated, have self-structuring effects.

The caveat that I would like to stress most, though, is that this binary is in no way an opposition; rather, each of these modalities includes spaces and moments for their respective antipode, and that aspect is the secret of Christianity’s growth in the twentieth century (or at least of its charismatic and Pentecostal variants). Consider again the discussion of Robbins’s essay, which we used as a basis for the church mode. There was an emphasis on a transcendent moral order that grounds imagination and practice, but just as important was the fact that this transcendent order offers a this-worldly “proof” in the form of charismatic gifts. The gifts can be thought of as a moment of becoming other, versions of the kind of slipping into alterity that we have already seen in our discussions of Coleman and Toronto, only less alien due to their (relative) familiarity for us. We can see this in the structure of prophecy, where the Holy Spirit’s voice comes out through one’s own mouth; in visions, where other worlds and scenarios become visible through one’s own eyes; or in tongues, where a divine language temporarily takes the place of one’s normal terrestrial langue. All these instances can be thought of as a temporary loss of individual borders and a partial and passing erasure of identity; this has caused Tanya Luhrmann to liken charismatic and Pentecostal acts of “hearing from God” to a modern-day enactment of Lucien Lévy-Bruhl’s participatory mode of being.30 It would appear, then, that in any church structure where the gifts are present, in those moments and spaces a structure of becoming reminiscent of revival is present as well.

While all our exemplars have come from Pentecostal/charismatic Christianity, what we have put forward may also express itself even where the gifts are not present, in forms of Christian religiosity that are untouched by, or have refused, the Pentecostal/charismatic turn. The presence of revival in church can even be seen in modes of Christian practice in which the idea of the congregation is strong and the particular forms of embodied performance associated with Pentecostalism have not been taken up. Remember that for Coleman it is a matter of a relationship of becoming other at the level of language as much as at the level of the body, and this subtle shifting of identity through the medium of speech can also be seen in what is in some ways the “opposite” of Pentecostalism, Baptist fundamentalism: consider the strange transformations and purposely unstable conflations of
biblical and contemporary figures that are seen in the tricksterlike narratives of Jerry Falwell, as identified by Susan Harding.31

Likewise, it seems, church is present in revival—or at least in any revival that appears recognizable. Even during the height of revival in Toronto, there was a concern for appearing to be beholden to certain eternal Christian truths, and however permeable the revival-self was, in the end it always had to be reconstituted enough as an individual to function effectively or else the individuals and movement would self-erase. It is also important to remember that these spontaneous acts of becoming-other are often primed by modes of self-cultivation specifically designed to place into question the usual cognitive and sensory boundaries that demarcate self and other; this priming suggests a fealty to this process akin to the dedication found in church.32 Given this mutual entanglement of church and revival, it is therefore not too surprising to see accounts in which a transcendently imposed truth and an immanent transformative grace coexist as parallel, and often interfering, logics, and the usually unmarked ensnarement of these two different ways of being can be used to think through the peculiarities not only of the more abstract interpretive practices with these communities, but also of their economic and charitable practices.33

What does this have to do with the debates regarding either the philosophical reading of the Apostle Paul or the Deleuze/Badiou opposition with which we started? It certainly has no bearing on the accuracy or cogency of these readings of Paul—those who imagine themselves to be Paul’s inheritors cannot retroactively affect his work. Nor is it easy to say that the previous discussion necessarily has implications on these neo-Pauline works as critical projects; any easy dialogue between anthropology and philosophy runs the risk of becoming either incoherent or pointless. These two fields are the results of different debates, and therefore, there will inevitably be spaces where they have nothing to contribute to each other because they had not been led to reckon with those issues by the particular rabbit trails they were following. There is even a question as to whether in this case dialogue is possible. After all, if philosophy is the study of the “inhuman,” as Badiou has claimed, there can be little surprise if anthropology, the “science of man,” runs counter to that.34

Since this discussion has focused on identifying the formal aspects of these two different modalities found in the ethnography of Christianity,
though, we can prevent the conversation from becoming mired by these disconnections if we keep the same formal focus in the interdisciplinary moment as we have in our earlier intradisciplinary one and ask what the homologies (but not the fungibilities) are between church and revival, on one hand, and the vying forms of praxis, discussed in the introduction, on the other.

Church is the relatively easy one: given the concerns with a collective ethical project that falls from a historically situated yet timeless break (either the ontological rupture of the incarnation or the crucifixion, possibly conflated, with the social break of collective conversion in “convert societies”) and in its concerns with proper discourse as forms and expressions of this événementiel truth, it seems that church has resonances with Badiou’s reading of Paul. Despite Badiou’s ratification of Jacques Lacan’s claim that Christianity is the religion that comes closest to the truth, though, church and Badiou may not appear to map to each other perfectly.\(^{35}\) It is unclear ethnographically if all Christian conversions contain the possibility of an open belonging and a reapprehension of what constitutes the social such that everyone can be properly presented, both of which are essential elements of a properly Badiou-influenced universalism. However, even in the face of social and cultural difference, syncretistic particularities can open up a space for participation and belonging in wider debates and communities, as is shown by participation in the global networks of churches, parachurch organizations, and internationally oriented Christian media.\(^{36}\) Becoming a part of these already established conversations allows for a space of a potentially more inclusive belonging and a collective working through and for statements that at least have the pretensions of being addressed at the level of the universal.

More vexing is the fact that church is oriented toward transcendent truths. Transcendence is something that does not fit with Badiou’s vision of Paul. For Badiou, Paul is concerned with the making immanent of the divine; Badiou presents Paul as demanding a renunciation of the transcendent, a renunciation that Badiou shares. To Badiou, any infinite that points to a further horizon, rather than being contained within the here and now, is just romanticism and religion, which are anathema to him.\(^{37}\) However, there is something about Badiou’s self-avowed Platonism, exhibited in the gap between the merely ontic day-to-day world and ontological truth, that smacks of the transcendent. For Badiou, it is individuals who must adequately themselves to truth through fidelity if they wish to rise to the level
of subject, even though these are truths that they author themselves as the promulgators of the event; the particular language *(immortal, eternal)* and status given to the truth and the subject that bears it has a cast not unlike that found in transcendence—intelligible and world affecting, yes, but not quite the quotidian knowledge that constitutes most discourse. This odd half-transcendence is a better fit with its doppelganger church because it captures the “emic” sense of something greater and expansive, while at the same time staying true to anthropology’s methodological atheism and sociocultural causation.38 Finally, for those skeptical of the alignment of Badiou with church, which is more Petrine than Pauline, recall that by *church* here we would not mean institutional structures but a collective of militants however organized (including, but not presuming, hierarchical organizations) and recall this line from Pascal, used as an epigraph by Badiou: “The history of the Church should, properly speaking, be called the history of truth.”39

If we align church with Badiou, can we align revival with Deleuze? This may appear too bold. Deleuze has not written approvingly of religion in general nor of Paul in particular. For Deleuze, Paul is a monumental but unfortunate and villainous figure: Deleuze adopts without qualification Nietzsche’s characterization of Paul, “the founder of Christianity,” as the figure of bad conscience and *ressentiment*, at once managerial, aristocratic, and Leninist (again, for Deleuze, as opposed to Badiou, *Leninist* is no compliment). Worse yet, Paul, through his promulgation of Christianity, is a participant in the forging and extolling of the “judgment of god,” Deleuze’s term for the repression of affective circuits and lateral regimes of debtor-creditor relationships and their replacement with infinite obligation to a single god and the sclerotization and multiplication of stifling categories of identity.40

Despite Deleuze’s unequivocally negative assessment of Paul and the religion he founded, there are aspects of revival that seem to fit how Deleuze has portrayed valorized aspects of the world, if not with Deleuze’s own preferred mode of rarefied and abstract contemplation. Revival’s sustained and sometimes uncanny emotional palette parallels nicely with Deleuze’s preference for affective intensities; the acephalous networks formed by revival, capable of jumping numerous geographic and social barriers, certainly have a rhizomic cast, and revival’s tendency to connect adherents from different churches and congregations and to bring in outsiders smacks of an affiliative logic, rather than one based on descent. The vitalistic ecstasy found in
these rites, especially the holy laughter and being drunk in the spirit found in the Toronto Blessing, is reminiscent of Deleuze and Guattari’s call to get drunk on pure water.41 Even the preference for spiritual warfare in revival suggests a reliance, at least in the interim, of an immanent contestation (even if it doesn’t completely abandon the fantasy of a final, though suspended, judgment of God), making it again another aspect of revival that would be in accord with a Deleuzian outlook. One could even describe the effects of revival as a kind of deterritorialization, from the way it eats away at preexisting social forms and regimes of signification. But perhaps the most striking argument is the becoming-other we see in more quotidian forms in the gifts, in forms, in the linguistic/bodily incorporation Coleman identified in the prosperity gospel movement, and in the becoming-animal found in the Toronto Blessing. Isn’t this slinking into other inhuman skins almost a literal playing out of Deleuze and Guattari’s dream of becoming animal, becoming multiple?

Theologically minded authors have already noted the similarity of some Deleuzian concepts to phenomena found in global Christianity’s revivalistic spread; the question is what these rough isomorphisms between Badiou and church, Deleuze and revival, might mean for both anthropology and these Continental philosophic discussions of Paul.42 For anthropology, the benefits are a much more careful calibration of the kinds and uses of technical language. It has been common practice to speak of Pentecostalism in the language of global flows and rhizomes but without much thought as to whether this was applicable to all Pentecostalism and also without remembering that Deleuze’s mode of thought was one that was supposed to celebrate elements of a nonarboreal freedom. Along these lines, articulating homologies between church and revival, Badiou and Deleuze, might also open up a more sophisticated capacity for diagnosing the political valences, for good and for ill, found in Christian movements. Both Badiou’s and Deleuze’s thoughts were meant to chart what proper political forms might be and also the ways in which one can turn away from them; it is no accident that the nature of fascism has been something both carefully considered, positing it as versions of proper gone horribly wrong, either through infidelity to and a rejection of universalism (Badiou) or through a metastasis of power and recoding in the wake of deterritorialization (Deleuze).43 Rather than the common summary pigeonholing of Christian groupings, local and translocal, as either unfortunate or felicitous, these lines of thought can facilitate an approach in which the specificities of Christian religiosity can
be thought and evaluated without dropping into a sort of hyperparticularism that forestalls comparativist thought.

And what about the discussions of Continental philosophy and Paul? Does this necessitate a “Deleuzian” reading of Paul, one that would try to read the metaphor of “grafting” the Gentile onto the Jewish root as a disjunctive synthesis or as a rhizomic moment in an otherwise arboreal religious lineage, of “adoption” over being “born in the womb” as a moment of double capture? Do we wish to emphasize Paul’s discussion of the charismatic gifts in 1 Corinthians, first as the same kind of becoming-other that we see in the gifts today, and second as an endorsement and not a containment and limitation of them? Can we read Paul’s mission as Apostle to the Gentiles not as a conversion or even a partial renouncement of his Pharisee past but as a pluralistic gesture intended to allow “pagan” populations new ways of being that would supplement, rather than overwrite, then-existing Judaism? Would we take Paul’s life in Christ the same way we would take Deleuze’s idea of participation of life in the abstract, in which a particular life becomes merely a life shorn of all markers and qualifiers, as put forward in the last essay Deleuze wrote? Would we take the “Yiddish” of Paul’s Koine Greek, as described by Jacob Taubes, as writing in a “minor language” and akin to “minor literature” as put forward by Deleuze and Guattari, and see Paul’s form of argumentation through an almost mosaic-like bricolage of decontextualized quotes from the Septuagint as a sign of the epistles’ status as such? Would we even take Paul’s fevered crisscrossing of the Mediterranean, down to his inability for all but his last jail to hold him, as a sign of the movement, action, and freedom so central to Deleuze’s thought?

Perhaps, but to do so may be to miss the point. To the extent that we wish to read Giorgio Agamben’s reconception of potentiality as loosely overlapping with Deleuze’s conceptions of immanence and the virtual, focus on a reading of the gifts (or, more specifically, of speaking in tongues) as an experiment in desubjectified experience occurring within language itself, and understand Pauline messianism as a contemporaneous and transformative opening up of the previous constrictive and inscriptive categories of the law without erasing them, we have something not unlike this already in Agamben’s writings on Paul. Indeed, we already had that without any recourse to an anthropology of Christianity.

What this comparison gives us is something far more important. This Continental turn to Paul occurred in a moment when one mass move-
ment oriented toward a radical universalism collapsed, and while Paul was no doubt originally selected because he was “a philosopher of the event,” the choice was no doubt also influenced by the fact that this “philosopher” was the architect of another mass movement that challenged an empire and established itself throughout the then-known world. While the anthropology of Christianity cannot produce first-hand evidence regarding that earlier efflorescence, it can speak of the growth of Christian religiosity today, and if the articulations presented here have any validity, this growth has its engines in both angels and grass, in forms that point to a vitalistic and immanent exteriority of becoming other, and in immortal heralds of eternal truths. Badiou and those sympathetic to him have sought to either domesticate Deleuze’s thought or present it as politically naive or mystic and ineffectual. This is unfortunate, as Deleuze is best able to capture revival as a becoming, and revival has the resources and cunning to forge events in the same way that Badiou would have events forge truths. Those sympathetic to Deleuze, of course, have been just as rejecting of Badiou and his project—again, a shame, as it is the elevation of the event and the embracing of truth found in Badiou that seems to capture the structures of epochal significance that many now find in Christianity and that can produce the promulgatory adherents necessary to make revival more than mere Heraclitean flux. Of course, both Badiou and Deleuze could be used individually to find languages to account for both of the modalities of church and revival (here Deleuze, with his language of virtual and actual, planes of consistency and planes of organization, smooth and striated space, rhizomatic maps and arboreal tracings, might be in particular a rich resource), but to use one thinker without recourse to the other would inevitably be to valorize one pole at the cost of the other. If a progressive Left is to achieve the kind of global success and import presenting its own vision that the Christian movements have had presenting theirs, it needs to develop a way of thought and a form of praxis that follows the contours of both revival and church, some synthesis of these two ways of apprehending the world, rather than merely championing one logic or another that is beholden only to partial elements of Christian sociality and conviction.48

One final caution. There is another possibility, of course, that neither church nor revival would be of use to us—that they are both too run through by the logic of the current order to offer any resistance to it. In this reading, Christianity’s power would not lie in how it can run at right angles to capital but in how successfully it submits to it and can therefore offer us
no instruction at all. If this is the case, it does not mean that all this was for naught, for we would need all the more the grace of the event and the capacity to produce new lines of flight.

Notes

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3 Ibid., 9–10, 13.

4 Peter Hallward, *Out of This World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation* (New York: Verso, 2006).


8 For a more in-depth discussion of the barriers to this project and a history of how they were overcome, see Jon Bialecki, Naomi Haynes, and Joel Robbins, “The Anthropology of Christianity,” *Religion Compass* 2.6 (2008): 1139–158.


10 Joel Robbins, “Pentecostal Networks and the Spirit of Globalization: On the Social Pro-


13 Ibid., 59.


25 Ibid., 8–9.


28 This description of the Toronto Blessing is drawn from Margaret M. Paloma, *Main Street Mystics: The Toronto Blessing and Reviving Pentecostalism* (Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press, 2003), and from accounts I gathered while conducting ethnographic research on the Vineyard, a Southern California church-planting movement strongly associated with charismatic-style evangelical worship.


32 Luhrmann, “How Do You Learn to Know.”


35 Alain Badiou, *Being and Event* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 212.

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38 Only, though, to a certain extent: there is something about the event in Badiou that is acausal and therefore goes against anthropology’s naturalism—it is not surprising that the event in Badiou is thought of as a form of grace. See John Milbank, “The Return of Mediation, or the Ambivalence of Alain Badiou,” Angelaki 12.1 (2007): 127–43, 134.

39 Badiou, Being and Event, 212.


48 To the degree of course we assume that these are different agendas, which is not necessarily the case.