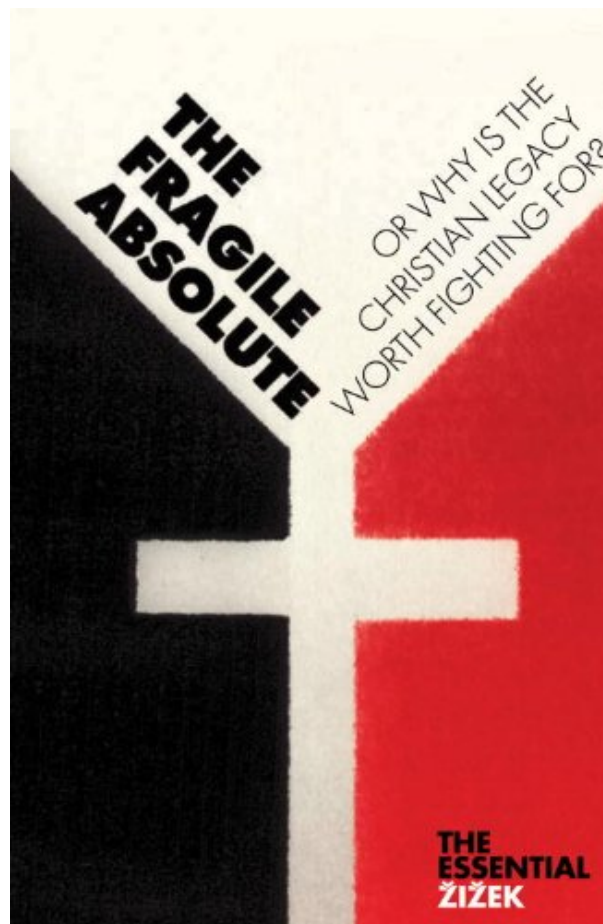
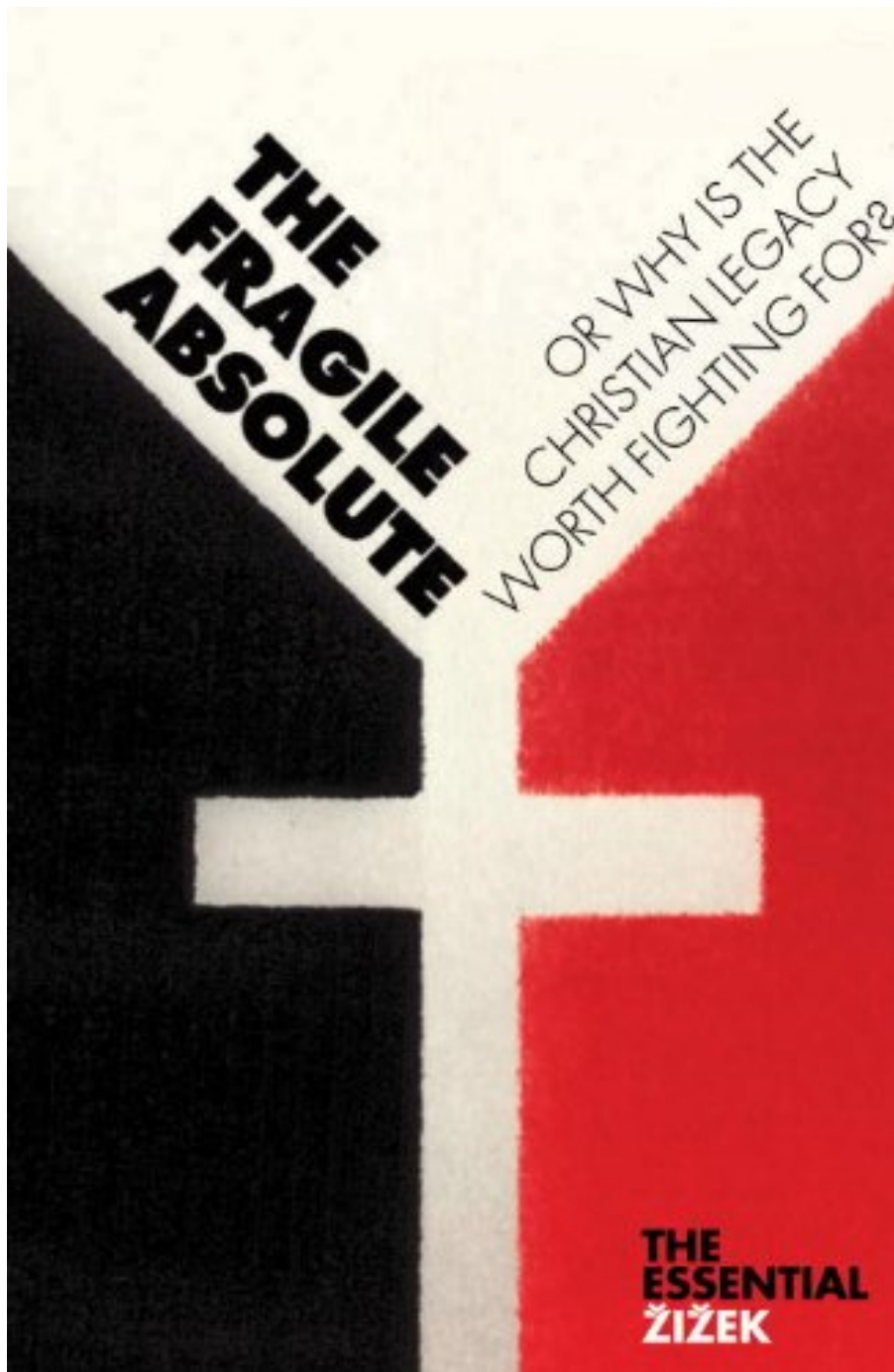


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CHRISTIAN LEGACY WORTH FIGHTING
FOR? (THE ESSENTIAL ZIZEK) BY SLAVOJ
ZIZEK**



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Review

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About the Author

Slavoj Žižek is a Slovenian philosopher and cultural critic. He is a professor at the European Graduate School, International Director of the Birkbeck Institute for the Humanities, Birkbeck College, University of London, and a senior researcher at the Institute of Sociology, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. His books include *Living in the End Times*, *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce*, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, four volumes of the *Essential Žižek*, and many more.

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BY SLAVOJ ZIZEK PDF

One of the signal features of our era is the re-emergence of the 'sacred' in all its different guises, from New Age paganism to the emerging religious sensitivity within cultural and political theory.

The wager of Žižek's *The Fragile Absolute* – published here with a new preface by the author – is that Christianity and Marxism can fight together against the contemporary onslaught of vapid spiritualism. The revolutionary core of the Christian legacy is too precious to be left to the fundamentalists.

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9 of 13 people found the following review helpful.

A Shared Lie is an Incomparably More Efficient Bond for a Group Than the Truth

By Etienne RP

The *Fragile Absolute* opens with a call to arms: "Christianity and Marxism should fight on the same side of the barricade against the onslaught of new spiritualism." Similarly, it closes with an invocation of the emancipatory potential of the Christian community of believers, spearheaded by "authentic psychoanalytic and revolutionary political collectives."

But apart from this plea for a holy alliance under the banner Christ, Marx and Freud (or Saint Paul, Lenin, and Lacan), this book says very little about the Christian legacy, or why it should be worth fighting for. If there is a dominant theme in this loosely connected collection of short essays, it is that our beliefs are underlined by dirty little secrets, that there is an obscene and disavowed underside to our publicly acknowledged values. Zizek's goal is to bring the skeleton out of the closet, and to confront us with our unsavory family history.

According to Zizek, Judaism and Islam depend on a violent founding event that they repress and try to hide away, but that returns to haunt them. For Islam, it has to do with the role of women: Ishmael, the progenitor of all Arabs and the first son of Abraham, is presented in Genesis as the son of the Egyptian slave Hagar whereas the latter doesn't appear in the Qur'an (this is no secret for Moslems, who simply contest the Genesis version). For Judaism, the secret is that Moses was not a Jew but an Egyptian and that he was murdered by his people (you have to trust Freud on that one). Christianity's founding event is that Jesus died on the cross, but that is nobody's secret.

Family secrets are not confined to religions: for Freud, the founding of a community involves the murder of the father and the ensuing guilt that brings the brothers together. Similarly, the subconscious of any individual is marked by a primal scene or fundamental fantasy that, according to Freud, finds its way into consciousness through dreams and symptoms. No matter that the murder of the primordial father and other Freudian myths didn't take place: "they are in a way more real than reality; they are 'true', although, of course, they didn't really take place". Like ghosts, they continue to haunt the living, dwelling in a mysterious region of nonexistent entities which nonetheless persist and continue to exert their efficacy. A shared lie is an incomparably more efficient bond for a group than the truth.

(Zizek sees this mechanism at work "even in some Lacanian communities where the group recognizes itself through common use of some jargonized expressions whose meaning is not clear to anyone, be it 'symbolic castration' or 'divided subject' - everyone refers to them, and what binds the group together is ultimately their very shared ignorance. The Master-Signifier which guarantees the community's consistency is a signifier whose signified is an enigma for the members themselves - nobody really knows what it means, but each of them somehow presuppose that others know.")

For Zizek, one becomes a full member of a community not simply by identifying with its explicit tradition, but only when one also assumes the spectral dimension that sustains this tradition. One should therefore not only pay attention to the symbolic law but also to its obscene underside, the 'virtual' narrative of the irredeemable excess of violence that establishes the very rule of law. To Proudhon's famous claim that property is theft, Zizek adds that law is crime: the rule of law is based on a crime, on a "violent gesture that brings about a regime which retroactively makes this gesture itself illegal/criminal."

The *Fragile Absolute* is published in a series that collects *The Essential Zizek*. It provides a good introduction to the author, although seasoned Zizek readers will find many repetitions with other books, and sometimes within the same book. Interested readers will find quotations of canonical texts, like the passage

in Marx's Manifesto where "all that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at least compelled to face with sober senses his real condition in life, and his relation with his kind."

1 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

it is good wisdom; the latter

By Keith D. Krugerud

This book is very intriguing and enlightening. However, is this book for the sake of Humanity or for the sake of Philosophy? If, the former, it is good wisdom; the latter, a disaster. For does not Zizek commit the very Cartesian Error at the end? As for Kant, it was Reason; for Lacan, Desire; here, for Zizek, Omnipotence. So the real question is ask: why (and how) does Zizek take omnipotence as his grounding point and as his a priori "given" ever so transcendent? Now, the reader has to keep in mind that this is a 14 year older Zizek. In his present work, "Absolute Recoil", "the zero-point, the starting point is not zero but less than zero, a pure minus without a positive term with regard to which it would function as a lack/excess." Hence, we should introduce a third position to the "Fragile Absolute": non-omnipotence. This is the proper position of dialectical materialism, for "there is no peace even in the Void" - there is mere non-relation. Perhaps non-peace is a better choice of "wordingization", here.

2 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

Read Ernst Bloch re: the Bible and theology instead

By hardboiledbabe

I'm not really a huge of fan of Zizek's approach here. He's sharp and sophisticated as always, but I find nothing particularly new or challenging about the sort of theology that he produces by means through materialization. It feels, stunted, stuck in the second stage of engaging in the materialization of theology and unable to move beyond that to produce anything new. It's not the worst thing, but as a reader I feel he has just not come all that far in his engagement with theology. He seems to be more or less rediscovering what others have already said, he doesn't come off as perceptive to this, often times I feel Zizek makes such a vitriolic attempt to cover everything he can he doesn't take the time to slow down and assess what we already have. I think he'd benefit from reading some Ernst Bloch, they make similar arguments, except that I find Bloch is much more comprehensive in pursuing the implications for the Bible and theology and is continually inspiring, far more perceptive and comprehensive.

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