

Psychoanalytic Theories of Religion in Protestant Contexts

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Psychoanalysts since Sigmund Freud have tried to discuss the role of religion in modern societies. Freud himself saw religion as an illusion which had struck neurotics, while Slavoj Žižek viewed it as some sort of “perversion” which functioned in the cycle of law-transgression. In this essay, I dig into these theories to uncover traces of Lutheran interpretations of Paul’s words on the Jewish law. I argue that Luther’s emphasis on Christian faith as a remedy for “Jewish” guilt reached Friedrich Nietzsche via the exegesis of the nineteenth-century Tübingen School. In his Pauline act, Nietzsche tried to cure modern humanity from its guilt-inducing “decadent” morality. He, in turn, influenced Freud, who sought to remedy modern humanity from its guilt, by reminding it of its “religious illusion.” Žižek has not been able to go beyond this paradigm of faith-guilt, as he also tried to free Christianity from its “perverse” core. In sum, in its conceptualization of religion, psychoanalysis has probably referred to a Protestant faith-guilt framework.

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I. Introduction

All intuition to the contrary, psychoanalytic theory was, since the very beginning, in the service of explaining more than the individual psyche. Sigmund Freud himself devoted several books to a psychoanalytic reading of societies: *Totem and Taboo: Resemblances between the Psychic Lives of Savages and Neurotics* (1913), *The Future of an Illusion* (1927), *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930),

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and *Moses and Monotheism* (1939). Freud considered religion an illusion, which indicated some sort of neurosis. Therefore, mature, healthy, modern humans could (and even should) go beyond religion. His major followers, Slavoj Žižek and Jacques Lacan pushed this thesis further. Žižek diagnosed some sort of Lacanian “perversion” in both conventional religion and modernity. That is why, in his opinion, a new reading of religion could remedy the modern malaise. It may not surprise us that Žižek’s views are not too different from Freud’s since psychoanalytic theories result more from speculation than experiment. This is more significant if one considers the context in which they were produced. While Freud’s theories have been studied as a starting point for psychoanalytic readings of religion, they were themselves a reaction to, if not a continuation of, contemporary debates on religion. As I will show below, psychoanalytic readings of religion betray traces of Lutheran perspectives on Judaism and Christianity. More than a merely genealogical endeavor, my work attempts to clarify the Protestant underpinnings of what is assumed to be non-religious, secular research into religion. My story starts with a brief survey of Lutheran understanding of Judaism, and then via a nineteenth-century philosophical transition, reaches its climax in the work of Freud and Žižek.

Europe and Religion, Translated into Luther and Judaism

Europe has always struggled with the problem of religion, not the least when it had to deal with the Jewish question. Huge disasters of the twentieth century made Europeans conscious of many of their misperceptions of Judaism. The question was whether the Bible or Christian tradition was responsible for anti-Jewish sentiments in Europe. Paul’s writings, and more specifically, Luther’s interpretation of them, were blamed.

Paul’s writings are situated in the context of a major question in the early church. What had started as part of Judaism, the Jesus Movement was extending to the Gentiles. However, there was a controversy over whether the non-Jewish (better to say, uncircumcised) believers had to go through Judaism (most importantly, circumcision) in order to be members of the nascent church. Much of Paul’s writing, especially in the letters to Romans and Galatians, deals with this question. In the letter to the Romans, he interprets circumcision spiritually: “For a person is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is true circumcision something external and physical. Rather, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart—it is spiritual and not literal” (2: 28-29). Righteousness is not achieved only through observing the

Jewish Law, but “through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe” (Rom 3:22). This dual path to righteousness may be acknowledged, but valuing the former element (i.e., law observance) should not be at the expense of faith in Jesus.

The most influential passage on Paul’s attitude towards the Jewish law is found in Romans 7, where the Law is seen as providing an opportunity for sin:

What then should we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet, if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, ‘You shall not covet.’ But sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. Apart from the law sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died, and the very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment deceived me and through it killed me. So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good. (Rom 7:7-12)

This is followed by another crucial passage on an inner conflict over law observance:

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the veil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. (Rom 7:15-20)

This passage has been important because it implied some sort of Jewish legal perfectionism, which could make the Jews obsess about their shortcomings in observance. It should be noted that this is not an accurate observation, because Jews never seek to do everything that is required. Rather, they try to the best of their ability to observe the Law; and then, they always rely on God’s mercy and repentance (Montefiore 1914, 87; Schoeps 1961, 174, 284). The above verses, however, have not ceased to haunt modern imagination over a division within the self.

The (mis)interpretation of the above passage provoked Krister Stendhal to survey its reception. In his famous article, “The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West” (1963), Stendhal focused on Paul’s opinion about Jewish guilt as a result of legalistic perfectionism. The self-examining conscience (in the interpretations

of Romans 7)² is not a Jewish phenomenon. It had emerged only in the late medieval piety, as part of the rites of penance. In fact, Luther had used Pauline passages to negate what he saw among his contemporaries and to propose the alternative of faith over against the guilt-producing medieval penance. The “self-examining Jew” is more a Lutheran construct than an original Pauline character (Stendhal 1963).³

Soon, a new wave of scholarship arose that tried to uncover the historical Paul from the huge Lutheran veil that had fallen on him. A major voice in this movement, which came to be known as the New Perspective on Paul, belongs to E. P. Sanders. In *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (1977), Sanders outlined the tenets of the first century Palestinian Judaism. While the difference between the Protestant Paul and Judaism was usually explained away by imagining a hypothetical Judaism, Sanders situated Paul within a unified (although diverse) pattern of religion called “Palestinian Judaism,” which could be based on independent research. Rather than opposing Judaism, the Apostle only radicalized its notion of salvation and righteousness through his unique “christocentric” worldview. As Sanders famously put it, the only “wrong” that Paul found in Judaism was that “it was not Christianity” (Sanders 1977, 552).

N. T. Wright hailed Sanders’ approach for stressing variety, but criticized its use “as a way of smuggling back an anachronistic vision of a Pelagian (or semi-Pelagian) or medieval works-righteousness” (Wright 2009, 109). In this manner, Wright, who opposed any “Pelagian” or “medieval” reading, implied that a correct reading is only Augustinian or Lutheran. Wright still situated Paul’s discourse within Judaism. For instance, he proposed that Paul only changed the standards which determined membership in God’s people from covenant to grace so as to include others. Paul’s criticism of the Jewish people was their “national righteousness,” the “meta-sin” of hubris, which led to the rejection of the gospel (Wright 1999, 261). To the extent that it is based on merely conceptual frameworks (be they covenant or grace), without any intervention from embodied piety,

2. One major issue with respect to this chapter is whether the speaker’s disappointment with the Law refers to a personal experience of Paul’s biographical “I” or it is an expression of human encounter with sin and Law (rhetorical “I”).

3. Georg Kümmel also emphasized the influence of the Lutheran view on the interpretation of Romans 7. According to Kümmel, Romans 7:4-25 is not autobiographical—a description about the inner conflict of a law-observing Jew—which led to his faith in Christ. Rather, Paul meant the lot of humankind which could even “delight in the law of God” (Rom 7:22). See Kümmel (1974).

Wright's reading is still within the Lutheran faith-only paradigm. Moreover, Wright pictured a "universal" Paul, who disagreed with the Jews only over their particularity (Wright 1999, 108-28; 1996).

James Dunn also demonstrated that Paul only criticized a certain particularist aspect of the Jewish people: "Paul's critique of the Law was primarily directed against its abuse by sin, and against his fellow kinsfolk's assumption that the Law's protection continued to give them before God a distinctive and favored position over the other nations, which they were responsible to maintain as such" (Dunn 1998, 363) In this way, the traditional interpretation of legal observance was turned on its head. Christian authors eventually learnt that rather than provoking guilt, the Jewish Law brought pride. Still, for them, Christianity was needed precisely because it could heal people from pride. Paul's function was to neutralize any particularism in favor of the transcendental value of universalism. Ironically, Pauline universalism excluded anything which contradicted it.

My survey of the New Perspective on Paul has demonstrated that this movement presupposes that the Apostle was not the founder of Christianity, as there was no such thing as Christianity until long after his death. Paul was thus a Jew through and through. His experience on the road to Damascus certainly affected his (religious) worldview, but it did not change his religion. Paul's critique was directed from within the system, without suggesting that he wanted to uproot it. However, the New Perspective theologians were not flawless either. Although they criticized the Lutheran readings of Paul, they turned Paul into a Luther of Judaism.⁴ In their description, Paul was a reformer that first-century Judaism deeply needed. Again in a change of metaphors, while these theologians claimed that they situated Paul's discourse in Judaism, their own discourse can be read as new translations of the prevalent Protestant understanding of Christianity and Judaism. In this way, Paul even seems to perpetuate the myth of Christian superiority (Crossley 2011, 11). He was the figure who could say what distinguished the new people from their past heritage. No wonder, then, that philosophical receptions of Paul also followed the model of the superiority of Christianity (or universalism) over Judaism (or particularity).

4. This is no less true in the case of other interpreters like Louis Martyn and Hans Dieter Betz. The former author presupposes a Gentile-Jewish distinction about which the Galatian Teachers had to decide, while the latter clearly sets Paul against the Jews. See Martyn (1997, 228-45) and Betz (1979, 103-12).

If the Christian perspective on Judaism can be attributed to the Lutheran understanding, rather than Paul's own words, it is better to focus on Luther's own words on the Jewish law. In Luther's opinion, we are sinners anyway ("simul justus et peccator") and only saved by faith in Jesus Christ. The "true way to Christianity," then, is to "acknowledge [oneself] by the Law to be a sinner," as it is not possible to fulfill the requirements of the Law (see Gal 3:10-11), and then come to righteousness through faith (Crossley 2011, 131). In Lutheran perspective, Law was there only to show the situation of slavery, which ended with the coming of Christ. This theology of "faith alone," emphasized human guilt which could only be atoned for through faith and grace. Those who invested in salvation through good works could, then, be accused of Pelagianism or Jewish-like practice.⁵ In his interpretation of Romans 7, Luther even compared the "Jewish" legal perfectionism to that of monks (Luther 1961, 195-97). In this sense, the Reformation meant going beyond the "Jewish" element that still existed in the Roman Church. This "Jewish" element contributed to the troubled soul that is described in Romans 7:15-20. Even if one wills to avoid sin and do good, the sin within provokes one to commit it. So, humans are always caught in this struggle, from which they can be saved only through faith. In this manner, faith in Christ works as a remedy for perpetual guilt.

III. Lutheran Formulations in the Nineteenth Century

The Lutheran concept of faith was subsequently used by German Idealists to promote freedom of thought. They believed that the "reformation had cleansed faith of its oppressive otherworldliness, inspiring a tranquil confidence both in religion and in the secular institutions that religion nourished" (Comay 2010, 56).⁶ In this sense, Lutheran faith seemed compatible with human reason. This went so far that Hegel, for instance, identified with the Apostle of the "spirit," when he criticized the literalism of positivist historians or biblical critics. Thus, philosophy was—as it were—a Pauline task (Blanton 2007, 25-49).

5. Moreover, Luther mentioned that civil Law is incumbent upon the believers. This suggestion was due to his historical circumstance, as well as the Augustinian distinction between the earthly and heavenly cities. Luther pointed out that the heavenly and the earthly should not intrude on each other; therefore, legal observance could not intrude the heavenly, while the things of the heaven had nothing to do with the earthly matters of the Land (122-23).

6. In fact, this idea was not unprecedented. For example, Kant is said to have been inspired by Galatians 3:23-25 in calling for Enlightenment: humanity's emergence from "self-incurred immaturity"; see Balibar (2002, 3, 36).

On the side of the theologians, the Hegelian Ferdinand Christian Baur revised early church history to show more elaborately how it might be directed toward a goal. (Read this way, Baur's work was a response to Hegel's criticism of Enlightenment church histories as lacking "spirit," or historical and existential orientation.) In Baur's methodology, it was not only the particular individual events which mattered for historiography; rather, the universal idea that governed history was also significant in understanding the particular. The "spirit," in the Hegelian sense, must move on through different historical shapes in order to reach consciousness. It continues to move and negate its negation in the world in order to realize itself, continuing this process from there as it struggles to realize itself fully.

Following on Hegel's philosophy of history, Baur showed that the post-Easter movement, which was founded on the belief in resurrection, was divided between the "Gentile" Pauline and "Jewish" Petrine tendencies. The Judaizing ways of the latter group led to reactions from the former. In the end, however, with their synthesis, which is reflected in the Acts of the Apostles, catholic Christianity emerged in the middle of the second century (Baur 1875-79, 2:182-227). Still, for centuries, certain "Jewish" elements continued within the church, requiring the Protestant Reformation to do away with them, Baur claimed (Baur 1878-79, 2:274; Heschel 1994, 223).

This Hegelian model was so valuable for Baur that he used it as a filter for the authenticity of the texts. So, he rejected the historicity of the Acts because this book had used a harmonizing rhetoric to undermine major conflicts. But it is interesting that Baur himself was also strongly influenced by Acts. Inasmuch as he distinguished between the Pauline and Jewish Christianities, he was an heir to the very legacy of Acts that he wanted to overcome. For one, Baur confirmed that there were two versions of Christianity—the spiritual one which had to be followed and the "Jewish" bodily one which had to be dispensed with. Similarly, the picture of Paul as the "founder of Christianity" rather than a Jewish partisan (Blanton 2007, 24), which had started from the first record of church history in Acts, continued vigorously even in Baur's revisionism.

The Tübingen School of Theology (of Baur and his students) made a spectacular attempt to show the congruence between philosophy and the Bible. Although Baur's findings were criticized soon, his legacy remained in the work of his students in the church and the philosophers outside. As I will demonstrate below, both groups saw two ways of life: one is the way of Law, perpetual guilt, and the particular; the other is the way of the "spirit," faith, and the universal. Inasmuch as faith is

associated with Christianity, Law represents its religious others. Parallel to this, as long as Christianity contains literal elements, it has to be surpassed by another sort of Pauline Christianity. I will return to the philosophical reception of these nineteenth-century understandings of Paul and Christianity. Before that, I will discuss the Christian views on Paul's supposed anti-Judaism.

IV. Paul, according to Friedrich Nietzsche

Almost around the same time that the Tübingen School was active, Friedrich Nietzsche published his assessment of the European society, which included his view of religion. He believed that Europe depended very much on its system of morality, which had come into being when humans started to establish a link between their misfortunes and a certain guilt. The imaginary guilt was in turn related to some sort of evil deed. Instead of relying on their will-power to live a noble life and defeat their misfortunes, humans kept blaming themselves in relation to standards of morality. Christianity had a central role in this imaginary causality of guilt, Nietzsche contended (Nietzsche 1997, 12, 40, 144).

Nietzsche's project was to cure humanity from this wrong idea of guilt. His genealogical history of Christianity worked through themes that the church had inherited from different sources. In Christianity, he suggested, the values that the "evangel" (good tiding) had propagated changed soon after the crucifixion (Nietzsche 2005, 30). In the beginning, the Christian evangel was not faith (over against the Jewish practice), but a new way of life. The evangel abolished human guilt by bridging the distance between God and man. This was the "way" that Jesus introduced.

But it changed altogether with Paul, who founded what is today known as Christianity. Paul was the "*first Christian*, the inventor of Christianness! Before him there were only a few Jewish sectarians" (Nietzsche 1997, 42). Paul claimed that Jesus had atoned for human guilt, which is why he was more interested in the death of the redeemer than his *way of life*. According to Nietzsche, Paul "falsified the history of Israel once again, to make it look like the prehistory of his own actions" (Nietzsche 2005, 42). He replaced the high values with a decadent morality. So, the guilt was still there, indeed even a more intense guilt than before. Consequently, "as soon as the gap between the Jew and Judeo-Christian appeared, the latter had no choice except to use the same methods of self-preservation dictated by the Jewish instinct against the Jews themselves, while the Jews had never used them against *non-Jews*. The Christian is just a Jew with less rigorous beliefs" (Nietzsche 2005, 42).

Paul, according to Nietzsche, was “one of the most ambitious and importunate souls, of a mind as superstitious as it was cunning ... But ... without the storms and confusions of such a mind, of such a soul, there would be no Christianity; we would hardly have heard of a little Jewish sect whose master died on the cross” (Nietzsche 1997, 39). Paul started the whole business of Christianity simply because “this one man, of a very tormented, very pitiable, very unpleasant mind who also found himself unpleasant” was preoccupied with certain questions about the Law, its purpose, and fulfillment. He was in his youth a passionate follower of the Law and even on watch for transgressors. But that made him constantly feel guilty. He wondered whether it was the inherent “carnality” of the Law that made him a transgressor or the Law itself (Nietzsche 1997, 40). (Here Nietzsche was reading Romans 7 literally, identifying the “I” as the autobiographical Paul.) The philosopher even compares the Apostle’s internal experience to an imaginary feeling of Luther’s in the monastery.⁷ Both were as if involved in a dramatic confusion in their souls that could only be resolved through the destruction of their hereditary system. This is what happened on the road to Damascus. There Paul realized how he should destroy his “moral despair.” He joined the followers of the “Messiahdom” and abolished the Law:

The tremendous consequences of this notion, this solution of the riddle, whirl before his eyes, all at once he is the happiest of men – the destiny of the Jews – no, of all mankind – seems to him to be tied to this notion, to this second of his sudden enlightenment, he possesses the idea of ideas, the key of keys, the light of lights; henceforth history revolves around him! For from now on he is the teacher of the *destruction of the law!* To die to evil – that means also to die to the law; to exist in the flesh – that means also to exist in the Law! To become one with Christ – that means also to become with him the destroyer of the law; to have died with him – that means also to have died to the Law! Even if it is still possible to sin, it is no longer possible to sin against the law... God could never have resolved on the death of Christ if a fulfilment of the law had been in any way possible without this death; now not only has all guilt been taken away, guilt as such has been destroyed; now the law is dead, now the carnality in which it dwelt is dead – or at least dying constantly away, as though decaying. (Nietzsche 1997, 40-41)

The supposed confusion that had tormented Paul and Luther was not unfamiliar to Nietzsche. Like them, he saw the transgression of morality and the feeling of guilt everywhere, even after the so-called

7. It is interesting that Nietzsche mentioned this long before Stendhal.

death of God. And just like them, he was also involved in the “redemption” of humanity from guilt. While for Paul guilt lay in legalistic perfectionism, for Nietzsche it was part of Christian and modern morality. In this sense, as Jacob Taubes rightly realized, Nietzsche simultaneously imitated, rivalled, and attacked Paul (Taubes 2004, 79). If in Luther’s view the Catholic Christianity had yet to be paulinized through faith in Christ, Nietzsche felt the need to take it a step further to paulinize Christianity itself, to make it less “Jewish” and to bring it closer to the “good tiding” that it was meant to be. Nietzsche’s “road to Damascus” was the point he realized that liberation from the value system of European morality led to a better life. He intended to give humanity the space it needed to fly to nobler values without any guilt or subsequent misfortune.⁸ Nietzsche functioned as a bridge to transfer these essentialist views of Pauline Christianity from the nineteenth-century ecclesiastical discourse to the pathological readings of religion in psychoanalysis as well as philosophy.

V. Paul, according to Sigmund Freud

The relation between human guilt and the origins of religion resurfaced in Sigmund Freud’s work. He expressed his view on religion since very early in his career. In fact, his psychoanalysis was not confined to the analysis of the individual psyche; rather, he assumed that human society, like a macrocosm, reflected the individual psyche. If one were to summarize his psychoanalysis of religion, it ran like this: just as the obsessional neurosis of the individual appears as an Oedipal defense mechanism against childhood traumas, religion is the “universal obsessional neurosis” of traumatized societies.

Influenced by James Frazer, Freud held that the primitive societies were—as it were—composed of a horde of brothers that murdered the father. Because of its traumatic character, the murder of the father was soon forgotten, and the father was replaced by a taboo animal. What remained from the forgotten trauma is a sense of guilt, which resulted in certain obsessional practices on the part of survivors. These behaviors are manifested as religious rituals in human societies (Freud 2001, 170-90).

Yet, Freud affirmed that religion, as a defense mechanism against helplessness, and even an “illusion” had contributed to human civilization. Only with the evolution of human societies, he believed,

8. On Nietzsche’s identification with Paul, see Franck (2012, 60-69).

“a turning-away from religion is bound to occur with the fatal inevitability of a process of growth, and [...] we find ourselves at this very juncture in the middle of that phase of development” (Freud 1970, 14-17, 39). He proposed that this illusion be replaced with science. Thus, psychoanalysis, as a modern science, could present the reality that religion had sought to hide away.

Later, his monumental work *Moses and Monotheism* (1937) took further his psychoanalysis of religion. Here Freud explained the origins of Judaism and Christianity. In his opinion, Mosaic monotheism is only another version of an original worship of the sun-god in Akhenaton’s Egypt. Moses the Egyptian rebelled against the rulers of his homeland and took a group of oppressed people to another land, where he (the “father”) was soon killed by his people (the brothers). This constitutes the trauma of the Hebrew nation. In order to overcome the sense of guilt from a forgotten parricide, the Jewish people created a set of strict legal practices, which resemble neurotic behaviors. However, this forgotten trauma got a new turn in Christianity. The guilt provoked Paul “a Roman Jew from Tarsus” to claim that the Son of God, who as the Messiah had replaced God the Father, had died. Those who believed in Paul’s message were rescued from guilt and the consequent neurosis. In this sense, the major difference between the Jew and the Christian is that the latter admits the murder of the father (in the form of crucifixion), while the former is stuck in “obsessional neurosis” in attempts to repress the guilt (Freud 1955-1974, 80-92).

In this manner, Freud pathologized religious practice (in the form of Judaism and its “abbreviated repetition Islam”) (Freud 1955-1975, 92-93). That is to say, to be directed to an “advance in intellectuality,”⁹ one should get away from religious practice. Notwithstanding the Pauline mission of liberation from guilt, according to Freud, still certain obsessional rituals persisted within Christianity. To be healed from its malaise, the modern world required a large-scale liberation from guilt. Freud sought to cure the modern Europeans through psychoanalysis. Echoing Nietzsche, Freud described Paul in this manner: “In the most proper sense he was a man of an innate religious disposition: the dark traces of the past lurked in his mind, ready to break through into its more conscious regions” (Freud 1955-1975, 86-87). Here Freud was reading Romans 7 as a reference to Paul’s personal experience. He was also comparing the “innate religious disposition” to a disease-like feeling of guilt, from

9. *Geistigkeit*, alternatively translated as “spirituality” (Freud 1955-1975, 111-15).

which Paul had finally rescued himself and his people. As Jacob Taubes has rightly recognized, the father of psychoanalysis identified with the Jewish Paul, who would remind the people of the source of their misfortunes, the murder of the father, and their defense mechanism in the form of “religion” (Taubes 2004, 90-92). If the Roman Jew (in the Lutheran narrative) had told his people to replace guilt with faith, the German Jewish atheist doctor reminded Europeans to replace the illusion of religion with science.

Although Freud was much influenced by Nietzsche, especially in the notion of cure from guilt, their approach to Paul was different. Freud did not so much attack Paul as imitate him, while Nietzsche clearly disdained and still rivalled him. Furthermore, Freud saw the problem of humanity in its ignorance (of its trauma, guilt, and psyche), while for Nietzsche the problem lay in the denial of the body and resort to metaphysics. Inasmuch as both thinkers held that certain elements in the precedent religions (mainly Judaism) still survived in Christianity, they had inherited the legacy of the biblical scholars. Let us recall that Baur saw the Reformation as one step in the direction of a more Pauline Christianity. More than that, Nietzsche and Freud were criticizing modernity (and its religion), as they saw that it still retained traces of guilt. Both of them believed that modernity itself required a new ethics, composed of the transformation of values for one, or the admission of the repressed material for the other.

In this manner, both philosophy and theology held modernity and Christianity together and opposed them to Judaism. Even if Christianity was criticized, it was for its preservation of certain “Jewish” elements. However, this anti-Jewish spirit changed a lot, as it was blamed for many of the atrocities in the twentieth century.

Now let us see to what extent post-war continental philosophy was influenced by this new perception of Judaism. It seems that the psychoanalytic interpretations of Judaism and religion in general changed only slightly in the course of the twentieth century. In fact, despite the changes in the European conceptions of Judaism, Lacan’s view of the Jewish Law was not very different from the Lutheran-Freudian ideas. First, it is necessary to briefly introduce Lacanian psychoanalysis in order to have a better grasp of the psychoanalytic readings of religion.

VI. Re-Formulation of Psychoanalytic Theories of Religion, according to Lacan and Žižek

Lacan divided the human psyche into three major parts. The Symbolic is the realm of the law (of the father) and language, which separates

the individual from the Big Other. The Imaginary is the linguistic part that is formed when one first starts to distinguish oneself as a whole separate from the maternal (the Big Other). It constitutes what one *imagines* other people or things to be. As such, it depends on the symbolic law (language, culture, etc.). In the Imaginary, one learns to replace the Big Other, which had been separated through the Symbolic, with the *objet petit a*—a smaller object which resembles the Big Other only in part. The Symbolic and the Imaginary are maintained by a non-linguistic element—that is, the Real. Because of its non-linguistic character, the Real is not expressible. Individuals tend to avoid it by creating phantasms. (Unlike symptoms, phantasms are not very pleasurable.) The task of psychoanalysis is, according to Lacanians, to cross over the phantasms and ease one's encounter with the Real.

Thus, the story of the human psyche is like this: a baby boy does not feel that his mother (the Big Other) is a separate object until the mirror stage (around 18 months). At that point with the intervention of the father (language), the baby recognizes in the mirror that he is separate from his mother. This means the fragmentation of a formerly complete being. In the Imaginary, the self tries to overcome this sense of fragmentation by imagining itself as a whole, while, at the same time, it desires to become One with the Big Other. This unification is forbidden by the Symbolic (language, father, law, etc.); therefore, the individual desires to become one with the small other (*objet petit a*). The Real is present in all relationships, in the sense that its absence would lead to their collapse. So, in the ideal sexual liaison between an obsessional (man) and a hysteric (woman), both of them imagine another woman in bed—the man imagines that he is having sex with another woman and the hysteric woman imagines that her male partner is having sex with another woman. The relationship is sustained by the Real—that is, the phantasmal presence of that woman.

In fact, the Real contains what Lacan generally associates with the Freudian “Thing.” For example, in Lacan's analysis of the Jewish Law (which belongs to the Symbolic), the surplus of the Law (“Thing” according to Lacan) induces the subject to transgress the Law. Lacan even translated Paul's description of the Law (Rom 7:7-9) into psychoanalytic language, replacing “sin” with the Freudian “Thing”:

Is the Law the Thing? Certainly not. Yes I can only know of the Thing by means of the Law. In effect, I would not have had the idea to covet if the Law hadn't said: “Thou shalt not covet it.” But the Thing finds a way by producing in me all kinds of covetousness thanks to the

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commandment, for without the Law the Thing is dead. But even without the Law, I was once alive. But when the commandment appeared, the Thing flared up, returned once again, I met my death. And for me, the commandment that was supposed to lead to life turned out to lead to death, for the Thing found a way and thanks to the commandment seduced me; through it I came to desire death. (Lacan 1997, 83)

The Real contains the sin, which provokes the Jew to transgress the Law. The sin is the Freudian murder of the primordial father, which need not have any external reality. Nevertheless it is “true” because, as an excessive specter, it sustains the symbolic law. The logic of guilt and transgression is the phantasm that helps the subject to avoid an encounter with the fundamental myth. On this reading, one might even say that Judaism survived by not confessing to the founding traumatic event (Žižek 2008, 88-90). In Christianity, on the contrary and according to Žižek, one gets out of this cycle of inherent transgression in the Law. Unlike Judaism, Christianity admits its guilt and accepts the death of God at its foundation. Up to this point, as Žižek fully acknowledges, he is indebted to Freud’s claims about the difference between Judaism and Christianity. That is why his narrative is no less supersessionist, as he also mentions interdependence between the Jewish Law and a perpetual sense of guilt, the Law being merely a coping mechanism.

However, according to Lacanian description, the task of Christianity is not only to get out of the endless circle of guilt and Law. Christianity can become more guilt-inducing than Judaism, because it does not even allow for legal loopholes to get around the Law. In Žižek’s opinion, contrary to the literalist Judaism, Christianity even considers the hidden desire for an act sinful (see Matt 5:27-28). But psychoanalysis can help the individual recover from both kinds of religion by showing how one can enjoy doing one’s duty without feeling guilty (Žižek 2008, 130-31). Žižek qualifies a general misunderstanding about the tension between Judaism and Christianity:

The first paradox to note is that the vicious dialectic of Law and its transgression elaborated by Saint Paul is the invisible third term, the ‘vanishing mediator’ between the Jewish religion and Christianity – its specter haunts both of them, although neither of the two religious positions actually occupies its place: on the one hand, the Jews are *not yet* there, that is, they treat the Law as the written Real which does not engage them in the vicious superego cycle of guilt; on the other, as Saint Paul makes clear, the basic point of Christianity proper is precisely to *break out* of the vicious superego cycle of the Law and its transgression via Love. (Žižek 2008, 136)

In the Law/sin binary, love serves as some kind of “third term.” However, the ultimate point of love is when the (feminine) subject, in order to fulfill her subjectivity, sacrifices what is most precious to her (Žižek 2008, 133). This is what the Christian God does. In contrast to the perverse omnipotent subject who creates suffering and sin so that he can intervene and remove these miseries, the Christian God is read as the tragic hero who undergoes the same destiny as the people by sacrificing God’s most precious Son (Žižek 2008, 148). Love is universal because it unplugs the subject from its social order and cleanses the subject’s slate for a new beginning. It is to hate one’s beloved out of love (like Romeo and Juliet’s hatred of their respective families), to love the others for their mere appearances, when the other is reduced to singularized subjectivity (Žižek 2008, 117-19).

In *The Puppet and the Dwarf* (2003), Žižek’s view of religion is less essentialist. He plays with the opposition between Jewish Law and Christian love. Still, for him the most important Pauline theme remains love. The Pauline way of life, we are told, is like that of a person who is passionately in love:

It is therefore crucial to distinguish between the Jewish-Pauline “state of emergency,” the suspension of the “normal” immersion in life, and the standard Bakhtinian carnivalesque “state of exception” when everyday moral norms and hierarchies are suspended, and one is encouraged to indulge in transgressions: the two are opposed – that is to say, what the Pauline emergency suspends is not so much the explicit Law regulating our daily life, but precisely, its obscene unwritten underside: when, in his series of *if* prescriptions, Paul basically says: “obey the laws as if you are not obeying them,” this means precisely that *we should suspend the obscene libidinal investment in the Law, the investment on account of which the Law generates/solicits its own transgression*. The ultimate paradox, of course, is that this is how the Jewish Law, the main target of Paul’s critique, functions: it is already a law deprived of its superego supplement, not relying on any obscene support. In short: in its “normal” functioning, the Law generates as the “collateral damage” of its imposition its own transgression/excess (the vicious cycle of Law and sin described in an unsurpassable way in Corinthians [sic]), while in Judaism and Christianity, it is directly this excess itself which addresses us. (Žižek 2003, 113)

In this sense, love is the (Real) surplus that sustains the Law in both Judaism and Christianity. It is not necessarily “something,” but without it one is “nothing.” Without love, one is lacking; and only a lacking person is capable of love.

Law can belong to a “masculine” logic. The “Man” reaches out to the *objet petit a*, while only fantasizing about the Real, which sustains the relationship. Love, on the other hand, is “feminine” because it expresses lack, but immediately reaches the Real. Just like the perfect sexual relationship between an obsessional (man) and a hysteric (woman), law and love go together. Christianity fulfilled the Jewish Law “not by supplementing it with the dimension of love, but by fully realizing the Law itself—from this perspective, the problem with Judaism is not that it is ‘too legal,’ but that it is not ‘legal’ enough.” The Jewish Law has always served to “unplug” the Jews from the social order; otherwise, they would be, like any other individual, alienated from themselves. Christianity had to go even further and unplug the Jews from what they had already been unplugged from. More than that, in order to avoid falling into the “pagan” feeling of “cosmic oneness” with the universe, Christianity needed a negative reference to the Jewish Law in order to glorify “universal” love as that which replaced the Jewish “particular” Law (Žižek 2003, 117-20).

What remains for Christianity to do, in Žižek’s view, is to get rid of its “perverse” core, its “institutional” character, that which imagines a God that leads the believers to the “fall” in order to redeem them. Like capitalism, this God parasitizes upon modern pleasures, which are themselves devoid of pleasure. The modern capitalist fetishist individual enjoys the *objet petit a* to the exclusion of the Big Other. It even creates arbitrary laws to regulate pleasure. For example, the regime of health takes over so that the object is empty of the main kernel which made it an object of pleasure. Diet coke is Žižek’s famous example of such self-made regulation of pleasure—or Lacanian perversion.

According to Žižek, if Christianity and capitalism are to recover from their “perversion” they should remind themselves of the “death of God” as the tragic hero. It is the God who shares the destiny of Man, so that all are One. The community of the spirit after the death of God can be compared to a communist world, where all differences are annihilated into the One. There the modern subject is able to fully enjoy because the “Christian” principle of unconditional love rules. Just as Christ died for Christianity to emerge, Christianity has to die to itself so that it can save its treasure, Žižek declared (Žižek 2003, 171).

Again here, even when Žižek is more politically correct about the Jews and genuinely finds them remarkable in their own right, he is resorting to all the old metaphors on which Freud and Nietzsche

rested. The plight of modernity is, according to Žižek, that even in a secular world it still retains the “perverse core of Christianity.” The modern capitalist world has replaced the older Christian God with another center. And only Christianity itself (bereft of its institutional garb) can save the world from its “perversion.” But it should be remembered that the “institutional organization” of Christianity and its omnipotent monotheistic God have always been reminiscent of the Jewish system. In many ways, institutional Christianity realized what Judaism had implied. Now, according to Žižek’s narrative, it was time for psychoanalysis to restore a transformed version of Christianity to the world. For Christianity to represent the “universal,” it had to get over its “Jewish” elements. The problem with modernity was that it preserved religion without calling itself religious. This is what the founders of modernity (Luther, Nietzsche, and Freud, among others) had already said about the Christian-secular Europe.

VII. Conclusion

In this essay, I tried to tell the story of the ecclesiastical background of the secular psychoanalytic theories of religion. In my short sketch of the cultural history of “guilt,” I drew a line from the nineteenth century Lutheran biblical scholarship of the Tübingen School to Nietzsche and then Freud and Žižek. Nietzsche spectacularly twisted the alleged guilt of law observance (in Lutheran perspective) to the guilt of Pauline, European Christianity. Psychoanalytic readings of religious neurosis or perversion inherited this conception of guilt as a religious problem. Both the Lutheran theologians and modern philosophers tried to help humanity get over its guilt. For one the guilt lay in the residual “Jewish” elements within Christianity, for the other it resulted from the remaining “religious” sentiments, even after the death of God. Even in the politically correct readings developed by Žižek, the “perverse core” of Christianity is precisely what can be deemed its “Jewish” core. That is, the “Jewish” functioned as a pathological trope, which is both inadequate and exclusionary. Despite its inaccuracies and theological inflection, the New Perspective on Paul has made us aware of the anti-Jewish sentiments in previous Lutheran literature. However, the arbitrarily constructed narratives of the parting of ways between religion and modernity (according to the so-called “parting of ways” between Judaism and Christianity) continue to be reiterated in Western imagination.

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