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Disciplined Seeing: Forms of Christianity and Forms of Life

On How One Sees Things

To work at seeing the world as though one were seeing it for the first time is to get rid of the conventional and routine vision we have of things, to discover a brute, naïve vision of reality, to take note of the splendor of the world, which habitually escapes us.”¹ If Pierre Hadot’s meticulous, often poignant reconstructions of the philosophical traditions of antiquity have taught us nothing else, it is that there was a time when what it meant to be a philosopher was to set oneself on the course of becoming a certain type of person. Beset with a kind of blindness, stemming above all from our unregulated desires and exaggerated fears, philosophy’s charge was fundamentally that of a reeducation of the senses that would effect a “profound transformation of the individual’s manner of seeing and being,” a metamorphosis of personality and a thoroughgoing renovation of one’s mode of existence.² The ensemble of techniques deployed in this learning to live, the array of practices that unequivocally situated the philosophical act not merely on the terrain of theory and cognition but in the formation of a concrete attitude and a determinate life-

style—these habits Hadot refers to as “spiritual exercises,” and they show us, he asserts, that philosophy at its inception constituted more than a specific way of life; it constituted, necessarily, a *therapeutics* as well.³

So it comes as little surprise that Hadot would discern in Ludwig Wittgenstein, whose writings he was among the earliest French intellectuals to discover (and in reference to whom, incidentally, he would first use the term *spiritual exercises*), a modern articulation of a decidedly premodern view of philosophy’s curative function—even if, as Hadot rightly points out, Wittgenstein believed that “the true philosophy would consist in curing itself of philosophy, in making every philosophical problem completely and definitively disappear.”⁴ For, like Hadot and the tradition he elucidates, Wittgenstein’s therapeutics were directed at the recovery of a distinctive mode of apprehension—as in his famous injunction, “To repeat: don’t think, but look!”⁵—where *looking* at the world means to see it differently, that is, naturally, in all its “splendor . . . which habitually escapes us.” Or again: “Work on philosophy—like work in architecture in many respects—is really more work on oneself. On one’s own conception. On how one sees things. (And what one expects of them.)”⁶ Far from insinuating a retreat from the ordinary, Wittgenstein believed that the cultivation of a particular manner of seeing—here associated with the therapeutic “work” of a certain kind of philosophical training—might rather provide the conditions for our finally acknowledging the strangeness, the beauty, even the terror of it.

The wonder correlative of this acknowledgment is an experience that suffuses the whole of Wittgenstein’s output. But it is the shifting status or character of that wonder, as he moves from the *Tractatus* to his *Investigations*, that most clearly evinces the implications of its eclipse by our desire for explanation. Hence, the loci of wonderment in his later philosophy are “small, local, various, and mundane” and reside in such commonplaces as *this* gesture or *that* flower blossoming—a wonder, in other words, not at the existence of the world as such but at the “amazingly intricate ways in which we are interwoven with it.”⁷ And yet, Wittgenstein seems to say, it is precisely this practice of seeing that becomes less and less tenable as we progressively, habitually coast through the calculable currents of our modernity. Thus Wittgenstein writes of a person who “might admire not only real trees, but also the shadows or reflections they cast, taking them too for trees. But once he has told himself that these are not really trees after all and has come to be puzzled at what they are, or at how they are related to trees, his admiration [*bewunderung*] will have suffered a rupture

that will need healing.”⁸ At issue here is not puzzlement per se but rather that *kind* of puzzlement whose incapacity to sustain awe in the face of, say, a tree’s shadow betrays a style of “thinking” (or what Wittgenstein otherwise refers to as a “scientific” or “causal” perspective) that searches for and invariably uncovers systematicity beneath the rough surface of things, and in whose characteristic pronouncement — “Of course, it had to happen like that” — lies the truth of its peculiar sickness.⁹

The political analogue of this will to mastery can be found in the rationality and structuring order of modern bureaucratic states, such that the abnegation or at least domestication of contingency — “the taming of chance,” as Ian Hacking would have it — becomes the critical precondition for a range of legal and administrative capabilities.¹⁰ “Could there be,” Wittgenstein queries, “human beings lacking in the capacity to see something *as something* — and what would that be like? What sort of consequences would it have? — Would this defect be comparable to colour-blindness or to not having absolute pitch? — We will call it ‘aspect-blindness.’”¹¹ Enabling human populations, their potentialities and pathologies alike, to be explained and managed with unprecedented efficiency — and, when deemed unmanageable, to be efficiently discarded — aspect-blindness turns out to encompass more than a debased ethical disposition; it turns out to name an indispensable modality of effective governance.

Seeing Christianity

It is no doubt strange that we should begin our contribution to a volume titled “Global Christianity, Global Critique” by calling attention to the insights of Wittgenstein and Hadot. What, after all, might their efforts at disentangling us from “the chains of our bewitchment and from being captured by images,” as Stanley Cavell once described the Wittgensteinian task, and the seductions they identify as causing such enthrallments to seem necessary if not inescapable, have possibly to do with the intellectual developments with which the present volume is concerned?¹² Ours, admittedly, is an oblique way of approaching these concerns. Yet we want to suggest that the vocabularies by which the objects of our inquiries are conceived and apprehended are themselves manifestations of historically specific pedagogies connected, so Wittgenstein might say, to “how one sees things” — and, in seeing them, intuiting how properly to live with them.¹³

Of course, the “thing” in question here is Christianity: on the one hand,

a Christianity whose rapid proliferation throughout the Southern Hemisphere has brought it under increasing scholarly as well as public scrutiny (“global Christianity”), and on the other, a Christianity now taken by a heterogeneous grouping of philosophers and social theorists to contain resources that might revivify political projects once animated by avowedly non- or even antireligious political desires and teleologies (“global critique”).¹⁴ Needless to say, our own disciplinary itineraries have given us a stake in how such developments play out and are understood. Yet while it is indeed noteworthy that so many academics have thought it worthwhile to take Christianity as a topic of research—or even, as it were, a prototype of political militancy—we recall that the secular university, much like the secular state, has tended to be less concerned with *banishing* “religion” from its domain than with probing, circumscribing, recalibrating, and at times reactivating and mobilizing it (be it an abstract “religion” or specific “religions”) to its various purposes.¹⁵ So although it has become common among anthropologists, for instance, to narrate the emergence of an anthropology of Christianity in terms of a return of the repressed, where Christianity—or a “fundamentalist” version of it—stands as the apotheosis of that “repugnant cultural other” through which the anthropologist’s own sensibility has in no small measure come to be constituted, it is not at all evident that such a repression ever took the form of any but the most superficial of absences.¹⁶ In fact, one might proffer a history of anthropology in which the discipline’s energies were from the very beginning galvanized in an attempt not simply to distance itself from but to reflect on and, more significantly, *rearticulate* Christianity—and concurrently “religion”—in ways commensurate with the moral and political determinants of a given moment.

Is positing the current preoccupation with Christianity as something new a means of evading that history? Perhaps not. But to the extent that scholars have failed to confront the myriad ways in which the Christianity they now seek to take seriously has itself been inscribed in, read through, and thereby refashioned as the result of such processes, there is no reason to suppose that these latest objectifications of Christianity will not similarly yield images of a religiosity made uncannily legible to the logics and circumscriptions of the disciplinary formations—and not only professional formations but political and economic ones as well—occupied by those who study it. Put somewhat differently, our worry is not (or not *only*) that this burgeoning interest across a range of scholarly orientations will inevitably engender explanations of Christianity foreign to the self-understandings

of Christians themselves; it is that a long series of contingently linked intellectual, legal, and political developments have *already* rendered Christianity, as with everything else, translatable into a lexicon—what Alasdair MacIntyre once referred to as an “internationalized language”—in which the conditions for explaining, repudiating, or, as the case may be, instrumentalizing “Christianity” have been firmly secured.¹⁷ (That dominant strands of Protestantism played no small part in shaping that lexicon is surely cause for further consideration.)

Thus, judging from the title of this issue of *SAQ*, it is not Christianity in and of itself that we are being asked to address. It is something called “global Christianity,” which is to say, a purportedly historico-empirical phenomenon locatable in time and space (i.e., the time-space of a globalized world) that social scientists, religious studies scholars, and others can identify and interpret as an object of theoretical analysis. So that Christianity, as we understand it, has already been converted into a particular idiom: the idiom of the global.¹⁸ Whether and to what extent the notion of a “global Christianity” captures something real is beside the point, as is the panoply of questions—regarding the disparate archives from which this category emerges, its historical and conceptual antecedents, its relation to a discourse on “world religions,” and so forth—that one might easily pose of it.¹⁹ Likewise, although an explication of what exactly “global Christianity” *does* (or is taken to do) for those scholars who invoke it—the avenues of debate and research it occludes and opens up, the assumptions it fortifies and contests, the constraints it responds to and reproduces—would undoubtedly prove instructive, our intention here is to pursue a different route. We want to ask what it would mean to approach Christianity otherwise: to work, following Hadot, at seeing it, if not “as though one were seeing it for the first time,” then at least in such a way that the questions we have grown accustomed to asking of it, and the words with which we have grown accustomed to answering those questions, might be subjected to the shock of other questions, different words, ones arising from the materiality of life-worlds not easily made available to the insatiable, ever-appropriating curiosity typical of our regnant intellectual practices.²⁰ And so, in the spirit of unpredictable outcomes (and perhaps ill-advised beginnings), we have decided to make our entrée into this terrain via a confrontation with what Kavin Rowe, whose recent book we will be dependent upon in the following pages, refers to as “a highly charged and theologically sophisticated political document that aims at nothing less than the construction of an

alternative total way of life”: namely, that composed by Luke in his Acts of the Apostles, the first effort at depicting authoritatively the birth and character of the early community of Christians.²¹

Why Acts? Why, of all places, turn to a biblical text, and a notoriously contentious one at that? Our engagement with Acts may well seem arbitrary and misguided, a cheap shot that, not unlike the philosophical aloofness that appears to have provided a tacit impetus for the present issue, willfully ignores the messiness and ambiguities of “real” (we ask again: “global”?) Christianity in favor of a biased and idealized, even pristine account. Furthermore, we could rightly be accused of facilitating the collapse of the anthropological/historical into the theological (here leaving aside the irony that it is only recently that theologians have begun to rediscover the value of scripture) and thus of blurring the line between interpretation and assertion, dispassionate analysis and motivated confession. It is our contention, however, that a descent into the rough texture of Luke’s narrative, a narrative that has long instructed Christians as to what it looks like to be sent out into the world as witnesses to the reality they call gospel, might at the same time provide a model of—or failing that, a way of exposing the limits to—what, on the one hand, is increasingly being taken up as an anthropology of Christianity and, on the other, has in recent years become an effort to envisage a novel political subjectivity derived from Christianity. As such, our purpose is less to dismantle than to interrogate and sharpen the prospects of taking Christianity as a focus of study, be it as the site of ethnographic investigation or the source of a critical register. But in doing so it is necessary to ask: what kind of Christianity are we dealing with? After all, it is one thing to study a Christianity whose theology tells us that it can be studied unproblematically, that is, by recourse to the same methods and conceptual discriminations that would be employed in the examination of any social fact. But it is, we imagine, quite another thing to study a Christianity whose theology asks us to consider the possibility that what we find in Acts might actually be true. It is a commonplace among anthropologists that taking the questions that concern their subjects “seriously” is a vital means of gaining access to the cultural-discursive milieu to which that subject belongs. What Acts shows us is that there might be questions that in order to ask them, or to ask them *competently*, may well require a transformation of the agent of investigation. A disquieting thought: that attending the current “turn to Christianity” might be a problem involving not so much how we make our

objects of inquiry, than of how—and if so, in what ways—our objects of inquiry make us.

Involved, we want to suggest, in seeing Christianity otherwise, in “get[ting] rid of the conventional and routine vision we have of things,” as Hadot would have it, must be a willingness to submit oneself to the training necessary to acquire the ability to read felicitously its defining texts. As his framing of Acts attests to, Rowe’s defamiliarizing book is as good a place as any to initiate such a training. For it is in Acts, according to Rowe, that the appearance of the church as the *novum* of God’s apocalypse testifies to the contingent nature of all that is, thereby conferring on the world, coterminous with the reality of resurrection, the possibility of a people in whose deeply specific language, “full to bursting with meaning,” the world itself is both refracted and made—that is to say, fabulated—afresh.²² But it is also in Acts that the learning of such a language, and the seeing of such a world, is revealed to be indistinguishable from an ongoing habituation into the emplaced yet perpetually dislocated community of the radically dispossessed: dispossessed not simply of land and money, prestige and so forth, but of the requisite knowledges by which one could explain and thereby manage the surrounding world; what, for lack of a better term, we might call *epistemological dispossession*; or, better still, humility.²³ If Acts has anything to teach us, it is that the world to which such a condition gestures cannot be known, indeed might be said to not even exist, absent the lives of the people who enact it. The theological politics that emerges from Acts, therefore, is decidedly not one of a “plurality of viewpoints on the same world or object”; instead it is a matter of “each viewpoint . . . opening on to another world that itself contains yet others.”²⁴ This is a world that must be believed in order to be seen; in the terminology of Acts, it is a world that must be *witnessed* to.²⁵

Becoming-Witness; or Luke: Anthropologist of Christianity?

All of us, even when we think we have noted every tiny detail, resort to set pieces which have already been staged often enough by others. We try to reproduce the reality, but the harder we try, the more we find the pictures that make up the stock-in-trade of the spectacle of history forcing themselves upon us. . . . Our concern with history, so Hilary’s thesis ran, is a concern with preformed images already imprinted on

our brains, images at which we keep staring while the truth lies elsewhere, away from it all, somewhere as yet undiscovered.

—W. G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*

To be sure, it was not the interpretation of scripture that Sebald had in mind when he penned these remarks—the Hilary alluded to is André Hilary, a secondary school teacher in the Welsh countryside, and the impetus for his thesis is an inability to recount adequately a particularly gruesome battle in the Napoleonic Wars—but it may as well have been. They are, after all, literally set pieces that Alain Badiou resorts to when, taking a cue from Pier Paolo Pasolini's unfinished screenplay *Saint Paul*, he juxtaposes what he considers to be the radical temperament of the latter's Epistles with "the pro-Roman benevolence harbored by the author of the Acts."²⁶ Apart from the sheer novelty of Pasolini's transposition of Paul into contemporary Europe, which finds the Pharisee-turned-apostle now portrayed as a leader in the anti-Fascist Resistance, what is especially pertinent for Badiou's purposes is the fact that it is not the tyrannical dictator that is figured as the villain in Pasolini's script but instead the internal enemy who would write history in such a way as to eradicate from the movement any trace of genuine revolutionary potential. Thus, against the militant "saintliness" exemplified by Paul and his comrades, Luke is exposed as a traitor, an agent of the devil, bent on domesticating the Resistance and therefore on making of Paul "a man of the institution," a "saint erased by the priest," or, closing the analogical gap entirely, "not so much a theoretician of the Christian event as the tireless creator of the Church."²⁷ To a large extent, it is this contrast effect—between Luke and Paul, accommodation and fidelity, sanctioned discourse and singular truth—that will supply the dramatic thrust of Badiou's own study. Indeed, one could suggest that Badiou's "startling reinterpretation" of Paul, and Pasolini's as well, premised as they are on an explicit disavowal of what Badiou will elsewhere refer to as Luke's "retrospective construction whose intentions modern criticism has clearly brought to light," finally end up reproducing what, among New Testament scholars at least, has been a 300-year-old habit of reading Acts as little more than an apologia for political quietism fashioned to appear as "uniform, organizational, and 'Roman' as possible."²⁸

Such is the hermeneutical consensus that Rowe's *World Upside Down: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman Age* sets out to unsettle. And yet, as Rowe

makes clear from the outset, his counter-reading cannot proceed merely by way of a more precise exegetical style, but must concurrently take stock of the numerous, often inchoate ways in which the concepts and classifications endemic to modern life have imposed themselves on the social vocabularies of the ancient world—and that involves breaking not only with interpretations of Acts that view it as politically “conformist” but from those that consider it “revolutionary” as well. Tempting though it may be to read Acts through the later vicissitudes of Constantinianism, Luke’s portrait of the early church—he calls it “the Way”—is emphatically *not* that of a people whose desire it is to take the state. Christians do not want to replace the emperor, nor do they want a Christian to be the emperor. That would be a far too conservative politics. Instead, recounted in Acts is the ceaseless, exuberant, often grueling dissemination of a “good news” that, resting as it does in the affirmation of a break between God and the gods of the pagan cosmos, the peace of Christ and the Pax Romana (the former constituting a “subversion and rearrangement of the very notion of peace”; *World*, 35), threatens to unravel the very fabric of the entire order of things—or so Rowe wants to suggest. Displaying a methodological acuity reminiscent of that advocated by R. G. Collingwood, whose “logic,” as he called it, of “question and answer” held that a proposition can be properly grasped only when the question to which it forms an answer is first identified and articulated, Rowe begins with the basic observation that “Luke does not have a different *opinion* on the question of religion and politics from many modern thinkers, he has an entirely different question” (*ibid.*, 9; emphasis added).²⁹ We need not go far in Acts to discover what that question is. After his crucifixion, we are told, Jesus ordered the disciples

not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. “This,” he said, “is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.³⁰

What does it mean to be a living body of witnesses to the reality of the risen Christ? This, above all, is the question that animates Luke's account. Yet it is exactly this question that seems to have escaped several generations of New Testament scholars, whose uniformity of opinion as to (what Badiou calls) the "pro-Roman benevolence harbored by the author of Acts," and the non-threatening political imaginary thought to accompany it, can only be attributed to a profound misrecognition of the irreducibly particular question to which Luke's narrative was crafted as a response and in isolation from which the actions of its protagonists are divested of their original sense.

This is not to say that the question is original to Acts. For inasmuch as the dominant motifs of that book are prefigured by an assortment of episodes depicted earlier in Luke's Gospel as well as the Old Testament, what emerges is an intricate pattern of promise and fulfillment—a salvation history—that by necessity gestures beyond the confines of any single text.³¹ Conceived fundamentally as a continuation of the biblical narrative, Luke arranges his literary project through a succession of echoes, allusions, and anticipations—some overt, others remarkably subtle—whose implications for the present take shape in their orientation to a past that is itself altered in the course of Luke's narrative redeployment.³² It follows that the apprehensibility of Acts must be built on a prior familiarity not only with the circumstances of Jesus' life and ministry, passion and resurrection, but with the larger yet startlingly parochial story that, then as now, enables Jesus to be called the Christ: the story, in other words, of God's enduring covenant with the Jews. It is no accident, for instance, that whereas Mark's Gospel places Jesus' appearance in his hometown synagogue at Nazareth well after his public ministry has already commenced, reporting only that Jesus "began to teach" and that "many who heard him were astounded" (Mark 6:1–6a), Luke moves the episode to the very beginning of Jesus' ministry and provides a detailed description of what transpires therein (Luke 4:16–21). According to Richard Hays, what Jesus' subsequent recitation from the prophet Isaiah amounts to is "nothing less than a public announcement of his messianic vocation," for by evoking these texts at the outset of his ministry, Hays writes, "Luke's Jesus declares himself as the Messiah who by the power of the Spirit will create a restored Israel in which justice and compassion for the poor will prevail."³³ As the scene in the synagogue continues to unfold, as the crowd is "filled with rage" at Jesus' suggestion, made by way of a reference to the prophets Elijah and Elisha, that God's favor would extend to the Gentiles (Luke 4:25–30), we are at once clued in to how the

prophetic tradition has been recast in Jesus' inhabitation of it and at the same time offered a foretaste of issues that will persist into the final pages of Acts: specifically, those having to do with "the extension of God's grace beyond the boundaries of Israel and the hostility of many in Israel to this inclusive message of grace."³⁴

If a key to understanding the signifying power of the inauguration of Jesus' public ministry lies in its embeddedness in and consummation of the deepest yearnings of Jewish law and prophecy, so, too, does Jesus' parting address at his ascension resonate with a promise that both presages and exceeds the advent of the apostolic commission. Indeed, it is a promise that spans the entirety of the biblical record: from God's pledge to make of Abraham the father of a nation that will be a blessing to all nations (Gen. 17:1–27) to the angel's stunning proclamation in the final pages of Revelation ("He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples"; Rev. 21:3), the reality of a God who moves in history is consistently shown to be dependent upon the existence of a people whose lives bespeak the truth of his sovereignty and provision. It is, moreover, a promise that is made when, at the beginning of Luke's first volume and prior to the birth of Jesus, Gabriel appears to Zechariah and announces that his unborn son—John the Baptist—will have as his task to "make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1:17).

But a promise, it ought to be stressed, is not a precedent; while it is not the case that "there never was a Jewish mission of any kind prior to Christianity," it is no less the case, Rowe argues, "that what we see in Acts—*taken as a whole*—finds no counterpart anywhere in the Jewish world prior to the end of the first century" (*World*, 119). What may appear here to be historicist quibbling becomes a prelude to a crucial theological point: when Jesus says to his disciples that they will be his "witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8), he is describing for them a mode of being in the world that cannot arise naturally out of any "type" or "model." Instead, springing as it does from his death and resurrection, what Jesus enunciates at his ascension is the composition of a radically new creation, the very embodiment, socially and materially, of the fact that death no longer marks the boundary of human life. To the contrary, as Rowan Williams suggests, it is through *this* death that "a new and potentially infinite network of relations is opened up."³⁵ The resurrection miracle, the miracle of miracles—not because a dead man has been resurrected, but because Israel's messiah has been resurrected—soon gives way

to the miracle of a church whose literally limitless mission, as Rowe puts it, “actively socializes the salvific reality that attends Jesus’ universal Lordship” (*World*, 124).

Luke, however, has little interest in “proving” the resurrection—or, better, the proof he offers, the only proof he *can* offer, is that of a people whose lives (and, in many cases, whose deaths) would be unintelligible had Jesus not been raised from the dead. Put in slightly different terms, Luke is concerned to demonstrate that those who will follow Christ will be unable to “explain” his resurrection. The resurrection will explain them. And it is this impossibility of disentangling the event of the resurrection from the shape of the lives of the people who declare it that defines the *witness* announced in Acts. Of the apostles—that is, those who have been sent out to witness—depicted in Acts, it is Paul, the primary human protagonist in the book’s second half (the book’s principal actor, of course, is the Holy Spirit), who best exemplifies the necessary interconnection between the resurrection of Jesus and the subsequent biographies of the men and women who are to serve as witnesses to it. Yet it seems strange that, of all people, Paul would be appointed a “witness to all the world of what [he] has seen and heard” (Acts 22:15), for, unlike many of his fellow apostles, he neither knew Jesus during the Messiah’s lifetime nor was he present at Jesus’ resurrection and ascension—nor, for that matter, and again unlike the other apostles, was he there for the arrival of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1–4). In short, what he has actually “seen and heard” is, it would appear, far less impressive than we might have expected of this paragon of apostleship. To what, and in what particular manner, is Paul a witness?

Perhaps a brief detour into some prevailing conceptions of witnessing, particularly among contemporary anthropologists, will allow us to better address this question. In his *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, Giorgio Agamben observes that in Latin there are two words for *witness*: “The first word, *testis*, from which our word ‘testimony’ derives, etymologically signifies the person who, in a trial or lawsuit between two rival parties, is in the position of a third party (*tersis*). The second word, *superstes*, designates a person who has lived through something, who has experienced an event from beginning to end and can therefore bear witness to it.”³⁶ Commenting on this double meaning, anthropologist Didier Fassin explains:

In the first case the witness was external to the scene, but observed it: to be more precise, he has no vested interest and it is this supposed neutrality that is the grounds for hearing and believing him, including in legal proceedings. In the second case, the witness lived through the ordeal, and suffered it: it is therefore because he was present, but as a victim of the event himself and hence a survivor, that his word is listened to. One testifies on the basis of his observation, the other on the basis of his experience. The truth of the *testis*, expressed in the third person, is deemed objective. The truth of the *superstes*, expressed in the first person, is deemed subjective. The latter has merit by virtue of the affects it involves, the former by virtue of those it eliminates.³⁷

Fassin's purpose here is to trace the emergence within the domain of international humanitarianism and human rights discourse of what he calls the "key political figure of our time": namely, the humanitarian worker-cum-"witness" whose aim it is to give voice to the unarticulated or unrepresented traumas visited upon those subjected to various forms of violence and catastrophe. While he does not mention it here, the mounting efficacy of this figure correlates with the contemporaneous reimagining of the anthropologist's task as being fundamentally one of "bearing witness," such that one well-known anthropologist can suggest, in a formulation whose banality is offset only by its surprising parenthetical addendum, that "the work of witnessing is what lends our work its moral (at times its almost theological) character."³⁸ Less a matter of supplanting the discipline's signature method of "participant observation" than of imbuing it with an ethico-political mandate, a growing number of anthropologists have taken to conceiving of their work and, specifically, their writings as "powerful spaces in which to authorize and legitimate the painful and often devastating histories that we anthropologists are allowed to listen to and sometimes see with our own eyes."³⁹ Hence the salience, for Fassin, of the distinction between *testis* and *superstes*: the humanitarian worker, like the anthropologist, does not *live* the "painful and often devastating history" in question but rather *observes* (or otherwise hears about) it; both are witnesses exactly to the extent of their remove from the event to which they testify and, in an important sense, from those—as Fassin would say, those *superstes*—whose sufferings and resultant affects they seek to convey. The juridified world to which such testimonies are addressed, in other words, demands that the self of the witness be wholly separable from that

which has, according to the aid worker or anthropologist, so indelibly left its mark on the psyche of the victim. And presumably, moreover, their identity qua aid worker or anthropologist, or whatever other name they may wish to assign themselves, will, barring some breach of professional conduct, endure independently of their work of bearing witness, for the latter task, though likely assumed in a moment of perceived necessity, was not after all essential to their capacity to go on.

The witness of Paul, in contrast, derives not from observation, nor even — and here we need to challenge the usefulness of the *testis/superstes* opposition — from experience, but instead from *recognition*, an initial lack of which takes the form of Paul's remarkable bewilderment in the famous story of his conversion. "Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus," we are told in Acts 9:3–5, "suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' He asked, 'Who are you, Lord?'" The incredulity of the question indicates that Paul must lose his vision before he will see, and that he will testify to what he has seen only when he has been able to identify the voice that summons him, and the light that blinds him, with the one who came to the people of Israel preaching peace, who healed the sick and fed the hungry and was later put to death on a tree. Against the Pauline event postulated by Badiou, the ostensible locus of which is the *ex nihilo*, "absolutely aleatory" moment of subjective "caesura," Paul is to become a witness not to the experience of a light blinding him on the road to Damascus but to the actuality of the resurrected Christ embodied in the corporeal existence of, among others, those who have fallen prey to Paul's repressive violence.⁴⁰ The witnesses exhibited in Acts are not merely those who have observed or experienced something and then gone on to tell others about it. Paul is a witness because his very life, a life of rejection and persecution, has been made a testimony to the inauguration of a kingdom that, "against every Gnosticizing impulse," is not merely "spiritual" but is also practical and material — a kingdom, in short, "that takes up space in public" (*World*, 101). Accordingly, in line with what Douglas Harink characterizes as the determinatively apocalyptic vision that runs throughout his writings, Paul "does not see in Christ one religious option among others. He sees in Christ nothing less than the whole of creation and all of humanity under God's final judgment and grace. . . . Paul is uncompromisingly focused on a single, incomparable, final, and exclusive theological reality which constitutes, includes, and determines all other reality: Jesus Christ."⁴¹ And just as

Paul's eyes have been opened to a new reality, so, too, has he been called to open the eyes of the Gentiles "so that they may turn from darkness to light" (Acts 26:18, 23). Here, then, is apocalyptic at its most basic and comprehensive. "The resurrection of Jesus actually creates a new mode of seeing—'light.' To miss the resurrection of Jesus, therefore, is to forfeit the ability to see" (*World*, 86).

Hardly a matter of brute facticity or abstract truth, the reality enunciated by the resurrection is one that is inseparable from—indeed, more often than not, is literally *written on the bodies of*—those who have assumed the task, however painful or demanding, of proclaiming and thereby participating in it. Now it may seem that this reality enunciated by the resurrection is by definition a happy one, a triumphant one, a reality whose unending reenactment in the life of the visible church, far from necessitating painful or demanding practices of discipleship, might just as easily lend itself to assumptions such as those that, according to scholars of the Roman imperial church, served to underwrite that institution's consolidation of power both within and beyond its borders: namely, the assumption that "the power of heaven and of the age to come had, in a sense, been domesticated and made available here and now."⁴² In Acts, however, we discover that to partake of the body and blood of Christ is to be transformed into a community of crucifixion—with all of the uncertainties and discomforts (to put it blandly) that implies—even and at the same time as the resurrection remains its inescapable telos and condition of possibility. For what Acts shows us is that the resurrection can only be accessed and encountered once the believing community has learned to live not simply after but *through* the *experimentum crucis*, the experience of the cross. This is the case not only with the apostles and Paul, who, "captive to the Spirit," is persistently led "to testify to the good news of God's grace" in cities where only "imprisonment and persecutions are waiting for" him (Acts 20:22–24), but also with Stephen, at whose lynching Paul makes his first appearance in the New Testament text.

Indeed, it is with Stephen that another, maybe paradigmatic meaning of witness comes sharply into view: that of the martyr, whose faithfulness even to the point of death simply denotes the more acute form, the intensification, of what Luke suggests will be the typical Christian mode of acting and being in the world. The significance of Luke's conferral on Stephen of the appellation "witness"—as in Paul's speech to the angry Jerusalem crowd in Acts 22, where he relates how he said to the risen Jesus that "while

the blood of your witness Stephen was shed, I myself was standing by, approving and keeping the coats of those who killed him”—cannot, according to Rowe, be overestimated:

Whether or not Luke was here consciously forging the first explicitly verbal link between “witnessing” and becoming a “martyr” in the later Christian sense of the term, the text doubtless draws clearly the line between the mission of witnessing to the risen Jesus and the reality of trial, suffering, and death. In so doing, it elevates for clear inspection what it means to be a witness in the missionary theology of Acts. It is, in fact, to reenact the life-pattern of the suffering Christ . . . , to suffer for his Name . . . , to be put on trial . . . , to face the possibility of death . . . , and to proclaim the resurrection In short, it is to embody the cruciform pattern that culminates in resurrection. (*World*, 121)

In marked contrast to the constellation of images that we tend to associate with martyrdom, images that have been filtered through entrenched ideologies of nationalism and warfare, masculinity and individualism, the violent deaths of Stephen and, soon thereafter, countless others are profoundly misconstrued when they are regarded as instances of courageous heroism or self-abnegating sacrifice. Such renderings threaten to extricate martyrs like Stephen from the narrative frame that alone makes their deaths intelligible, a narrative, Rowan Williams contends, in which the narcissistic drama of heroism has been eschewed in favor of freedom from the imperatives of violence.⁴³ Inhabiting this freedom means finding oneself most fully at home in a world that is no longer ruled by the specter of death—and yet, precisely to that extent, it also means finding oneself most fundamentally at odds with how the world runs itself. In this way the remembrance of martyrs becomes a radical political act: in so remembering, we are reminded of the possibility of an alternative to the economies of fear and mastery that so unremittingly compel us.⁴⁴

At this point we may return to the accusation of accommodationism that has long inflected interpretations of Acts (among which, as we mentioned at the outset, Badiou’s is merely symptomatic). How can we continue to evoke an alternative politics in light of what appears to be such a seemingly insurmountable consensus? One of the foremost contributions of Rowe’s book, it seems to us, flows from his assertion that the demarcations that populate our language—such as that of “religion” from “politics”—render

it difficult to comprehend the far-reaching implications of the church's claim to be the social and material embodiment of the lordship of Christ. That modern readers would fail to recognize the nature of that claim is not the least bit surprising, for a great deal of Luke's account is given over to showing the multifarious ways in which the message of the early Christians could be misunderstood by their contemporaries, often violently so (although, as we have seen with Stephen, and as we shall see below, it is also when their message is *perfectly* comprehended that violence can ensue). Rowe's method of enumerating the distinctive contours of Christian mission, and hence its relation to the prevailing political structures of the period, is to unpack what he considers to be a profound, even constitutive tension at the heart of Acts. This tension (or "dialectic," as Rowe calls it) is not an accidental or inadvertent but a necessary dimension of Luke's theological and political vision, which means that the point is not so much to resolve it as to understand how exactly it is produced and to exactly what ends. Here is the tension as Rowe presents it:

On the one hand, Luke narrates the movement of the Christian mission into the gentile world as a collision with culture-constructing aspects of that world. From the perspective created by this angle of vision, Christianity and pagan culture are competing realities. Inasmuch as embracing the Christian call to repentance necessarily involves a different way of life, basic patterns of Graeco-Roman culture are dissolved. The pagans in Lystra, Philippi, Athens, and Ephesus are understandably riled: the Christians are a real threat

On the other hand, Luke narrates the threat of the Christian mission in such a way as to eliminate the possibility of conceiving it as in direct competition with the Roman government. Of all forms of sedition and treason, Luke says, Christianity is innocent. Paul engenders considerable upheaval as a part of his mission, but time and again—in Corinth, Jerusalem, Caesarea, and Rome (so the reader understands)—the political authorities reject the accusations of his opponents: Paul is *δίκαιος* [righteous, or innocent]. The Christians are not out to establish Christendom, as it were. (*World*, 91)

Nowhere, Rowe suggests, is the complex political disposition of Acts more explicitly elaborated than in the manner in which Luke recounts the charges brought against Paul and Silas in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1–9); indeed, it is clear that an elucidation of what transpires in that city is the fulcrum around

which the thrust of Rowe's argument stands or falls. The scene opens with Paul in the Jewish synagogue at Thessalonica, trying to persuade his audience ("as was his custom"), composed of both Greeks and Jews, that "it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and to rise from the dead" (Acts 17:3). Here again we are given a glimpse, one of countless such glimpses in Acts, not only of the fundamentally Jewish self-understanding of the community to which Paul belongs but of the ways in which that community is seriously countercultural in relation to the prevailing forms of Judaism.⁴⁵ The rejection of messianic violence as a means of national liberation in favor of a suffering and servant Messiah, the expansion of the elect community to include uncircumcised Gentiles, and most contentiously for some, the ascription of divine identity and lordship to the human Jesus—all this comes together to constitute a minority people among a minority people, a subculture *within* Israel that hermeneutically *redefines* Israel.

However, it is not only in relation to Israel that Paul and his fellow Christians are deemed a subversive force; they must, crucially for Luke, defend themselves against allegations of sedition against the empire as well. Envious of their initial missionary success (Luke reports that some of the Jews "were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women"; Acts 17:4) and determined to rid Thessalonica of the Christian disturbers, a group of Jews organized a mob and attacked the house of Jason, presumably the local host of the Christians. When their search for Paul and Silas proved unsuccessful, they dragged Jason and some other believers before the city authorities, alleging, "These people who have been turning the world upside down have come here also, and Jason has entertained them as guests. They are all acting contrary to the decrees of the emperor, proclaiming that there is another king named Jesus" (Acts 17:6–8). The people and the magistrates were "disturbed," we are told, and the hearing rather abruptly concludes with Jason and the others being released on bail.

Much turns on how this scene is read, on where the narrative stress is seen to lie, and on the sort of evidence that is brought to bear. Depending on one's orientation, the events in Thessalonica can be—and have been—taken to confirm the suspicion of a Lucan apologetic on behalf of a harmless church vis-à-vis the Roman order or, alternately (and far less commonly), the view that Acts' political imagination announces an emphatic summons, not to revolt, but to a style of life that entails a thoroughgoing antagonism with regard to the present powers. Interestingly enough, exegetes from

across the interpretive spectrum have long regarded these few verses as providing a window into the proper construal of Luke-Acts as a whole, with the central question being whether the accusation against the believers is to be understood as a false charge—thereby buttressing Luke’s ostensible concern to demonstrate that Christians are innocent of the charges of stirring up trouble—or whether the hostile crowd, as Hays puts it, “rightly discerns something true about the impact of the gospel in the Roman world.”⁴⁶ Conventionally, the critical reception of the episode in Thessalonica has tended to gravitate toward the former perspective; as has been maintained by New Testament scholars such as Hans Conzelmann—whom Badiou likely has in mind when he speaks of Acts as “a retrospective construction whose intentions modern criticism has clearly brought to light”⁴⁷—Luke’s project is to portray the Christians as docile subjects whose loyalty to the state is called into doubt only when the Jews manage to rouse the populace with baseless accusations against the church.⁴⁸ And, as a way of narratively preempting any further misgivings, it is argued, Luke places the most familiar, popular charge against the Christians—namely, that there is “another king” to whom they are subservient—onto the tongues of the Thessalonian mob, only to subsequently, unambiguously write this possibility out of the picture. Fortunately for the Christians, as this dominant line of reasoning wants us to believe Luke is trying to suggest, the Roman authorities have the good sense to see through the jealousy-inspired tricks of the Jews and, therefore, to release Jason and his friends without further delay.

However Luke’s vision of the church’s mission—of becoming-witness—and, ultimately, the social and political coordinates of the messianic community are finally to be understood, it must come down to this: is Jesus a king who claims a definitive allegiance that supersedes the jurisdiction of all other kings? Based on what we have already related of Rowe’s defamiliarizing account, it will come as little surprise that what he discovers in Luke’s writings is a resounding, unmistakable “yes.” What’s more, and here against the more politically progressive readings of Christian witness, Jesus does not challenge Caesar’s status as lord (*κύριος*) (as if, Rowe says, Jesus were somehow originally subordinate to Caesar in the order of being). Instead, because “of the nature of his claims, *it is Caesar who is the rival*; and what he rivals is the Lordship of God in the person of Jesus Christ” (*World*, 112; emphasis added). It is Caesar, not Jesus, who bears the burden of proof; Caesar, not Jesus, who has pretentiously usurped the title of “king” for himself. Here we cannot wander into the dense thickets of Rowe’s exegeti-

cal strategy or, indeed, into each of the myriad references he mobilizes in making his case, so two particularly apt passages, both located within Luke's first volume, will need to suffice.

At the very beginning of his Gospel, Luke's readers are made aware that Jesus is destined to reclaim the sovereignty that the emperor has seized for himself when the angel Gabriel declares that "the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:32–33). With ascriptions such as these interspersed throughout each of Luke's texts, it is scarcely possible, Rowe avers, "that a Christian reader in the late first or early second century would not know that Christian claims about Jesus' identity as the Christ entailed royal claims as well, or that the advent and resurrection of Jesus was the coming of the Kingdom of God" (*World*, 100).

The second example is even more striking. Luke's account of Jesus' post-baptismal temptation in the desert is in many respects similar to Matthew's, but there is one point at which Luke quite drastically goes beyond him. After showing Jesus all the kingdoms of the world, the devil says, "To you I will give their glory and all their authority, if you will worship me" (Luke 4:6). The words are nearly identical to those spoken in Matthew 4:9; it is what the devil says next that is unparalleled in the Matthew's Gospel: "*For it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please*" (Luke 4:6). The ramifications of Luke's political theology, as it were, could not be more conspicuously displayed: the emperor possesses authority because it has been given him by the devil.⁴⁹ The powers of this world, the world of the imperium, are said to emanate from Satan. So that when we move to Acts, we find the disciples portrayed not as revolutionaries but as emissaries of an emergent order in which Jesus has *upended* kingship to reflect the inversion prophesied in Mary's song at the outset of the Gospel: "He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly" (Luke 1:52).

To turn again, then, to the tension Rowe perceives to be running throughout the book of Acts and, thus also, to the fundamental question of whether the charges leveled against the Christians in Thessalonica—in contrast to the charges leveled against Luke by the New Testament scholars—are warranted: they are false, Rowe says, inasmuch as they attempt to place Jesus in competitive relation to Caesar, as well as to the forms, presuppositions, values, and sensibilities that "Caesar" represents. To posit such a relation would be an ontological mistake. The accusations are true, however, in that Christian mission entails a call to another way of being, "one that is—on

virtually every page of the Acts of the Apostles—turning the world upside down” (*World*, 101–102).

Church is the name of this form of life.

A Brief Concluding Postscript

“That’s it?” some readers may ask. “You’ve taken us through all this only to conclude with ‘church is the name of this form of life’?” But we ask you, the reader, frustrated though you may be, to think again. Description is everything. And by calling attention to Luke’s account of the birth and spread of what came to be referred to as the church, we have tried to suggest that knowing how to describe that reality is anything but a straightforward process. Christianity did not spring from the head of Zeus readily identifiable. Indeed, as Luke makes clear, followers of Christ were first simply known as those who followed “the Way.” It was their detractors who labeled them “Christians.” The label turned out to be a useful description, but, as we hope our brief rendering of Acts has shown, the church names an ongoing narrative which is itself a politics and a habit of sight. In an odd way, the story Luke recounts allows us to see that Christians are a people who may never quite know who and where they are. That means descriptions are never settled. We hope, therefore, that our attempt to help readers see Christianity through Luke’s account has made it apparent that any Christianity abstracted from flesh-and-blood manifestations of the lordship of Christ embodied in concrete communities of witness would, in fact, no longer be recognizable to those whose lives Luke sought to narrate—that is, to Christians.

We began this essay by calling attention to the philosophical therapeutics of Wittgenstein and Hadot—a therapeutics, we observed, oriented above all toward a reeducation into a distinctive manner of apprehension, or what we have called a disciplined seeing—and it is to their sense of the central threat to, but also promise of, that peculiar mode of philosophizing that we now return. To frame our reflections in such a way is not to imply that there is some disguised metaphysical infatuation that has been confronted only to be eschewed (as a self-congratulatory deployment of the Wittgensteinian motto “What *we* do is lead words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use” might risk insinuating), nor that we have detected some unjustifiable “arrogation of voice” to which our own contribution has been an antidote.⁵⁰ It is only to follow an inclination that, far exceeding the

precision or plausibility of a specific argument, at stake in the current preoccupation with Christianity is a deeper, more intractable problem having to do with how we perceive, name, explain, possess—in short, *create*—what we endeavor to know, and also with recognizing when the objects of such endeavors cannot (or perhaps should not) be known in quite the manner we wish to know them.⁵¹ And so we have raised the question of what it might mean for those intellectual currents whose scholarly energies have been directed at enumerating the lineaments of various renderings of Christianity, “global” or otherwise, to grapple with the existence, so far as Luke has shown us in Acts, of a people whose attitudes and behaviors, passions and disputes, signal the ineluctably specific aftereffects of having been woven into a story not of their own design. In fact, it is our contention that what Acts shows us is that to “see something *as something*” is, in large measure, already to have been made by it—or, at the very least, to find oneself journeying down a path where the potentiality for such reordering is ubiquitous. Yet aspect-blindness might well be our normal condition.

This takes us to a final thought. Is it possible, or desirable, that an encounter with the life-worlds that comprise the focal points of our inquiries might make a claim not only on the certainties by which they are apprehended but on the life of the student who apprehends them? That retaining “what may be a discomforting—even scandalous—presence within our receiving languages” might reveal as slightly more tentative or provisional the assumptions that subtend them?⁵² We cannot pretend to have avoided the tendencies that militate against such a possibility. We only hope that a modicum of what we have learned from Wittgenstein and Hadot has been made manifest in the preceding pages.

Notes

- 1 Pierre Hadot, *The Present Alone Is Our Happiness: Conversations with Jeannie Carlier and Arnold I. Davidson*, trans. Marc Djaballah (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 173. The title of our essay is adapted from Hadot’s seminal lecture “Forms of Life and Forms of Discourse in Ancient Philosophy,” reprinted in Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, trans. Michael Chase (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 49–70. It was with sadness that we learned of Hadot’s death during the completion of this essay.
- 2 Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, trans. Michael Chase (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 57.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 81–144.
- 4 Pierre Hadot, “Wittgenstein, philosophie du langage: II,” *Critique* 150 (November 1959): 973. Arnold Davidson suggests it was likely that Hadot’s unique understanding of ancient

- philosophy allowed him to perceive central, still-neglected dimensions of Wittgenstein's work. Interestingly enough, Hadot's writings would in turn prove to be a source of great inspiration for Michel Foucault, particularly in the latter's examination of the relation between ethics and *askesis* in his later lectures. For a brief but illuminating statement on Hadot's intellectual kinship with Wittgenstein and Foucault, see Arnold I. Davidson, "Spiritual Exercises and Ancient Philosophy: An Introduction to Pierre Hadot," *Critical Inquiry* 16 (Spring 1990): 475–82.
- 5 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (1953; Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 27e. For Wittgenstein's equally well-known remarks on the therapeutic character of his philosophy, see especially section 133 of the *Investigations*.
 - 6 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, ed. G. H. von Wright, trans. Peter Winch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 24e. The ocular orientation of Wittgenstein's method is most explicitly elaborated when he writes: "I wanted to put this picture before your eyes, and your *acceptance* of this picture consists in your being inclined to regard a given case differently; that is, to compare it with *this* set of pictures. I have changed your *way of seeing*." Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), 52, emphasis in original.
 - 7 John Churchill, "Wonder and the End of Explanation: Wittgenstein and Religious Sensibility," *Philosophical Investigations* 17.2 (April 1994): 388–416.
 - 8 Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 57e.
 - 9 Ibid., 37e. "The insidious thing about the causal point of view is that it leads us to say: 'Of course, it had to happen like that.' Whereas we ought to think: it may have happened *like that*—and also in many other ways."
 - 10 Ian Hacking, *The Taming of Chance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
 - 11 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 213e.
 - 12 Stanley Cavell, *Cities of Words: Pedagogical Letters on a Register of the Moral Life* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2004), 293.
 - 13 On "a seeing which also helps effect what it sees," that is, one "conceived not simply as a response to what [the world] is, but as what *makes* it such," see Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 449.
 - 14 It is unclear why the appellation "global" should be assigned to a style of theorizing as provincial as that which characterizes many of these thinkers—even when that provinciality is most clearly manifested in their respective versions of "universalism." It's hardly surprising, then, that Badiou's reclamation of Paul as the exemplary figure of a subjective militancy finds deep resonances with a long-standing Euro-Christian tradition of posing the "event" of Christianity in direct contradistinction to the putative "particularities" of Jewish norms and practices. "What does Paul want?" Badiou asks. "Probably to drag the Good News (the Gospels) out from the rigid enclosure within which its restriction to the Jewish community would confine it." Alain Badiou, *St. Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 13. Here the discovery of a political subjectivity up to the task of confronting the dual enemies of identitarian politics and consumer capitalism finds itself drawing (obliviously or not) from an archive in which Christianity is seen as the systematic undoing of Jewish election and Judaism the antithesis of true—which is to say, universal—religion. On this

- point, see Sarah Hammerschlag, *The Figural Jew: Politics and Identity in Postwar French Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 261–67. As Gil Anidjar has shown in *Semites: Race, Religion, Literature* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), we might recognize in this impulse a specific formulation of Islam as well.
- 15 Saba Mahmood, “Secularism, Hermeneutics, and Empire: The Politics of Islamic Reformation,” *Public Culture* 18.2 (2006): 323–47.
 - 16 Susan Harding, “Representing Fundamentalism: The Problem of the Repugnant Cultural Other,” *Social Research* 58.2 (1991): 373–94. For a typical view of the “repressed” status of Christianity in anthropology’s history, see Fenella Cannell, “Introduction: The Anthropology of Christianity,” in *The Anthropology of Christianity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 4.
 - 17 Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 373.
 - 18 Of course, some have asserted that the idiom of the global already has a Christian history. For a compelling argument along these lines, see Webb Keane, *Christian Moderns: Freedom and Fetish in the Mission Encounter* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 42.
 - 19 For an illuminating examination of such questions, see Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions, or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).
 - 20 For an incisive critique of this brand of “curiosity,” see Paul Griffiths, *Intellectual Appetite: A Theological Grammar* (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press, 2009).
 - 21 C. Kavin Rowe, *World Upside Down: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 4; hereafter cited parenthetically by page number as *World*.
 - 22 We borrow this phrasing from an early text authored by Gershom Scholem, cited in Stéphane Mosès, *The Angel of History: Rosenzweig, Benjamin, Scholem* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 168–70. In speaking of the “fabulative” dimension of Acts, we mean to suggest something like what Gilles Deleuze refers to as the “pure and simple story-telling function,” among the effects of which is to falsify the true/false coordinates of a given world in order to live another world into existence. See Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 149–50.
 - 23 Daniel Barber’s formulation of a “creativity of exilic deterritorialization” nicely captures what we are trying to get at here. See, most recently, his “Epistemological Violence, Christianity, and the Secular,” in *The New Yoder*, ed. Peter Dula and Chris K. Huebner (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010), 288. According to Rowan Williams, it is through baptism, or what he refers to as “the process of self-forgetting that leads to the cross,” that such a dis-possession is displayed sacramentally. See Rowan Williams, *Resurrection: Interpreting the Easter Gospel* (1982; Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2002), 54.
 - 24 Daniel Smith, “‘A Life of Pure Immanence’: Deleuze’s ‘Critique et Clinique’ Project,” in Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), xxvii.
 - 25 See Stanley Hauerwas, “Believing Is Seeing,” in *A Cross-Shattered Church: Reclaiming the Theological Heart of Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009), 27–32.

- 26 Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 30.
- 27 Ibid., 38–39. Badiou’s assumption that the truth of the “Christian event” can so conveniently be distinguished from the contingent formation of the historical church is, in large part, exactly what we take Luke to be writing against in Acts. Here as elsewhere, the “radical” impulse of Badiou’s reading of Paul ends up looking remarkably managed and determinate. That his book has garnered the fawning attention that it has surely says more about the impoverished theological (not to say political) imagination of contemporary thought than about the power of Badiou’s account.
- 28 Ibid., 18, 26.
- 29 On Collingwood’s question and answer method, see R. G. Collingwood, *An Autobiography* (1939; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 29–43.
- 30 Acts 1:3–9 (New Revised Standard Version).
- 31 Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (San Francisco: Harper, 1996), 113–14.
- 32 See Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 219.
- 33 Hays, *Moral Vision*, 115–16.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Williams, *Resurrection*, 53.
- 36 Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 2002), 17.
- 37 Didier Fassin, “The Humanitarian Politics of Testimony: Subjectification through Trauma in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,” *Cultural Anthropology* 23.3 (2008): 535.
- 38 Nancy Scheper-Hughes, *Death without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), xxi.
- 39 Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 17.
- 40 Asale Angel-Ajani, “Expert Witness,” in *Engaged Observer: Anthropology, Advocacy, and Activism*, ed. Victoria Sanford and Asale Angel-Ajani (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 79.
- 41 Douglas Harink, *Paul among the Postliberals: Pauline Theology beyond Christendom and Modernity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2003), 81.
- 42 Rowan A. Greer, *Fear of Freedom: A Study of Miracles in the Roman Imperial Church* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989).
- 43 See Rowan Williams, *Christ on Trial: How the Gospel Unsettles Our Judgement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 107.
- 44 Joshua J. Whitfield, *Pilgrim Holiness: Martyrdom as Descriptive Witness* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009).
- 45 Here and in what follows we are indebted to Richard Hays, “Turning the World Upside Down: Israel’s Scripture in Luke-Acts” (lecture delivered at the MacLaurin Institute, Minneapolis, Minnesota, April 12, 2007).
- 46 Hays, *Moral Vision*, 125.
- 47 Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 18.
- 48 See Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987); and Hans Conzelmann, *Theology of St. Luke* (New York: Harper and Row, 1961).

- 49 Hays, "Turning the World Upside Down"; see also Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 88.
- 50 Stanley Cavell, "Philosophy and the Arrogation of Voice," in *A Pitch of Philosophy: Autobiographical Exercises* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).
- 51 In the course of his discussion of Wittgenstein's notion of criteria, Stanley Cavell writes: "If you do not know the (non-grammatical) criteria of an Austinian object (can't identify it, name it) then you lack a piece of information, a bit of knowledge . . . But if you do not know the grammatical criteria of Wittgensteinian objects, then you lack, as it were, not only a piece of information or knowledge, but the possibility of acquiring any information about such objects *überhaupt*; you cannot be told the name of that object, because there is as yet no *object* of that kind for you to attach a forthcoming name to: the possibility of finding out what it is officially called is not yet open to you." Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (1979; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 77. We take it for granted that a familiarity with the grammatical criteria of Christianity presupposes both a training in the exercises that comprise it *and* an awakening to the limits placed on our ability to know certain things in anything like the way we might otherwise have sought to know them.
- 52 Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 199.