



Discerning Fidelity: Badiou between Faith and Reason

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Abstract

At this juncture in history, viewed as either the dusk of modernity or the dawn of its overcoming, questions of faith and reason are continually cast up anew. The questioning of faith and reason raise familiar binaries and oppositions: Is faith for or against, internal or external, before or after, above or below reason? Does faith perfect or overcome, complete or destroy, add or subtract from reason? This essay will pass through two figures representative of the contested field of Thomistic scholarship en route to a discussion of how the French philosopher Alain Badiou might intervene within the contemporary discussions of faith and reason. It will first engage Denys Turner's recent work which could be characterized as a dogmatic faith in reason attempting to repel the dispositional faith which he attributes to Fergus Kerr. These competing conceptions of faith will set the backdrop for a presentation and application of Badiou's understanding of faith as discerning fidelity.

Keywords

Faith, Reason, Alain Badiou, Philosophy, Fidelity

At this juncture in history, viewed as either the dusk of modernity or the dawn of its overcoming, questions of faith and reason are continually cast up anew. The questioning of faith and reason raise familiar binaries and oppositions: Is faith for or against, internal or external, before or after, above or below reason? Does faith perfect or overcome, complete or destroy, add or subtract from reason? Is faith subjective or objective in relation to reason? And as in the past transition from the medieval to the modern era, so also in the current transition out of modernity, Thomas Aquinas has become a contested figure in the debate between faith and reason. We will not, however, enter into the contested waters of Thomistic scholarship, but will rather pass through two figures representative of the field *en route* to a discussion of how the French philosopher Alain Badiou might

intervene within this contemporary discussion of faith and reason. To do this we will first engage Denys Turner and his sparring partner, Fergus Kerr, and their understanding of faith and reason. These competing conceptions of faith will set the stage for a presentation and application of Badiou's understanding of fidelity.

I. Faith: Dogma or Disposition?

Denys Turner's *Faith, Reason, and the Existence of God* argues for the possibility of a rational proof of God. The bulk of his argument centers on an articulation of reason situated between both atheological rationalism and Augustinian pseudo-rationalism.¹ Rather than seeking a rational proof for God which would also articulate who and what this God is (as in most Enlightenment accounts of natural theology), Turner outlines the possibility of reason knowing that which is unknowable to itself, which is God the unknown. He does this through an explication of reason as apophatic and cataphatic in structure, able to question its own limits, reasoning beyond the horizon of its experience as intellect. Outlining his argument he says,

You begin to occupy the place of intellect when reason asks the sorts of question the answers to which you know are beyond the power of reason to comprehend. They are questions, therefore, which have a double character: for they arise, as questions, out of our human experience of the world; but the answers, we know, must lie beyond our comprehension, and therefore beyond the experience out of which they arise. And that sense that reason, at the end of its tether, becomes an *intellectus*, and that just where it does, it meets with the God who is beyond its grasp, is, I argue, the structuring principle of the 'five ways' of the *Summa Theologiae*.²

Reason is most itself in its own exhaustion as reason emptied into intellect by "entertaining a certain kind of question" that puts the answering ability of reason to rest.³ This certain kind of question is the question of the contingent existence of the world, of "why is there anything at all?" For Turner, if this question is valid, then through it reason is forced beyond itself and its natural situation, it is exposed to a question the answer of which is beyond its comprehension,⁴ or rather, "reason thus 'abolishes itself in its self-realization' in its entertaining a certain kind of question, for reason reaches its limit not in some final question-stopping answer but rather in a final

¹ Denys Turner, *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. xii.

² *Ibid.*, p. xv.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 232.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 248.

answer-stopping question.”⁵ The validity of this question, and its importance, consists in its expressing a “sense of the world’s radical contingency,”⁶ a contingency which establishes an understanding of *esse*, an existence separated from essence. For if the possibility of the world’s contingency is entertained, then this is to see the world as created, as standing alongside the possibility of there being nothing at all. From this possibly we “derive our primitive notion of ‘existence’ itself, what Thomas calls *esse*.”⁷ The contrast of *esse* and ‘nothing’, of the split between essence and existence, gets at the heart of the contingency of creation. Therefore, for Turner, the *sense* of the question of ‘why is there anything at all?’ stems from our understanding of bare existence, of *esse*, which when coupled with the ‘self-abolishing’ aspect of reason (its apophatic nature) leads reason to its very limit as the unknowable answer which is God. This is the case because reason is not merely itself on its own but has the “shape of the sacramental”⁸ and the logic of the incarnation and the Eucharist.⁹

But the backdrop to this argument, and that which separates Turner from his main targets, Barthian theologians and the *nouvelle théologie*, is what most concerns us here. This backdrop is what Turner variously calls the ‘reasons’ or ‘grounds’ or ‘context’ of faith. Turner articulates his argument within the contested terrain “between those for whom, on grounds of faith, the existence of God could not be rationally demonstrable, and those for whom, on grounds of faith, the existence of God must be rationally demonstrable”¹⁰ and makes the case that there are reasons of faith for maintaining that the existence of God must be demonstrable by reason alone. His book intends to refute those for whom “the existence of God is knowable with certainty by reason *but only* within and as presupposing the context of faith.”¹¹ In agreement with the teaching of First Vatican Council, Turner seeks to show that the God of the philosophers is indeed the same God of the theologians, even if known differently. He argues this in contrast to those like Fergus Kerr who claim the proposition ‘God exists’ has incommensurable meanings for theologians and philosophers because the former “believe under conditions” that the latter do not.¹²

⁵ Ibid., p. 232.

⁶ Ibid., p. 242.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 244–5.

⁸ Ibid., p. 24.

⁹ Ibid., p. 193.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. xi.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 14 and 17.

¹² Ibid., p. 16, noting Fergus Kerr’s *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), p. 67.

To understand better what is at issue, let us look more closely at Kerr's argument in *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism*. In a chapter dedicated to Thomas's 'five ways', Kerr advances a line of thought attempting to remove the 'five ways' from the grip of analytic philosophers who tend to read them solely from the perspective of natural philosophy. He does this by putting the 'five ways' back into properly biblical and theological hands. Kerr claims one clue to understanding Thomas's natural philosophy lies in his discussion of faith in 2–2.2.2 of his *Summa Theologica*.¹³ This article concerns how it is that unbelievers are said to believe in God. Kerr says, summarizing Augustine's three-fold distinction of faith, that there is "believing God (*credere Deo*: believing what God says), believing in God (*credere Deum*: believing that God exists), and . . . believing unto God (*credere in Deum*: the faith by which one is personally committed to God)," and that through these distinctions Thomas answers this objection.¹⁴ Thomas answers that while the unbeliever might fulfill one of the three conditions of faith by believing *a* God exists, she fails in the other two. And since true faith requires all three as the one act of faith, Thomas concludes "they do not believe that God exists under the conditions that faith determines; hence they do not truly believe in a God."¹⁵ But Kerr notes that Thomas unfortunately does not then specify what the conditions would be for truly claiming God exists. Yet Kerr speculates Thomas presumably "means that, under grace, the mind of the believer would be conformed to God and the will motivated by God."¹⁶ At the risk of oversimplification, we might call this a *dispositional faith*, in that from within God conforms and motivates the mind of the believer creating the conditions for faith to obtain.

This *dispositional faith*, or believing under condition, is exactly what Turner argues against, instead leaning on a *dogmatic faith*. For in his seeking to untangle reason and proof for the existence of God from the context of faith, Turner makes claims that seem haunted by this very context, and from which he never seems quite able to exorcise himself. What is the status of the claim that reason alone can know God exists, but only faith can know that the God of reason and the God of faith are the same God?¹⁷ Or, while rightfully seeking to overcome the dichotomy of a cataphatic reason and an apophatic faith in dialectical tension, Turner's move to make both the cataphatic and apophatic intrinsic to reason itself which anticipates the dialectic

¹³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, vol. 3 trans. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province. (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1948), p. 1174.

¹⁴ Kerr, *After Aquinas*, p. 67.

¹⁵ Aquinas, *Summa*, 2–2.2.2, p. 1175.

¹⁶ Kerr, *After Aquinas*, p. 67.

¹⁷ Turner, *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God*, pp. 19–20.

of faith begs the question of whether reason has timelessly been an anticipation of the structure of faith (an argument for natural theology) or whether indeed the structure of reason has been restructured by the history of faith?¹⁸ Is Turner's reliance on the concept of *esse* a timeless resource of reason, or is it a historical creation based in the reasoning of a faith tradition?¹⁹ Lastly, if "the 'shape' of a proof of God's existence must be the 'shape' of faith itself" or "must have the 'shape' of Christ" such that a "rational proof of the existence of God is thus incarnational in both source and form,"²⁰ how is this deemed outside the context of faith when the criteria for evaluation are internal to faith and not likely to be shared by those external to that context? In light of the aporias of Turner's claims, we can call this type of view a *dogmatic faith*, in the dual sense of resting on the dogmatic assertions of the Church, in this case the First Vatican Council, as well as resting on the dogma of the church, i.e. incarnational and Eucharistic logic, and the existence/essence distinction. Between these lightly sketched distinction of *dispositional* and *dogmatic faith*, let us now turn to Alain Badiou's understanding of what we will call *discerning fidelity*, seeing how it can move us beyond the opposition of a timeless reason and historicized faith.

II. Faith: Discerning Fidelity

Alain Badiou is a French philosopher who does not fit neatly in with the divide between analytic and continental philosophy. While being just as quick to criticize both Rudolf Carnap and Martin Heidegger, Badiou employs an exacting mathematical philosophy but also gives flowing commentary on contemporary aesthetics. He can chop the logic with any analytic philosopher even while moving effortlessly between Pascal, Kierkegaard, Husserl, and Lacan, all in an attempt to move philosophy beyond its contemporary sophistic malaise back to a rigorous Platonism of the multiple. Add to this his militant atheism coupled with his unselfconscious appropriation of theological terms, Badiou makes for an ideal partner in this conversation between faith and reason, rending back to theology a scrupulously philosophical notion of fidelity.

A. *Beings and Events*

To get a handle on Badiou's concept of fidelity, we must briefly work through three groups of terms: multiplicity and situation, being and

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 48–49, 51, 193.

¹⁹ As David Burrell argues in *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993). See pp. 14–15, and 39–46.

²⁰ Turner, *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God*, p. 227.

knowledge, event and truth. Badiou sutures his philosophy to contemporary set-theory, proclaiming that ‘mathematics *is* ontology—the science of being qua being.’²¹ The basic term of set-theory is the ‘multiple’ where every multiple is a collection of other multiples, or “every multiple is a multiple of a multiple.”²² Badiou gives every grouping of multiples the philosophical term ‘situation.’ A situation is any, literally any, “presented multiplicity.” The presentation of a multiple depends on an operation of gathering together made up of “circumstances, language, and objects”²³ which presents each multiple as *this* multiple.²⁴ In this sense, a situation is anything from the grouping of cardinal numbers, to a biological body, to a traffic pattern, or for our purposes later, the intersecting historical situation in the first century of Jewish Nationalism, the Roman Empire, and Greek philosophy. Each situation has its own particular ‘being’ according to what it is composed of, but the logic of this ‘being’ is expounded according to the logic of multiplicities, i.e. set-theory.

Within every situation there is a coordination between ‘being’ and ‘knowledge’. As Badiou says: “In every situation, there is an encyclopaedia of knowledge, linked to a language of the situation.”²⁵ Knowledge functions here in a “commonsensical manner: it is the collection of facts and opinions that obtain in reference to the various elements of a given situation.”²⁶ But knowledge is not only a ‘collection’ of facts and opinions, but rather is also that which circumscribes ‘existence’ within the situation. What Badiou describes as the ‘encyclopaedia of knowledge’ consists of all the terms, properties, objects, and rules that have been allowed, created, or otherwise found(ed) by the language of the situation. In this framework, only what is made explicit by a well-formed language is granted existence, and “whatever is not distinguished by a well-made language is not.”²⁷ Knowledge, as Badiou understands it, is linked to and authorizes the being of a given situation. Knowledge is the guaranteed being of a situation.

²¹ Alain Badiou, *Being and Event* trans. Oliver Feltham. (New York: Continuum, 2005), p. 4.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 29.

²³ Alain Badiou, “Truth: Forcing and the Unnameable,” in *Theoretical Writings*, ed. and trans. by Ray Brassier and Alberto Toscano (New York: Continuum, 2004), p. 121.

²⁴ Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 24.

²⁵ Alain Badiou, “Politics and Philosophy” [interview with Peter Hallward] *Angelaki* 3:3 (1998): p. 130. See also his “Eight Theses on the Universal,” in *Theoretical Writings*, p. 146, where he says, “I call ‘encyclopedia’ the general system of predicative *knowledge* internal to a situation: i.e. what everyone knows about politics, sexual difference, culture, arts, technology, etc.”

²⁶ Jared Woodard, “Faith, Hope, and Love: The Induction of the Subject in Badiou,” *Journal of Philosophy and Scripture*. 3:1 (Fall 2005): p. 29.

²⁷ Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 283.

The last group of terms is event and truth. An ‘event’ is that by which something new comes into existence within a situation. Or rather, an event is the revelation of the existence of something already presented in the situation yet not re-presented by it,²⁸ something belonging to the situation (presented in it) but not included in the knowledge of the situation (re-presented in it). In an event a new being “comes-forth within presentative proximity. . .subtracted from representation.”²⁹ This coming-forth of a new being within the situation creates a truth-procedure which transforms the original situation and its corresponding knowledge. As Badiou says: “a truth is always that which makes a hole in a knowledge.”³⁰ The event gives rise to a truth (not *the* Truth) that “groups together all the terms of the situation which are positively connected to the event.”³¹ But this truth is not just some truth added to the general knowledge of the situation; rather it is the truth of the entire situation, previously unknown or concealed by the regime of knowledge its discursive rule.³² Interestingly, for Badiou the paradigmatic example of the coupling of an event and its truth is in St. Paul’s declaration of the event of the resurrection of Christ, that “He is risen.”³³ Moving beyond Badiou a little bit to make the point clear, we could say that according to the re-presentation of Jewish Nationalism, Jesus is merely a failed Messianic pretender, and according to the re-presentation of the Roman Empire Jesus is merely a crucified criminal. Therefore, according to the reigning knowledge of the situation Jesus is no person of consequence, and yet St. Paul declares that the very truth of both Jewish Nationalism and the Roman Empire are revealed in the resurrection of Christ.³⁴ But this is to get ahead of the argument. What seems at first blush to be an opposition between the reign of being and generative events, between the knowledge of being and the truth of the event is clarified in Badiou’s understanding of *fidelity*.

²⁸ In *Being and Event* Badiou opposed ‘presentation’ and ‘representation’ (see pp. 93–103), but later began writing the latter as ‘re-presentation.’ We will follow this development. See Badiou’s “Politics as a Truth Procedure” in *Theoretical Writings* (pp. 153–160) for an example.

²⁹ Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 177.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 327.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 335.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 417.

³³ Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. by Ray Brassier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

³⁴ For the relation of St. Paul’s gospel and Jewish and Roman thought see N.T. Wright’s *What Saint Paul Really Said* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), esp. pp. 39–62; “Paul’s Gospel and Caesar’s Empire” in *Paul and Politics: Ekklēsia, Israel, Imperium, Interpretation: Essays in Honor of Krister Stendahl*, ed. by R.A. Horsley (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000); and “Paul and Caesar: A New Reading of Romans” in *A Royal Priesthood? The Use of the Bible Ethically and Politically*, eds Bartholomew, Chaplin, Song and Wolters (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002).

B. Fidelity: Declaration and Discernment

In his more abstract register Badiou calls “fidelity the set of procedures which discern, within a situation, those multiples whose existence depends upon the introduction into circulation. . . of an eventual multiple” such that “to be faithful is to gather together and distinguish” everything connected to the event.³⁵ Accordingly, fidelity 1) always depends on an event, and therefore cannot be reduced to an intrinsic capacity, disposition, or virtue; 2) fidelity cannot be understood as something in the situation, but rather a process acting within the situation; 3) but nevertheless fidelity mimics the domain of knowledge in the production of a truth.³⁶ In this sense fidelity both turns toward its founding event even while turning toward its consequent truth.

The two main features of fidelity, for Badiou, are its interventional declaration³⁷ that the event exists, and the inquiring discernment³⁸ of its consequent truth within the situation. A fidelity, carried out by a faithful subject, intervenes within the prevailing knowledge of the situation, deciding and declaring that something significant has occurred of which the prevailing knowledge did not and could not know beforehand. Without this intervention the event is liable to fade back into inexistence, being forgotten and lost. Outside of those who intervene, the event is always considered doubtful and ambiguous. The intervention names the event, putting its existence into circulation within the situation against the laws governing the knowledge of the situation. Turning again to St. Paul, his intervention concerning the universality of Christ ran against Jewish Law (separating Jew from Gentile) as well as Roman Law (that only Caesar is Lord). Nevertheless, because “truth is a process, not an illumination,”³⁹ without the initial interventional declaration and its matching fidelity, the process of discerning a truth is impossible.

The second feature of fidelity consists in inquiring and discerning the consequences of the event within the situation, rather than merely declaring that it happened. Badiou variously calls this inquiry the ‘procedure’ or ‘operator’ of fidelity. This inquiry constitutes a counter-discernment to that of the reigning knowledge. This alternative mode of discernment, which functions “outside knowledge but within the effect of an interventional nomination, explores connections to . . . the event.”⁴⁰ Fidelity is, therefore, thinking “the situation

³⁵ Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 232.

³⁶ *ibid.*, p. 233.

³⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 201–211, and 223–231.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 232–254, and 327–343.

³⁹ Badiou, *Saint Paul*, p. 15.

⁴⁰ Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 329.

‘according’ to the event”⁴¹ by gathering together everything within the situation connected to the event. Fidelity is a counter-discernment because it works according to a law of connection between terms alternative to the laws of knowledge. For the Jewish and Roman laws of thought, it was inconceivable that a messianic pretender and crucified criminal be called ‘Lord’. Yet this is exactly what St. Paul does as he discerns the nomination ‘Lord’ according to the event of Christ’s resurrection, rather than by Jewish or Roman Law. Fidelity, then, looks back and declares the existence of a founding event even while it looks forward, discerning the truth that the event bears. Discerning fidelity is the process by which an event transforms a situation, not through destruction, but by reconnection.

This transformation of the situation is, however, not against knowledge. The event does not destroy the original situation, but rather reorders the situation to such an extent that it could be considered a new situation altogether. In a statement reminiscent of Catholic doctrine on grace and nature, or even some Protestant understandings of general and special revelation, Badiou says, “Truth is subtracted from knowledge, but it does not contradict it” because while the transformation of the situation may present new terms, all the old terms persist even if reconnected.⁴² From the perspective of knowledge it might seem like the destruction of the old in order to make room for the new, but from the perspective of the operation of fidelity it is the preservation of the old and the extension of the new. In fact, Badiou claims the 20th century’s desire to make a fundamental break with the old led it to attempt to destroy the old through various ‘wars to end all wars.’⁴³ Against this tendency for destruction (epistemologically and politically), all the terms accounted for by knowledge are also present for the emerging truth, but they are nevertheless reconnected according to an alternative discernment in relation to the event.

III. The Grounds of Fidelity

Equipped, then with Badiou’s conception of fidelity let us turn again to the distinction between *dogmatic faith* and *dispositional faith*. First we will run through a brief history of Christian doctrine illuminating the usefulness of Badiou’s concepts, before offering a critique of Turner and Kerr by showing the upshot of understanding faith as *discerning fidelity*.

⁴¹ Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. by Peter Hallward (New York: Verso 2001), p. 41.

⁴² Badiou, *Being and Event*, pp. 406–408.

⁴³ Badiou, *Le Siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 2005), p. 59.

As we have already noted, in the articulation of his gospel as fidelity to the Christ-event, Paul reconnects terms that equally cut across the accepted knowledge of Jewish and Roman thought. Paul claims that terms such as ‘Gospel’, ‘Savior’, and ‘Lord’ only find their truth when they are connected to Jesus, the Crucified, yet Risen, Messiah.⁴⁴ But moving beyond Paul and his relation to Jewish and Roman thought, let us consider the historical situation of Greek philosophy. In the Gospel of John the philosophical concept of *logos* is connected to the Christ-event as an affirmation of the pre-existence of Jesus (a connection prepared by Philo). Through this and other discernments, the Christ-event connects the previously disparate terms ‘God’ and ‘humanity’ in what will become the doctrine of the Incarnation, a new term explained by means of the old terms of the situation (*hypostasis, homoousios, substantia*). The affirmation of the Incarnation connected to the terms for ‘God’ in the Hebrew Scriptures (*elohim, adoni, Yahweh*) in conjunction with the manifestation of the Holy Spirit, give rise to another new term, namely, the ‘Trinity’. Also, fidelity to the Christ-event, through the new term of Incarnation, discerns a new connection between ‘God’ and ‘cosmos’ resulting in the disconnection between ‘essence’ and ‘existence’ which Greek natural philosophy failed to do, eventually culminating in Aquinas’ conception of *esse*.⁴⁵ In each process of discernment, the production of these terms, according to the knowledge of the Greek philosophical situation, seem strictly irrational or paradoxical. This is why many classify Christian theology as mostly failed philosophy.⁴⁶ But from within the process of fidelity, these reconnections are not a failed attempt to Hellenize Christianity, but successful inquiries reconnecting terms of Hellenism to the Christ-event, a process that might rightly be called Christianizing Hellenism, because “Christian thinking, while working within patterns of thought and conceptions rooted in Greco-Roman culture, transformed them so profoundly that in the end something quite new came into being.”⁴⁷ This entire process, beginning with the interventional declarations that “He is risen,” through initial discernments concern Jewish Law and the Roman Empire, all the way to the Thomistic distinction of essence and existence, this process falls within the context of *discerning fidelity*, unable to even begin without

⁴⁴ See N.T. Wright’s “Paul’s Gospel and Caesar’s Empire” and “Paul and Caesar: A New Reading of Romans”.

⁴⁵ See Robert Sokolowski’s *The God of Faith and Reason* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1995), pp. 41–51, and David B. Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, (Notre Dame, IN: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1993), esp. pp. 39–46.

⁴⁶ See Christopher Stead’s *Philosophy in Christian Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

⁴⁷ Robert Wilken’s *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), p. xvii.

the interventional declaration and inquiring discernment made by a community of believers.

Returning then to Turner, who dogmatically claims that reason itself must conform to the ‘shape’ of faith and Christ, we see him drawing on a combination of new terms (the logic of incarnation and *esse*) and old terms reconfigured. Yet it seems difficult to maintain that a proof for the existence of God is outside of the context of faith because Turner is leaning so heavily on terms only discernible through fidelity to the Christ-event. But if this ‘context’ of faith is understood not as *dogmatic faith* but rather as *discerning fidelity*, building upon previous connections now at a great distance, yet still faithful to the Christ-event, it is fastidious to say that such a proof is independent of faith. For while it is conceivable that in conjunction with the old terms of the situation, i.e. natural philosophy, the new terms might verify the possibility of proving that the old term ‘God’ is equivalent to the new term connected to the Christ-event, this only shows how pervasive the process of fidelity has become in Western culture, even in its transformation of ‘reason’ itself. And at times this seems to be exactly Turner’s point—that Thomas’s ‘five way’ are intended to reconfigure the structure of reason. But then this makes them seem more as paths of conversion than proofs of reason, unmaking the argument he is at such great pains to make.

But this does not mean Kerr’s *dispositional faith* is superior to the *dogmatic*, for a *discerning fidelity* is not merely a disposition, capacity, or virtue. *Discerning fidelity*, united by a declaration to the event and propelled toward its truth, has what seems might be a subjective element. But for Badiou, while the subject of fidelity is said to be the bearer of the process of truth, the subject “in no way pre-exists the process. He is absolutely nonexistent in the situation ‘before’ the event. We might say that the process of truth induces a subject”⁴⁸ because the subject is “*taken up* in the fidelity to the event, and *suspended* from truth.”⁴⁹ This ability to be *taken up* and *suspended*, or what Badiou elsewhere calls being “overcome and traversed by a truth,”⁵⁰ makes humanity distinctive from animals. This traversal by truth might be analogous to Turner’s articulation of *intellect*, but on a historical rather than transcendental scale. The subject of fidelity, by looking back to the event and forward to its truth within the situation, nevertheless stands at the intersection of knowledge and truth,⁵¹ and is therefore aware of the overlap of nature and grace, or general

⁴⁸ Badiou, *Ethics*, p. 43.

⁴⁹ Badiou, *Being and Event*, 406 (emphasis in original).

⁵⁰ Alain Badiou, “Philosophy and Politics,” in *Infinite Thought: Truth and the Return of Philosophy*, ed. by Justin Clements and Oliver Feltham (New York: Continuum, 2003), p. 55, and also 53.

⁵¹ Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 406.

and special revelation. This is possible because the subject is neither a subjective disposition internally creating its own truths (which is Turner's fear, that faith could somehow invent rational truths),⁵² nor an objective dogmatician making pronouncements of accumulated knowledge.

But the upshot of *discerning fidelity* is not merely a uniting of a subjective disposition and an objective dogma (although it is not less than this). Rather more importantly, *discerning fidelity* reintroduces the significance of history without capitulating to historicism. It does this by giving an account of language, as the knowledge of the situation, without following a strictly nominalist account tending toward historicism. On the side of knowledge Badiou acknowledges that nominalism reigns with its rules for exact nomination,⁵³ while on the side of the event of truth nominalism is dethroned by the emergence of something new which transforms and stretches language between the univocal and equivocal, which of course for Aquinas is the analogical. *Discerning fidelity* also escapes historicism in that truth is a cumulative process rooted in but not confined to a particular historical epoch, instead opening toward a type of universalism beholden to the event from which it came. Badiou considers as events the universalism begun by St. Paul, the scientific revolution begun by Galileo, and the French Revolution, each persisting beyond their historical origins, yet inexplicable without them. In this light, Turner, in his polemics against Barthians whom he claims create a binary between 'salvation' history and 'ahistorical reason,'⁵⁴ tends to generate for himself an 'ahistorical faith' such that the 'shape' of faith and reason undergoes no development.⁵⁵ Against this tendency, *discerning fidelity* is able to account both for the historical grounds of faith by fidelity to the Christ-event (corresponding to Turner's need that reason conformed to the shape of Christ), and also account for the rational grounds of faith through the deployment of terms gathered by faithful inquiry (i.e. incarnational logic and Thomas's understanding of *esse*). The former concerns intervention and the event, while the latter concerns inquiry and truth, each rooted in, yet not capitulating to, history.

In these ways, *discerning fidelity* overcomes the aporias of Turner's attempt to separate a space for pure reason in accordance to the reasons of faith, even while it safeguards against the temptation toward

⁵² Turner, *Faith, Reason, and the Existence of God*, p. 5.

⁵³ Badiou, *Being and Event*, pp. 286–294.

⁵⁴ Turner, *Faith, Reason, and the Existence of God*, p. 12.

⁵⁵ Turner would have to complete his argument by showing how his suggested shape of reason could be accounted for without recourse to concepts and terms developed by the history of faith, and therefore argue for a 'timeless' structure of faith hinted at in other traditions regardless of revelatory tradition.

fideism. *Discerning fidelity* cuts across the typical binaries relating faith and reason of subjective/objective, for/against, above/below, and perfection/destruction by relating historically contingent events with the production of universal truths (not the Truth *per se*, but the truth of each situation). Of course, Badiou as an atheist would object to a theological appropriation of his rendering of fidelity, assuming that theology is indeed failed philosophy. But this ends up creating a situation similar to the one facing Turner such that Badiou's argumentative structure resembles and relies on the 'shape' of Christ and the Trinity, even if using these to deny theism, belying a disavowed dependence.⁵⁶ Indeed, it might very well be that Badiou can lead Christian theology back to a situation of self-confidence after its exile between modern rationalism or fideistic dogmatism, fully assuming its particular history even while opening toward a Catholic future.

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⁵⁶ For the beginning of such an argument see John Milbank, "The Return of Mediation, or The Ambivalence of Alain Badiou," *Angelaki* 12:1 (April 2007), pp. 127–143.