

Paul's Ideological Reversal of Power: Reading "Two" Corinthians during the Reign of Donald J. Trump

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*In gratitude to my former New Testament professors:
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There are times, as the Roman imperial poet Juvenal observed, when it seems impossible "*not to write satire (difficile est saturam non scribere)*."¹ Yet such a temptation should be resisted. The point of philosophical-political analysis is neither to laugh nor cry but to understand. Satire, we might say, remains at a superstructural level of analysis, whereas what is needed is also infrastructural inquiry. This is especially the case with U. S. President Donald J. Trump. Paying too much attention to Trump's authoritarian language, mannerisms, and tics – his "unbridled id"² – is to miss his own foundational self-description as a *builder*.

In a 2014 interview that was published, not surprisingly, in *Golf Digest*, Trump observed: "You know, I own buildings. I'm a builder; I know how to build. Nobody can build like I can build. Nobody. And the builders in New York will tell you that. I build the best product. And my name helps a lot."³ Using this architectural trope, we could investigate what Trump claims to have constructed – whether hotels, casinos, or golf

courses. We would soon learn that “Trump the Builder” is but a useful fiction, a smirking mask for exploitation.⁴ In its very claim to “authenticity” with which working people are hailed to identify, the term *builder* provides ideological cover for Trump’s actual class position as a *real estate developer* – a less than proletarian endeavor!⁵

What I would like to offer, though, is not another exposé of Trump’s bad faith or a history of the preconditions of his emergence⁶ as a “lumpen capitalist,”⁷ a “patrimonial household head,”⁸ or even the “great god” of a “cargo cult.”⁹ Instead, I shall pursue David Remnick’s insight that “chaotic, corrupt, infantile, grandiose, and obsessed with gaudy real estate, Donald Trump is of a Neronic temperament.”¹⁰ A case in point: Nero not only fancied himself a builder,¹¹ too, but his reign (54-68 CE) was an ideological, political, and economic frame of reference for the life of Paul of Tarsus, through whose mission I would like to take a theoretical detour. Why take a detour through Paul, though? As Louis Althusser put it, there is a

need for every philosophy to make a detour *via* other philosophies in order to define itself and grasp itself in terms of its difference: its *division*. In reality (and whatever its pretensions) no philosophy is given in the *simple*, absolute fact of its presence – least of all Marxist philosophy (which in fact never made the claim). It only exists in so far as it “works out” its difference from other philosophies, from those which, by similarity or contrast, help it sense, perceive and grasp itself, so that it can take up its own *positions*.¹²

The purpose of my theoretical detour is to challenge Martin Hägglund’s view that Paul’s letters are, like all religious discourse, *otherworldly* and concerned with the significance of Jesus’s resurrection only insofar as it concerns life *after* death.¹³ By contrast, I maintain that Paul is concerned with life *before* death, that is to say, his focus is decidedly *thisworldly*.¹⁴ Indeed, as E. A. Judge once remarked, Paul provides an answer

to the deep-seated problem of human exploitation which Marxism in our age has construed as alienation from the product of our labour. Paul’s solution is the reverse of Marx’s. Man is not merely to be restored to self-fulfilment and the possession of what he himself produces. Paul’s estimate of man’s capacity is more radical in that it caters both for the socially destructive forces of self-assertion in us which reformism and even revolution cannot master, and for

the need for a fresh endowment of spiritual resources from beyond ourselves if those better endowed by nature or education are not to assert themselves over us. The notion of the gifts of the Spirit opens to everyone, however limited in genetic endowment or social opportunity, the promise of being able to contribute to the upbuilding of a new structure of human relations. Such a mode of tackling the problems of oppression in human culture and society [is] an historical innovation of the first order. It may perhaps be called the first structural approach to human relations.¹⁵

Although I am unsure what it might mean to say that Paul's solution is "more radical" than Marx's, I readily admit that Paul's practice offers insight into something that is needed in Marxism, namely, a "spiritual" dimension that accounts not only for why one becomes a socialist but also how can endure through the successes and failures, retreats and advances, of political life.¹⁶ I am not the first to have noted this affinity.

In a notebook compiled during 1930-1931 while he was imprisoned by Benito Mussolini's Italian fascist regime, Antonio Gramsci offered a remarkable comparison between the roles played by key figures in Marxism and early Christianity:

To set up a comparison between Marx and Ilyich [i.e. Lenin] in order to establish a hierarchy is foolish and pointless. They are the expression of two phases: science and action, that are simultaneously homogeneous and heterogeneous. Likewise, from a historical standpoint, a parallel between Christ and St. Paul would be absurd. Christ – weltanschauung; and St. Paul – organization, action, expansion of the weltanschauung. They are both equally necessary and of the same historical stature. Christianity could be called, historically, Christianity-Paulinism, which would be a more accurate appellation. [The only thing that has prevented this from happening is the belief in the divinity of Christ, but this belief is itself a historical factor, not a theoretical one.]¹⁷

Following Gramsci's analogy, I aim to show that Paul did indeed play the historical role of Lenin to Jesus's Marx.¹⁸ Or, to put it in terms of Furio Jesi's distinction, Paul turned *revolt* into *revolution*.¹⁹ This was the case precisely because Paul operated as an organizer of messianic communities (*ekklesia*) that built on Jesus's

own ideal of the “kingdom of God” (*basileia tou theou*) and posed a compelling alternative to the violent hierarchy of the Roman imperial order.²⁰ In fact, the rapid expansion of the Jesus movement within the Greco-Roman world – what Richard Horsley and Neil Silberman have called the Christian “revolution”²¹ – was assuredly based not on *ressentiment*, as Nietzsche once complained,²² but on the sheer *joy* experienced by participants attainable only in “shared community” (*koinonia*) with others.²³

But we can be more precise than simply to say that Paul was an organizer; we should stress that his aim was to be a *builder of community*. Judge zeroes in on Paul’s very terminology: “Paul’s notion of edification, which we have now reduced to a pale ideal of inward-looking personal development, is in his usage a graphic and innovatory formulation of how people were to manage their relations with each other.”²⁴ In fact, the Greek word Paul regularly employs is *oikodomē*, which, according to Judge, was “widely used in Paul’s day as the ordinary term for the process of construction on a building site.” Paul deploys the term as a metaphor for “constructive as opposed to destructive relations.”²⁵ But what are *constructive* relations? Judge explains that “the constructive spirit is that of love, by which each contributes to the others’ good, as distinct from the ‘puffed-up’ spirit which pulls down building.”²⁶ Here is a stark, indeed and irreconcilable, contrast, then, between Trump the Builder (of exclusive vanity projects like hotels, office towers, casinos, golf courses, and border walls) and Paul the Builder (of inclusive communities of mutual aid). Trump’s Roman predecessors sought to provide visible expression, indeed, architectural and sculptural propaganda for their imperial order.²⁷ Paul, however, formulated an imperceptible emancipatory project²⁸ that successfully evaded and undermined that order for a generation or two until it was neutralized by, absorbed into, or, we might say, *baptized* in the service of Empire.²⁹

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My detour through Paul was prompted by Donald Trump’s assurance in 2015 to white evangelical voters during the early days of his presidential campaign that *The Art of the Deal*³⁰ was not his favorite book; rather, it was the Bible: “We take the Bible all the way.” Curiously, though, in response to a subsequent interview request to name a couple of his favorite Bible verses Trump demurred and said that “I wouldn’t want to get into it. Because to me, that’s very personal. The Bible means a lot to me, but I wouldn’t want to get into specifics.” In a follow-up question, Trump

was asked if he preferred the New or Old Testaments. His reply: “Probably equal. I think it’s just incredible.”³¹

More specifically, though, my detour through Paul arose not from Trump’s shaky grasp of biblical hermeneutics but from his discordant mispronunciation of “2 Corinthians” as “Two” instead of “Second” Corinthians” during his 2016 presidential campaign remarks at the conservative evangelical Liberty University in Virginia. In Trump’s words: “We’re going to protect Christianity. I can say that. I don’t have to be politically correct ... Two Corinthians, that’s the whole ballgame ... Is that the one you like? ‘Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is Liberty.’”³²

Yet Trump’s mispronunciation of the numeral distinguishing this letter from the earlier “1 (‘First’ not ‘One’) Corinthians” was less an instance of his biblical illiteracy than the kind of symptomatic lapsus for which he is well known.³³ Indeed, a careful reading of 2 Corinthians can provide a means by which not only to avoid parody or satire but also to supplement political or economic critique of Trumpism and help to disrupt the ideological support for its political project rooted in the U.S. theocratic right’s use of the New Testament to baptize Empire.³⁴

Finally, my interest in Paul stems from the resurgence of white nationalism that is at odds with Paul’s own decidedly *cosmopolitan* project.³⁵ Trump certainly imagines himself as a builder of walls and a promoter of a narrow conception of national identity. It is not surprising that Trump insisted that “We’re going to build a wall. It’s going to be a great wall. And it’s going to have big beautiful doors in it because we’re going to have people coming into our country, but they’re going to come into our country legally.”³⁶

For instance, at an October 22 rally in Houston ahead of the 2018 U.S. midterm elections, Trump proudly declared himself a nationalist:

A globalist is a person that wants the globe to do well, frankly, not caring about our country so much. And you know what? We can’t have that ... You know, they have a word – it’s sort of became old-fashioned – it’s called a nationalist. And I say, really, we’re not supposed to use that word. You know what I am? I’m a nationalist, okay? I’m a nationalist. Nationalist. Nationalist. Nothing wrong. Use that word. Use that word.³⁷

On September 25, 2019, before the 74th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, he reiterated, expanded on, and muddled³⁸ this nationalist theme:

Looking around and all over this large, magnificent planet, the truth is plain to see: If you want freedom, take pride in your country. If you want democracy, hold on to your sovereignty. And if you want peace, love your nation. Wise leaders always put the good of their own people and their own country first. The future does not belong to globalists. The future belongs to patriots. The future belongs to sovereign and independent nations who protect their citizens, respect their neighbors, and honor the differences that make each country special and unique.³⁹

For Trump there is “nothing wrong” with nationalism in the sense that it epitomizes what David Renton has called the convergence between traditional Republican party business-oriented conservatism with far-right politics.⁴⁰

One of the world’s leading voices of nascent nationalism is the Israeli political theorist Yoram Hazony, whose book *The Virtue of Nationalism* has been touted by Michael Anton, a former national security advisor to Trump, as the “intellectual basis for a supposed ‘Trump Doctrine’ in foreign policy – a hard-nosed yet non-crusading creed rooted in the recognition that ‘there will always be nations, and trying to suppress nationalist sentiment is like trying to suppress nature.’”⁴¹ Hazony’s book opens with a potted history of ancient Israel and its supposed invention of national identity.⁴² However, his argument conveniently ignores the *theological-political internationalism* that erupted during the traumatic context of ancient Israel’s sixth-century BCE “Babylonian exile,” which included the destruction of the Jerusalem temple and the forced exile of Israelite priestly and scribal elites. A remarkable product of that historical conjuncture was the collection of prophetic oracles now known as “Second Isaiah” (chapters 40-55 of Isaiah) – a work that repudiates once and for all any conception of God narrowly linked to any particular people. Indeed, the conjuncture can be fairly described as one in which the experience of overwhelming defeat led to a reconceptualization of ancient Israel’s tribal deity as the “God of all nations.”⁴³

It is no accident that Paul regularly cited Second Isaiah,⁴⁴ who offered for him an intellectual trajectory to help explain the continuity between ancient Israelite covenantal traditions and the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, whose movement he helped organize and orient toward a new cosmopolitan challenge to the injustices perpetrated by the Roman imperial order. As the classicist A. A. Long has acknowledged, Paul of Tarsus ought to be included within a

catalogue of other Greek and Roman cosmopolitans like Diogenes, Zeno, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius.⁴⁵ However, Long softens the blow of Paul's normative principle espoused in the third chapter of his Letter to the Galatians: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in the Messiah Jesus (*en Christō Iēsou*)"⁴⁶ According to Long,

Paul, in the context of the irrelevance of Jewish ritual and identity to the Christian faith, focuses on unity and anticipates Marcus Aurelius's conception of universal and shared citizenship. His negation of race, status, and gender differences is a rhetorically charged application of the Stoics' claim that all human beings are the same in virtue of their basic natural attributes."⁴⁷

Yet Paul seems to be committed to something stronger. As Hans Dieter Betz memorably argued in his commentary on Galatians, Paul's principle has "social and political implications of even a revolutionary dimension," for his claim is essentially

that very old and decisive ideals and hopes of the ancient world have come true in the Christian community. These ideals include the abolition of the religious and social distinctions between Jews and Greeks, slaves and freemen, men and women. These social changes are claimed as part of the process of redemption and as the result of the ecstatic experiences which the Galatians as well as other Christians have had. Being rescued from the present evil aeon (Gal 1:4) and being changed to a "new creation" implies these radical social and political changes. The Christian's relationship to the social and political structures of "this world" follows the rule set forth in 6:14: "through whom [= Christ] the world is crucified to me and I to the world." The Christian is now "dead" to the social, religious, and cultural distinctions characteristic of the old world-order (cf. Gal 2:19).⁴⁸

As Davina Lopez has argued, Paul's cosmopolitanism was rooted in solidarity with "conquered nations,"⁴⁹ that is, with the victims of Roman imperial violence whom we may regard the first-century equivalent of what Frantz Fanon called "the wretched of the earth."⁵⁰

Consider, too, the ideological stakes involved in what one could call a politics of appellation and counter-appellation. For all those subjects of the Roman imperial

order who existed on the margins of society, what did Paul's communities offer by way of group identity? Paul Trebilco has meticulously gathered the diverse ways that Jesus loyalists named themselves as "insiders" and named those who remained "outsiders."⁵¹ But this was not just a case of inclusion and exclusion: there was also an ideological reversal at work, by means of which the world of prevailing imperial values was subverted and new ways to recognize others as equals were constructed. For example, Paul's very designation "loyalist" (*pistos*)⁵² demarcated a distinctly cosmopolitan form of identity that transcended regional, ethnic, gender, status, and class distinctions—much as the term "comrade" has done in the modern world.⁵³

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Let us turn at last to 2 Corinthians, which was composed by Paul in 54/55 CE as a follow-up letter to the fractious community of Jesus loyalists in the Roman colony of Corinth who experienced serious conflicts arising from disputes over religious leadership, baptism, everyday morality, sexuality, gender roles, sharing food in common meals, the nature of life after death, and a collection for the poor among the Jerusalem community. Indeed, this was "a community born of struggle and conflict" in which Paul had to fight for his own positions to be taken seriously.⁵⁴

Allen Dwight Callahan captures well the original impulse of Paul's mission in Corinth as an "emancipatory project":

Emancipation is the means and root metaphor of Paul's eschatological politics. It is the politics of the oppressed. We do not have to do here with the classic definition of politics as the concerted action of autonomous individuals guided by rational self-interest. Such a definition of politics is useless in our understanding of what Paul is doing because it is irrelevant for oppressed people. The notion of autonomy begs the question; freedom is not the necessary condition of a politics of the oppressed, but the desired effect. The atomistic Kantian self presupposed in our common notions of politics is free to be political. The oppressed are political to be free. And in Roman Corinth in the first century of the common era, emancipation is the politics of freedom.⁵⁵

Yet realizing a "politics of freedom" was hardly an easy task for Paul and the Jesus movement in Corinth (and elsewhere). As Richard Horsley has argued,

Paul's Corinthian correspondence ... indicates ... just how difficult it was for a fledgling group of people of diverse viewpoints and interests to coalesce into a coherent and disciplined community. The ideal of a cohesive self-governing community may have been derived from the traditional peasant village and/or the diaspora Jewish synagogue. However, in contrast to both village community and diaspora Jewish synagogue, which were comprised of people who already had mutual bonds from belonging to the same community for generations, it was difficult in the extreme to mould a disparate group of people of diverse backgrounds who had wound up in an imperial colony or city as the result of disruption on the part of imperial forces of their previous, more traditionally grounded lives.⁵⁶

Paul addresses a number of issues in 2 Corinthians that are relevant to a politics of freedom, but I would like to focus on one that conveys especially well the means by which the apostle engages stylistically and conceptually in what we may call a *reversal* of the dominant Roman imperial ideology.⁵⁷ To be precise, Paul argues for a *weak* form of power: the capacity not to dominate but to care for and seek the wellbeing of others. Indeed, weakness and distress are for Paul the hallmark of both authentic discipleship and his own mission as a Jesus movement organizer, that is, as an *apostle*. Midway through the letter Paul reminds members of the Corinthian community that

as slaves of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see – we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.⁵⁸

Later in the letter, Paul confronts his rival evangelists in Corinth, whom he disparages as spiritually elitist “super-apostles” (*hyperapostoloi*), and then proceeds

to wage argumentative warfare against those whom he regards as little better than sophists.⁵⁹ Paul brandishes a violent metaphor of siege warfare:⁶⁰

we wage war not according to the flesh, for the weapons of war are not fleshly but powerful enough for God to demolish fortresses – demolishing arguments and any rampart thrown up against the knowledge of God and capturing every thought to make it obedient to the Messiah, and ready to punish all disobedience, once your obedience has been secured.⁶¹

He soon adds another military metaphor:⁶²

And what I do I will also continue to do, in order to undercut the base of operations (*ekkopsō tēn aphormēn*) to those who want an opportunity to be recognized as our equals in what they boast about. For such boasters are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of the Messiah.⁶³

These lines are ideological reversals: Paul engages in them in order to remind his audience that he seeks to demolish the arguments of his opponents by reframing them in terms not of military conquest (“according to the flesh”) but messianic nonviolence.

For, in the last analysis, Paul’s boldest challenge to his rivals draws on a distinction between their “boasting” and his own willingness to play a Socratic “fool” whose apostolic qualifications are rooted not in his rhetorical success but in his labors, imprisonments, and floggings. He reminds his Corinthian audience:

Five times I have received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning. Three times I was shipwrecked; for a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from bandits, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers and sisters; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, hungry and thirsty, often without food, cold and naked. And, besides other things, I am under daily pressure because of my anxiety for all the assemblies. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble,

and I am not indignant? If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness ... I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of the Messiah; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.⁶⁴

With these paradoxical words Paul reveals his “somatic weakness,”⁶⁵ which visibly links his own battered body to Jesus’s execution by representing it in performance.⁶⁶ Paul’s anti-imperial formula *Whenever I am weak, then I am strong* expresses both a reversed form of boasting and a slogan for a radically different way to organize human societies. As Richard Bauckham has counseled, “anyone who knows only his strength, not his weakness, has never given himself to a task which demands all he can give. There is no avoiding this weakness, and we should learn to suspect those models of human life which try to avoid it.”⁶⁷ Yet there is weakness as a way to orient a theological-political organizing project, and then there is weakness of result. By any historical measure, Paul’s project was a failure.

How, then, should we grapple today with this incapacity to find a way to supplant the Roman imperial order? In the last analysis, Paul doubtless expected divine intervention to bring about a just world.⁶⁸ He insisted that this would occur “like a thief in the night”⁶⁹ – decisively but unexpectedly. It didn’t happen. If, counterfactually speaking, Paul had proposed a direct military assault on Rome, his followers would have likely fared no better than those who participated in the heroic, but strategically divided, “Jewish War” against Roman legions in Galilee and Judea from 66-74 CE – a crushing defeat with subsequent crucifixions, enslavement, and exile.⁷⁰

At best, we must conclude, Paul was historically constrained to engage in a “war of position”; whereas the divine “war of movement” he fervently expected was delayed, if not permanently foreclosed.⁷¹ Nonetheless, his radically inclusive and egalitarian “summons to messianic life”⁷² persists. In David Kaylor’s words, “Paul’s vision stretches beyond human history,” for he “created a vision of human community which even in its elusiveness continues to draw us with power.”⁷³

As Paul confessed to his sisters and brothers in first-century Corinth: “We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed ... So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day.”⁷⁴ Paul’s endurance through his personal afflictions and

organizing travails provides evidence that religious faith does not have to point beyond to a transcendent realm in which the contradictions of secular faith would be imaginarily resolved at the expense of the meaning of one's own finite life and the intelligibility of political struggle.⁷⁵ Indeed, what contemporary Marxists can learn by reading Paul's first-century letters is that religious commitment need not be antagonistic to secular commitment: rather, the former can serve as the latter's enrichment, its immanent depth, its renewal "day by day," even as you, I, and we are in grave danger of "wasting away."

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Caught up into a third heaven of his own design,⁷⁶ former Trump close advisor and White House strategist Steve Bannon recently boasted that "we have turned the Republicans into a working-class party."⁷⁷ If only saying something so easily made it so! Fortunately, Robert Reich has countered Brannon's nationalist fantasy with stubborn facts. Reich drily remarks that

keeping the GOP the Party of Big Money while making it over into the Party of the Working Class is a tricky maneuver, especially at a time when capital and labor are engaged in the most intense economic contest in more than a century because so much wealth and power are going to the top.⁷⁸

Indeed, if we were to judge the Trump Administration and its enablers in Congress – some of them centrist Democrats – by their determinate bad actions instead of their professed good intentions, we should note the following indices of growing corporate domination: massive tax cuts for the rich, a shifting of the tax burden onto workers, and drastic reductions in social spending for food stamps and Social Security benefits. To say nothing of the nationalist scapegoating of the tired, poor, and huddled masses "yearning to breathe free," who have sought a better life in the United States.⁷⁹ In short, *contra* Bannon, not only has a working-class party not yet emerged, the precondition for its emergence remains above all the self-initiative, self-organization, and self-emancipatory struggles of working people in all their diversity. Such a party would give substance in the twenty-first century to Paul's first-century vision of building counter-imperial assemblies based on inclusion, equality, and reciprocity.⁸⁰

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Notes

¹ *Satires* I.30; Juvenal 2004, pp.132-3.

² Singer 2016, pp.41.

³ Barton 2014.

⁴ To illustrate: 1980 Trump hired a crew of two hundred ill-equipped and poorly compensated Polish workers to demolish the Bonwit Teller department store on Fifth Avenue in New York City – the very location where Trump Tower now stands (see Johnston 2017, pp.69-76). More recently, undocumented employees at Trump National Golf Club Westchester in Briarcliff Manor, New York

have alleged that their supervisors have forced them to work extra hours without pay (see Partlow and Fahrenthold 2019).

⁵ Thanks to Mike Grimshaw for pointing this out to me.

⁶ On the preconditions for Trumpism in the “post-Watergate” United States, see especially Kruse and Zelizer 2019.

⁷ See Farber 2018.

⁸ Dylan Riley (2018) argues that Trump has sought to run the federal government “as a household, with little if any distinction between the public and private interests of the ruler, whose favours secure the allegiance of dependents and followers.” This, he adds, “was a form of rule designed for pre-modern, pre-capitalist societies, in which the ideological weight of ‘tradition’ could suffice to legitimate the process of domination. In the later Roman Empire and medieval Europe, this system could organize entire realms. Trump’s notion of government is precisely patrimonial, in this sense.” However, Trump’s patrimonial rule is inherently unstable insofar as “he is practising this style of rule at the head of a modern capitalist state” (p.25).

⁹ Davis 2017.

¹⁰ Remnick 2018. However, the classicist Mary Beard doubts the value of comparing Trump’s personality, beliefs, or policies to any particular Roman emperor: “There aren’t these one-to-one correlations that people want ... I can’t think of any emperor that Donald Trump is like and the circumstances of the fall of the Roman Empire are still utterly opaque to us” (Nugent 2018). For similar skepticism, see also Freudenberg 2018 and Strauss and Werman 2019.

¹¹ “After the Great Fire of Rome (64 CE), for instance, Nero “confiscated much of downtown Rome to build an enormous new palace ... The Great Fire of Rome took only one week of Nero’s many years in power, but it defines his reign in both real and symbolic terms. The fire opened the way for a new city of Rome and a new age in Roman building that left its mark on Roman culture as well as on world civilization. And Nero himself was like a fire that cleared out the old senatorial elite and blazed the trail for a new ruling class from the provinces” (Strauss 2019, p.81).

¹² Althusser 1976, p.133.

¹³ See Hägglund 2019, pp.167-8.

¹⁴ Here I find common cause with Welborn 2015.

¹⁵ Judge 2008, p.174.

¹⁶ See Kovel 1991.

¹⁷ Gramsci 2007, pp.183-4.

¹⁸ One is tempted to say that Paul functioned more as *Gramsci* to Jesus’s Marx!

¹⁹ “Revolution prepares the future, revolt evokes it. But there is another fundamental difference – the future of revolution is the tomorrow while that of revolt is the day after tomorrow. Accordingly, we can say that revolution is timely, revolt untimely. The tomorrow is timely because the revolutionaries prepare it. The day after tomorrow is untimely because the rebels do not prepare it – they evoke it” (Jesi 2014, p.166). Thanks to Mike Grimshaw for reminding me about Jesi’s distinction.

²⁰ As Richard Horsley writes, “Paul himself was not a theologian but a movement leader insisting on exclusive loyalty and solidarity in the local communities of the movement” (Horsley 2009, pp.233). On the “spiral of violence” during the Roman empire, see Harrison 2018.

²¹ See Horsley and Silberman 1997.

²² Nietzsche 2005, p.37.

²³ The source of this joy was the *pneuma* or “spirit” that fueled the Jesus movement; indeed, that animates *all* movement aiming at freedom, equality, and social progress. On the emancipatory implications of spirit, see Comblin 1989.

²⁴ Judge 2008, p.173.

²⁵ Judge 2008, p.173. See, for example, 1Thess 5:11; Gal 2:18.

²⁶ Judge 2008, p.173. Judge has in mind 2 Cor 10:8, 13:10.

²⁷ See Zanker 1988 and La Rocca 2017.

²⁸ I borrow the concept of “imperceptibility” from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987, 197) to emphasize the contrast between “molar” Roman visual propaganda and Paul’s “molecular” politics.

²⁹ See Howard-Brook 2016.

³⁰ Trump 1987. For a demolition of Trump’s ghostwritten (by Tony Schwartz) book as little more than “a guidebook for ruining people’s lives,” see Fluss 2016.

³¹ Scott 2015.

³² Taylor 2016. See 2 Cor 3:17. I leave aside Trump’s baseball metaphor and the tendentious rendering of the Greek word *eleutheria* as “liberty” instead of as “freedom” in this verse, which is engraved on Liberty University’s Buildings. But for the radically egalitarian implications of Paul’s idea of freedom, see Richardson 1979.

³³ Although Trump’s pronunciation does follow standard British English, he immediately blamed his mispronunciation on the notes he had received from someone else: Tony Perkins, the conservative evangelical president of the Family Research Council (see Bradner 2016).

³⁴ Also, I want to supplement the fine historical-theological critique of Trump and Trumpism to be found in Fea 2018.

³⁵ See Neutel 2018. For Marx and Engels as “communist cosmopolites,” see Löwy, pp.5-15.

³⁶ See Nixon and Qiu 2018 for a compilation of Trump’s “evolving words” regarding the construction of a wall (or fence) between the United States and Mexico. Not surprisingly, given his history of shady business practices, the construction company proposed by Trump has a checkered past; see Alvarez, Foran, and Browne 2019.

³⁷ Cummings 2018.

³⁸ Muddled by using “patriotism” and “nationalism” interchangeably. On the need to distinguish them, see Viroli 1995.

³⁹ Trump 2019.

⁴⁰ Renton 2019, pp.99-139.

⁴¹ Luban 2019.

⁴² Hazony 2018, pp.17-20. Not surprisingly, Hazony (2001) has also been a strident defender of the Israeli state against such modern cosmopolitan Jewish critics as Martin Buber, Gershom Scholem, Albert Einstein, and Hannah Arendt. For a critique of the ideology of divine “chosenness” as a way to construe the political structure of ancient Israel or to justify modern “nationalism,” see Coogan 2019.

⁴³ See especially Rubenstein 2006 on the “revolutionary moral vision” of the Israelite prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah.

⁴⁴ On Paul’s citations of Second Isaiah, see Moyise 2010.

⁴⁵ Long 2008.

⁴⁶ Gal 3:28. In my citations from Paul I have modified the New Revised Standard Version in accordance with the Greek text in Nestle-Aland 2012. Compare 2 Cor 5:17 (“So if anyone is in the Messiah (*en Christō*), there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!”). Paul’s phrase “in the Messiah” should be understood not as descriptive metaphysics or even mysticism but as expressing a norm that might be better translated as “with respect to the principle underlying the new messianic community.”

⁴⁷ Long 2008, pp.57-8.

⁴⁸ Betz 1979, 190. See also Stephen Patterson’s elegant reconstruction of this emancipatory principle as having arisen from a pre-Pauline baptismal creed (Patterson 2018).

⁴⁹ See Lopez 2008.

⁵⁰ Fanon 2004. Admittedly, though, Paul’s emphasis on nonviolence has more in common with Gandhi or King than with Fanon.

⁵¹ Trebilco 2012; 2017.

⁵² Zerbe 2018, pp.26-46.

⁵³ On the universalist implications of the term “comrade,” see Dean 2019.

⁵⁴ Pickett 2010, p.114.

⁵⁵ Callahan 2000, p.216.

⁵⁶ Horsley 2009, p.237.

⁵⁷ I borrow the concept of ideological reversal from Raymond 2015, p.185.

⁵⁸ 2 Cor 6:4-10.

⁵⁹ See Winter 2002.

⁶⁰ Zeichmann 2018, pp.114-5.

⁶¹ 2 Cor 10:3-6.

⁶² Zeichmann 2018, p.123 n19.

⁶³ 2 Cor 11:12-13. This is in contrast to 2 Cor 5:12, which offers a positive “base of operations” for boasting. *Aphormē* can also mean something like “a place from which an attack is made,” as in Romans 7, in which Paul identifies the destabilizing power of *hamartia* (“sin” or “moral weakness”).

⁶⁴ 2 Cor 11:24-30, 12:10.

⁶⁵ See Glancy 2016.

⁶⁶ Elliott 2004, 81.

⁶⁷ Bauckham 192, p.6.

⁶⁸ For Paul’s conception of a “divine politics” that ultimately appeals to “holy war,” see Wasserman 2018.

⁶⁹ 1 Thess 5:2.

⁷⁰ The chief primary source for the Jewish War is Josephus 2017. On the strategic and military shortcomings – to say nothing of the disastrous in-fighting during the siege of Jerusalem – of the war against Rome, see Mason 2016.

⁷¹ See Portelli 1974, p.56. The distinction between “war of position” and “war of movement” is, of course, Gramsci’s (see Gramsci 2007, pp. 109, 117, 162-3, 168-9, 267). Roland Boer (2019, pp.44-59) has rightly stressed the unresolvable *contradictions* in Paul’s mission and letters, rooted as they were in a mode of production that relied on extraction of surplus labor from slaves and peasants and thereby blocked certain avenues of escape to human freedom and flourishing.

⁷² Welborn 2015.

⁷³ Kaylor 1988, p.222.

⁷⁴ 2 Cor 4:8-9, 16.

⁷⁵ *Contra* Hägglund 2019, pp.4-10.

⁷⁶ Compare the diametrically opposed normative implications of Paul's ironic counter-boasting in 2 Cor 12:2. For commentary see Wire 2019.

⁷⁷ Smith 2019.

⁷⁸ Reich 2019.

⁷⁹ To echo Emma Lazarus's 1883 sonnet "The New Colossus," which is cast onto a bronze plaque and mounted inside the lower level of the Statue of Liberty's pedestal. On the contemporary political stakes of interpreting Lazarus's poem, see Hunter 2018.

⁸⁰ See McNally 2019 for an insightful reflection on future of "practices, organizations and cultures of working class self-mobilization."