

Buber Invites Barth to a Dance – in Jerusalem...

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ABSTRACT

Buber the wisdom-figure and Barth the theologian. Buber carrying Jewish tradition, Jesus' tradition, crosses swords with the Christian, Barth, carrying the Church's tradition, derived from Jesus. We find two different views of God and two different views of man (the human person). But these are less difference that divide the two religions, than differences that cut through them, marking the difference between a belief-based Christianity and a spirit-filled Christianity that leads one to dance.

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Buber's invitation to Barth to a dance in Jerusalem occurs at the end of Buber's collection of essays edited by his friend, colleague and biographer, Maurice Friedman, *Between Man and Man* (1965), which appeared in the year of Buber's death. Forty years before this Buber had become famous for the key work of dialogical philosophy and theology, *I and Thou* (1923), a work much influenced by his friendship with Franz Rosenzweig, whose "new thinking" was along much the same lines, although embedded in an immense poetico-philosophical work, *The Star of Redemption* (1920). Buber had gone on to become something of wisdom figure with his translations of Hasidic stories, Hasidism being the Jewish spiritual movement that was started in central Europe in the seventeenth century by Rabbi Israel, known as the Baal Shem Tov and which spread throughout Europe. At the heart of the communities were sage-like holy rabbis and rebbetzim, often famed for their story-telling and exemplary saintliness. It was a movement which according to Nobel prize-winning novelist Isaac Bashevis Singer created the most humane communities in the history of human civilisation. These communities became the principal target for the Nazi criminals, although they have miraculously survived the Holocaust. Buber stands in the Hasidic tradition, in his understanding of it.

Buber's invitation to dance occurs in the Afterword of *Between Man and Man* which was especially prepared for the edition. In the Afterword Buber gives a short history of the dialogical principle with which his name is forever linked.

Like so many of Buber's writings this text has the appearance of being fairly simple and straightforward upon first inspection but upon closer examination proves quite otherwise, even to the point of being actually elusive. At the end of this Afterword, in the final pages of the book as a whole, Buber cites Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics* on the question of man and says the following:

The Protestant world of faith in Barth's understanding of it stands over against the Hasidic in my understanding of it. And there, among the Hasidim – in a world of faith whose teaching is ultimately the commentary on a lived life – the 'willingly' of the freedom of the heart is not, indeed, consequence, but certainly the innermost presupposition, the ground of grounds. One needs only hear how it is spoken: "Cleverness without heart is nothing at all. Piety is false." For "the true love of God begins with the love of man." But I would, I could, show Karl Barth here, in Jerusalem, how the Hasidim dance the freedom of the heart to the fellowman.¹

It is this quotation that I will be interpreting throughout what follows.

The context is Buber's historical reflection on the dialogical principle. Buber is thinking back to a time when the Barth of the *Church Dogmatics* named him and tried to critique his doctrine of the human person. It is this that Buber is taking issue with in the quotation here. Now the later Barth, the Barth of *The Humanity of God*, moved close to Buber's dialogical position, away from his early position in *Church Dogmatics*. The later Barth toned down his dialecticism (or diastasis that he posits between God and man) somewhat. However, for our understanding of the symbolism of Buber's invitation to Barth we are only interested in the Barth of *Church Dogmatics*. This was the Barth who influenced the Christian world. It was *this* Barth that unfolded theology in terms of 'faith seeking understanding', where 'faith' is a given in terms of *belief*. In a nutshell we shall see from what follows that for Barth, the person is first a believer, and on that basis gains access to their full humanity, but for Buber, belief is secondary to humanity. Where humanity ('true humanity') is conditional upon belief dialogue is at best difficult because conflicting beliefs cannot both be right; but where we are first and foremost human beings, and only in a secondary sense believers, dialogue is possible. And it is this very

dialogue that makes us more or less human. Of course for both Buber and Barth, God is always party to this dialogue and His word always central to it.

I

What is *the Protestant world of faith in Barth's understanding of it?* And what is *the Hasidic world of faith in Buber's understanding of it?* Obviously we can't treat such questions with the length they deserve here, but I will give some indication of the path of my thinking on both questions.

Barth takes up the question of faith in his understanding of it, which will encase the whole *Church Dogmatics*, in Volume 1 Part 1 "The Word of God and Faith". Barth says "faith ... is what takes place in real knowledge of the Word of God and makes this knowledge possible."² So faith is a pre-requisite for revelation, but what is "real knowledge"? We find that "real knowledge" of revelation depends on the rectitude of this faith, which in turn depends on right belief. Our experience of faith is governed by our beliefs about that experience, and in particular about whether those beliefs are right or not. Faith seeks understanding, but you have not understood if you have not rightly believed.³ And how do we know if we have rightly believed? Well, this is where *Church Dogmatics* comes in. It is a gigantic attempt by one man to help the Church to get belief right including belief about faith, which of course on this line of reasoning, is all-important.

"For faith is not already faith because it has or is a relation ... but because the Word of God is given to it as the object of this connection, as the object of acknowledgement and therewith as the ground of real faith."⁴ As an "object" it means there are extrinsic criteria for measuring this faith and its truth ('truth' in the sense of validity). This object must be seen through the eye of right belief for it not to be in fact distorted. How do we know we have this object properly in view? Well, again this is where *Church Dogmatics* helps us. It is a gigantic yardstick by which the Word of God can become "the object of acknowledgement and therefore the ground of real faith."

“Faith takes its absolute and unconditioned rise in the Word of God, independently of inborn or inherited characteristics and possibilities in man, and as it is faith has no other goal or source of life at any time or in any respect save in the Word of God.”⁵ Barth says faith must be “fixed” and “we can only fix it by staying fixed ourselves in faith and in the knowledge of faith, i.e. by turning away from ourselves and turning our face, or rather our ear, to the Word of God.”⁶ On the one hand is the objectification of the word of God, on the other the fixture of faith, a second objectification. “The fixing, therefore, is not the fixing of our possibility [the possibility of hearing the Word of God] but the fixing of its reality, a fixing which cannot be made otherwise than by our staying fixed.”⁷

Faith in Hasidism is another story. It is de-objectified: “certainly the relation of faith is not a book of rules which can be looked up to discover what is to be done now, in this very hour.”⁸ Faith starts with experience of God: “I experience what God desires of me for this hour – so far as I do experience it – not earlier than *in* the hour.”⁹ It is not defined so much by right belief as by relation in time and experience. It is not the ‘personal’ faith of the individual ego, nor is it ‘corporate’. The truth of faith (‘truth’ in the sense of reality) lies in the relation *between* the individual and the community of faith; it is faith characterised by the mediation of relationship, therefore dialogue and difference. “With my choice and decision and action – committing or omitting, acting or preserving – I answer the word, however inadequately, yet properly; I answer for my hour. My group cannot relieve me of this responsibility, I must not let it relieve me of it; if I do I pervert my relation of faith, I cut out of God’s realm of power the sphere of my group. But it is not as though the latter did not concern me in my decision – it concerns me tremendously.”¹⁰ Buber goes on in the strongest language to elucidate just *how* it concerns him (and all of us) tremendously. The key is responsibility “to my group before the Face of God.”¹¹ What Buber calls “my hour” is my point of responsibility or my situation: “I expose myself to it as to the word’s manifestation to me, to the very ground from where hearing passes into being.”¹² Faith here is less about right belief than decision and act. Faith is an *act* of faith.¹³

Faith for Buber begins not with a Barthian “possibility of faith” which is then, once actualised, fixed, but with the *question*. God has questions and we have questions and this is what comprises what Buber calls “the situation”. The situation – “my hour” - is not a matter of social circumstance, but of interpretation – a matter of the question. The question as the substance of faith is a matter of what Rabbi Jonathan Sacks has called “*mahlokot leshem shomayim*. Arguments for the sake of heaven.”¹⁴

You can’t have arguments for the sake of heaven without a basic faith in man, his essential goodness and our common humanity. You can’t have questions about things like justice, love and truth unless you also presuppose, without even meaning to, simply by virtue of the question, a world in which it is good to have things like justice, love and truth. Questions abound where justice, love and truth do not. There needs to be a basic goodness between man and man at the heart of reality to think like this. But for Barth the assumption is quite the contrary. He assumes the “complete incapacity” of man.¹⁵ For him there is no faith presupposed to begin with because Barthian man has no capacity for faith or even for the Word of God. “The possibility of faith as it is given to man in the reality of faith can only be regarded as one lent to man by God and lent exclusively for use. The moment we want to regard it as in any sense one belonging to man, the second statement about man’s incapacity would have to come back into force.”¹⁶

Buber is not saying Barth cannot dance. In other words, Barth’s theology is not without joy merely because of fundamental insistence on the incapacity and basic uselessness of man. Barth holds as a basic premise of his whole *Church Dogmatics* that man in no way cooperates with God,¹⁷ which is neither Jewish (biblical) nor orthodox (patristic).¹⁸ But Barth compensates by being joyful about salvation through Christ Jesus. But this Barthian worldview stands over and against Buber’s understanding of man who is good enough to be responsible, and who God needs as much as man needs God. As Buber says in our original quotation, “the true love of God begins with the love of man.” In Buber’s view we do not love man because of the Cross of Christ, because we love we can grasp what the Cross means and the symbol can

speak to us, but we love man because we are human. Our freedom of heart, our heart for others then, in Buber's worldview is "certainly the innermost presupposition".¹⁹

By questioning and challenging Barth's presentation of the "basic form of humanity" Buber endangers the whole edifice that Barth has so carefully constructed in *Church Dogmatics*.

II

The Barth of *Church Dogmatics* represents what is customarily called 'neo-Orthodoxy', which basically means a restatement, after Kant of church dogmatics. Barth differentiated orthodox Church dogmatics on one hand from liberalism kow-towing as it did to Enlightenment '*raison*' and progressive 'scientism'; and on the other hand he distinguished himself from the positions of the pre-Enlightenment metaphysics, whether the systemisations of St. Thomas or Calvin.

Buber the wisdom figure against Barth the theologian. Buber carrying Jewish tradition, Jesus' tradition, crossing swords, prior to the dance, with a Christian carrying the Church's tradition derived from Jesus. These are two thinkers at cross purposes. Their differences are important because at stake is the thought of God and the thought of man.²⁰ The teaching and counsel of Jesus is involved with what both are saying (as is the very *person* of Jesus as both human and divine), but the fact is that Buber and Barth represent a theological divide, an impasse, which affects the Church across denominations.

Throughout the essays comprising *Between Man and Man* in one way and another Buber has been presupposing a category which he eventually makes explicit. It is what he calls "the sphere of 'between'".²¹ This point is one he already makes in *I and Thou*.²² Here is how he describes it (and it is crucial for understanding Buber's thought as a whole):

The fundamental fact of human existence is man with man. What is peculiarly characteristic of the human world is above all that something takes place between one being and another the like of which can be found nowhere in nature. Language is only a sign and a means for it, all achievement of the spirit has been incited by it. Man is made man by it; but on its way it does not merely unfold, it also decays and withers away. It is rooted in one being turning to another as another, as this particular other being, in order to communicate with it in a sphere which is common to them but which reaches out beyond the special sphere of each. I call this sphere, which is established with the existence of man as man but which is conceptually still uncomprehended, the sphere of 'between'. Though being realized in very different degrees, it is a primal category of human reality.

Buber means here that this 'between' is not some kind of construct, or some psychological realm, but an ontological and existential fact of human being. In more modern language (or more plain English) what Buber is saying is akin to (but not quite the same as) saying all human being is relational and all relations are mediated. What Buber is doing is calling special attention to this mediated *quality* of constitutive relations. Normally we think of this quality as he goes on to say as "an auxiliary construction" that is, as something *merely between* the two terms of reference. No, says Buber. This quality, this 'between', is a third party which literally bears the relationship, defines it, keeps it. We might conclude then that the I-Thou relation is not binary (as it is so often understood), but trinitarian. Immediately that is said, we can see it follows that the God-man relation which is an I-Thou relation also needs to be thought in 'trinitarian' terms.

When Buber refers to this sphere *between* man and man (as where the life of the relationship is), he would have to have had in mind Heidegger's famous formulation along such similar lines in his magisterial work, *Being and Time* (1927), because it is one of the great philosophical works. *Dasein* ist *das Zwischen* (Dasein is the between) Heidegger argues.²³ Dasein (Heidegger's ontological redesignation of 'man') only emerges as 'the between' after an extremely prolonged deconstruction (as we would now, following Heidegger, call it) of everything man ostensibly is and has traditionally been believed to be. I tend to think Buber is saying something more simply along similar lines.

In fact Heidegger's fundamental ontological analysis lends credence to Buber in some respects, and we could work this out in full if we so wished.²⁴ But despite their differences as thinkers, on one thing they agree: in their de-objectification of 'man' and in their corresponding exposure of the falsity of all such objectification of man so far as the truth of man (man's being) is concerned. In both Buber and Heidegger, with their different terminology and agendas, when man becomes an object it is no longer man we are talking about, but a metaphysical construct.

In "Doctrine of Creation" in Volume 3, Part Two of *Church Dogmatics*, published in 1948 Barth criticises Buber's theological anthropology. Strangely he lumps it together with anthropologies "by the heathen Confucius, by the atheist L. Feuerbach."²⁵ Strange bedfellows! Buber: Barth's contemporary; Feuerbach: a fellow German from the previous century; and a pre-Christian sage from China! Or is it that Barth is really talking about heathenism, atheism and the Jews as constituting what he calls "a very different angle"?²⁶ Probably this latter. Barth's point is that these very different angles all belong to what Catholics would recognise as natural theology (but Barth avoids the term). These are points of view that can be discovered by natural means, and as far as they go Barth says he does not have a problem with them. However, Barth will argue that Christian theology offers superior knowledge through its "knowledge of divine grace and the man Jesus."²⁷ The whole of *Church Dogmatics* can be read in fact to revolve around this one argument and this one problematic.

On the particular pages we are dealing with Barth specifies knowledge of divine grace and the man Jesus as consisting in freedom of heart that we can and should have for one another. A free heart is a sanctified heart we learn from the *Church Dogmatics* at large (particularly the volumes on reconciliation). Barth attempts to show that Christian theology surpasses the wisdom of the heathens, the atheists (including humanists) and the Jews. At first, Barth concedes, it may seem that Christian theology stands with heathenism and atheism and Judaism in acknowledging a basic *gladness* between man and man as what we want and ought to be working to achieve.

This gladness is a mark of “that freedom of the heart between man and man as the root and crown of the concept of humanity.”²⁸ This is the freedom of heart that Buber refers to in our original quotation, which we are interpreting here. Barth says that Confucius, Feuerbach and Buber are able to recognise this gladness, and insofar as they do they follow Christian revelation.

For Barth then, “Man is human in the fact that he is with his fellow-man gladly.”²⁹ But what is the point of the Church if this is apparent to the heathen, the humanist and the Jew? First Barth criticises the kind of Protestant thinking which divides humanity into Christian and non-Christian, rather than see the humanity they have in common. But Barth nevertheless posits a “gulf” between humanity and Christian love which comes down from on high. Barth does not divide humanity (at least to begin with) but he divides humanity and divinity instead, except in Jesus. Man in his humanity is fallen and sinful, therefore the “gladness” and “freedom of heart” are unredeemed, unsaved. “He [a human being] exists under the negative sign of his antithesis to God, and this is also to be said of his humanity.”³⁰ Only in the Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ is this gulf bridged, this negativity reversed, and man saved; that is, only in and through Jesus Christ does human nature has access to a power that will allow man to be in the true sense (the theological sense) with his fellow-man gladly. But there is nothing natural or from man about this redemption of our nature, it is purely and only won by Jesus Christ on our behalf.³¹

Barth’s unspoken assumption in this line of argument is that God’s covenant with the Jews failed and was therefore made redundant. Unfortunately this view is traditional. Thus for him a Jew is basically the same thing as a heathen or an atheist. Being Jewish – indeed, being human - on this account does not allow (as a birthright) that access that the Christian is able to gain through the new Covenant in Jesus. Barth assumes that Christianity, rather than being an offshoot of Judaism, rather than being in fact, to put it bluntly (as Rosenzweig said) Judaism for Gentiles, sees Jesus as God’s once and for all replacement of Judaism in some sense, and the New Testament replacing the Old Testament. Buber’s position, to the contrary, would be that Jesus

surely *extends* Judaism, allowing Gentiles into the favour and blessing of a covenant, by virtue of the Jewish covenant to begin with, and largely by virtue of that, indeed conditioned by that. Jews are of course saved under their covenant as they always were. Buber's interpretation of the two covenants differentiates him from Feuerbach the humanist and Confucius the heathen (although of course Barth would not see it this way). And with regard to these latter, should we regard them as uncovenanted? We know from the Jewish Bible that God works in and through other nations (Assyria, Babylon) too and covenanted with them, in some respect. Before Moses God covenanted with all mankind in what is known as the Noahide covenant, of which the sign is the rainbow.³²

In striving to raise Christian love above and beyond anything to do with the human, in deeming the human only 'human, all-too-human' in a manner akin to Nietzsche in his rational sceptical phase, it seems to me that Barth actually takes a sanctimonious position. Thus Barth writes that Christians are made holy, righteous and pure in "the supreme 'gladly'", which they alone know and bring as witness to the world.³³ There seems to me a spiritual arrogance here which would hold that Christians are superior *qua* human beings because their love is superior. But Buber would say moral superiority (of love) depends upon one's good deeds, not upon one's religious *status*.³⁴ Barth's point – although he doesn't say it in so many words – is that the grace of Christian love will perfect nature; but not in a traditional orthodox sense.³⁵

Barth argues his position theologically from God as saviour, but he is exclusivist in an unJewish sense. Jewish exclusivism says there is only one God and God is one, all other objects of worship are idols, not worthy of worship or sacrifice. The Jews are exclusive about God, and exclusivity about themselves, where it occurs, pertains to the attempt and the difficulty of keeping the exclusivity of God at the centre of one's life and community, and Jesus lived and taught in this tradition. But Barth is exclusive about the way God saves, which is different, and the way God saves is only through Jesus. Certainly for Jesus' followers salvation is only through him. But for Jews salvation is through the Law and not just through the Law *ipso facto*, but

classically, through the rabbinic schools that *interpret* the Law. Jesus' interpretation of the Law is a particular interpretation that opens the Law for Gentiles, for non-Jews; and *his* interpretation and interpretations which he inspires, save *us*. For some Jews this is scandalous, but not for Buber. Then there is the whole question of salvation for the vast majority in history who have never heard of Israel, nor of Jesus. The Jewish Bible says, according to the Talmud, that God has given a natural covenant which saves – and this is an opinion canvassed in the patristic period importantly by Augustine in his most important work, *The City of God*.³⁶ Barth implicitly rejects this plural option.

Buber argues his theological positions out of his idea of man as constituted by 'the between'. Theologically, man, for Buber is an absolute. Why? Because G-d is one and we are made in G-d's image and likeness. That Jewish way of writing 'God' in English reminds us that God is not a name of a thing, an object, a deity. God is absolutely unique and man, made in the image and likeness of God, is absolutely unique. Yes there are absolutes. Our uniqueness is a primary absolute that we live and die with. It is the absolute difference of each person from every other person which is a theological premise in Buber's analysis in *Between Man and Man*. Human beings are not absolutely unlike, as chalk and cheese, because they are all like God, who is One and Only. But made in the image, not just the likeness of God, they are each one and only. There has never been one like me and there never will be. There has never been one like you and there never will be. It is out of this theological position, indeed this biblically revealed position, that Buber's talk of 'the between' makes more sense. Hence Buber says on this relation of image and likeness between man and God:

I do not consider the individual to be either the starting point or the goal of the human world. But I consider the human person to be the irremovable central place of the struggle between the world's movement away from God and its movement towards God.³⁷

For Buber, even the meaning of man and God is found 'between'. This is typical of mainstream Talmudic tradition and rabbinic reasoning, not just of

Hasidism.³⁸ In Christianity, perhaps because of Greek metaphysics, and Christian Scriptures being in Greek language, and the influence of Greek metaphysics seeping into the rhetoric of early Christianity, that Christian ‘man’ has tended to be subservient to God in a debased way that bears no self-respect.³⁹ But Jesus calls us friends.

III

Finally then, how can we specify this impasse between Buber and Barth which crosses Christian denominations, and which, in later life, as I said at the start, Barth himself crosses – crossing the dance floor as it were?

“Man is human in the fact that he is with his fellow-man gladly” as Barth says, and to this Buber assents. But you come first in your humanity, as one wanting to dance, what you believe is secondary to this. For Barth, man’s original gladness is fallen, unredeemed, unsaved. For Buber only God can save us, but salvation is not something metaphysical to be believed over and above us, despite us, as it were; God needs man to participate and cooperate with, and God is nothing without man. Salvation is “between man and man”. Barth came to this position in later years, but in *Church Dogmatics* the yardstick is exclusivist and anti-Judaic; Buber is open, dialogical and plural. For Barth, faith is fixed and objectified in having the answers, with which the *Church Dogmatics* is in enormous supply. For Buber faith is again “between man and man” in that bond of friendship that Jesus called his followers to; no longer servants, but friends. Faith for Buber is co-operative, event-like, beginning in questions and sustained in questions, searching, midrash (story and interpretation bound together). Barth assumes the “complete incapacity of man”; Buber assumes a profound dance – a movement of mutual togetherness and mutual otherness - “between man and man, between God and man.” Barth rejoices in salvation in Christ in dialectical relation to his despair about man; Buber invites Barth to dance, to see the dance already going on between man and man and between God and man in the holy city!

NOTES

¹ Buber. *Between Man and Man*. tr. Maurice Friedman. Collier: New York, 1985, pp.223-224. cf. Buber, *Into Gladness in Ten Rungs*, New York: Schocken, 1947, p.45. Buber wrote this book in Jerusalem.

² Barth. CD. I/I p.263.

³ Prior to faith seeking understanding faith presupposes understanding: that God is, that God is for us; that He is One. And for Buber this presupposition is given by the question, by the fact of man *asking*.

⁴ Barth, CD. I/I p.263.

⁵ Barth, CD. I/I,p.271.

⁶ Barth, CD. I/I p.271.

⁷ Barth, CD. I/I p.271.

⁸ Buber, "The Question of the Single One", *Between Man and Man*. p.68.

⁹ Buber, *Between Man and Man*. p.68. Buber would be aware of Rosenzweig's view of Revelation as: "the lived experience of a present that walks in the light of the divine countenance." *The Star of Redemption* [1920] Tr. Barbara Galli. Madison WI: University of Wisconsin, 2004, p.169.

¹⁰ Buber. *Between Man and Man*. p.68.

¹¹ Buber. *Between Man and Man*. p.68.

¹² Buber. *Between Man and Man*. p.69.

¹³ This is also strong in Thomas Aquinas. ST. II-II. 2.1-10.

¹⁴ Jonathan Sacks, "Faith" www.chief Rabbi.org/faith/faith.html (p.4 of 18).

¹⁵ Barth, CD I/I 272.

¹⁶ Barth, CD I/I 272.

¹⁷ Barth, CD I/I 273.

¹⁸ That it is not biblical is obvious from the many places in the Jewish scriptures where men dialogue with God, down to challenging God's judgement and changing his mind. This is normative in rabbinic theology, but not so in Christian teaching where God is portrayed in more static metaphysical terms (over and above the *physis* – life). In the Bible God is involved in history with mankind. That this view is not patristic either can be seen by a summary quotation from Sergei Bulgakov: "The Church as Divine-humanity, as the body of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit, is a *union* of divine and creaturely principles, their interpenetration without separation and without confusion. In this sense, the Church is a *synergism*, where the divine principle descends to penetrate and attach itself to humanity, whereas the human principle ascends to the divine. Therefore, in practical terms, this synergism is a giving and receiving of divine gifts." *The Bride of the Lamb*, tr. Boris Jakim, Edinburgh and, Grand Rapids MI: T & T Clark and Eerdmans, 2002, p.262.

¹⁹ Hence the claim: "In the beginning is the relation." *I and Thou*. tr. Ronald Gregor Smith, Edinburgh: T & T. Clark, 1966, p.18.

²⁰ We have been referring to 'man' throughout this article in the sense that includes both the individual (whether male or female) and mankind in general. This equivocation allows us to signify both. This is important philosophically because it is a linguistic way of keeping the part and the whole in relation.

²¹ Buber, *Between Man and Man*, p.223.

²² Buber: "Spirit is not in the I but between I and You. It is not like the blood that circulates in you but the air that you breathe. Man lives in the spirit when he is able to respond to his You." *I and Thou*, tr. W. Kaufmann. Edinburgh: T & T. Clark, 1971, p.89.

²³ Heidegger. *Being and Time*. tr. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. San Francisco: HarperCollins, p.427.

²⁴ See Buber's view of Heidegger's thought of man in *Between Man and Man*, pp.163-181.

²⁵ Barth. *Church Dogmatics*. Volume III Part 2. The Doctrine of Creation. tr. Harold Knight et al. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1948, pp. 277, 278.

²⁶ Barth, CD. III/2 p.277.

²⁷ Barth, CD. III/2 p.277.

²⁸ Barth, CD. III/2 p.278.

²⁹ Barth, CD. III/2 p.278.

³⁰ Barth, CD. III/2 p. 281.

³¹ Traditionally (in the Church Fathers and in St. Thomas) the notion of Incarnation assumed in principle of divinity (a spark) in humanity. Otherwise how could the divine wisdom and the divine presence have dwelt in the world? In denying this Barth is not Orthodox in a traditional sense, but is thinking against the background of Kantianism (and the liberalism and scientism it gave rise to).

³² Seven laws: justice at law, Not to blaspheme or be idolatrous, not to murder, steal or be sexually immoral, not to be cruel to animals. (Sanh. 56a) See David Novak. *The Image of the Non-Jew in Judaism: An Historical and Constructive Study of the Noahide Laws*. (Toronto Studies in Theology) New York and Toronto: Edwin Mellen Press, 1983.

³³ Barth words his assumption as follows: "Love is itself a life in the "gladly", in the holy, righteous and pure "gladly" of the gratitude which binds together brothers and sisters in Christ and therefore of the supreme "gladly" . How, then, can it fail to penetrate to the depths of the fellow-man who is not yet awakened to this thankfulness but still held by the intoxication of eros, thus being both permitted and commanded to find and accept even his foolish confused and evil "gladly" that which is genuinely creaturely and human?" [This reiterates, underlines and extends Barth's

assumption quoted above about the incapacity of man.] The passage continues: “How can the Christian fail to see that in this respect and on this level too, with the natural bond of the ‘gladly’, he is bound to the non-Christian, with whom he knows that he is primarily connected in a very different way by the judgement and grace of God in Jesus Christ?” Barth then goes on to refer to the “gladly” understood “within” the Christian church, and misunderstood by those “without”, who are sunk in “eros”. This passage is important as a working assumption in *Church Dogmatics*. Barth, CD. III/2 p.284.

³⁴ I am aware that I touch on a deep point here with respect to the *Church Dogmatics* that could take us back into Barth’s concept of the constitution of the self, natural and theological. Barth has much to say about the I-Thou relationship in ‘The Basic Form of Humanity’. But his basic argument is that, “in relation to other men we have to ask how far as men they are beings with which Jesus can be ranged as the image of God.” CD III/2 p.225. As soon as we ask this, however, it seems to me that we have a situation where a person is not built up in God by his or her good works (and by God’s grace in the first place which enables this) but by whether one is “within” or “without” with respect to particular kinds of (difficult metaphysical) beliefs about Jesus, which Jesus himself didn’t teach and were alien to Jewish oral tradition at the time of Jesus.

³⁵ In the traditional view there is a co-operation at work. In Barth’s view the perfecting of grace is only from above. Or as Barth puts it, there is a conformity, but not a divinisation (*theosis*). CD. I/I.p.273. Man “adapts” but does so only in “faith”. Adapting to God is hardly the same as co-operating with God in the sense of partners in the work of Kingdom building. ‘Conforming’ to God does not fit the traditional view of God as incomprehensible. St. John Chrysostom wrote definitively for the universal Church on this matter. One can be conformed to society, and to religion, but to the incomprehensible God? Traditionally the only ‘conformity’ was the intrinsic nature of deification, of the Holy Spirit transforming and raising us up from within, but the result, as we see from the lives of the saints and sages is hardly one of external conformity but of interior transformation.

³⁶ See Book 18 chs. 49 and 51 on the ills perpetrated by a perverse Christianity. See Book 20 ch.9 on the spiritual meaning of election. In a nutshell salvation is not contingent on being a Christian in an official religious sense, but on how well you’ve loved your fellow man or woman. Non-Christians who have loved well are spiritual Christians and will see heaven, and Christians who have not loved, even hierarchs of the Church, will not see heaven but will be cast out. See Book 21 Ch. 18, 20, and 25. Augustine could hardly be clearer and these passages speak clearly against ecclesiastical exclusivism from a proper spiritual perspective. It boils down to our deeds and to deeds of light and not darkness; precisely Buber’s position as well. Jesus cannot save us if we will not save ourselves by acting in the responsible manner – which Jesus’ teaching indicates in a fairly mainstream rabbinical manner. And if we do act the right way the Holy Spirit will help us, but otherwise it cannot easily help us, though the Spirit may still try to do so.

³⁷ Buber. *Between Man and Man*. p.70.

³⁸ And it is equally true of the synergy (of man and God) in traditional orthodoxy and the co-operation (of man and God, human and divine) in Catholic theology, particularly in Thomism.

³⁹ There are some exceptional instances such as the epigrams of Angelus Silesius (1624-1677) where he shows us as God-size creatures e.g. Bk. 4 Ep. 148, 154, 156 God is depicted as radically dependent upon man in the Jewish oral tradition, which Jesus would have known. Indeed the Father was radically dependent on Jesus as a man for the whole of salvation in the traditional Christian understanding. The Church Fathers always knew that if God can become a man in Christ, every person can potentially become Christlike qua human.

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BIO: Matthew Del Nevo has published a number of scholarly articles in philosophy and is author and editor of an educational resource, *The Continental Community of Inquiry* (ISFP: Sheffield, 2002) which includes some of his lively translations of Sartre. Matthew has recently published, *The Valley of the Soul: Melancholy and Soulmaking* (St. Paul's, 2008) and is finalising a new book, *By Jacob's Well: Pentecostalism and the Three Ages of the Church*, some of which has been appearing in international academic journals. Currently Matthew is a Senior Lecturer in Philosophy at the Catholic Institute of Sydney. He is married to the Chinese choreographer Susan Xu and they have one daughter.

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