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BUBER AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF JESUS

THE whole problem of identifying Israel's Messiah turns on one question: Will God or man set the terms for the Messiah when He comes? The true Jew and the true Christian are at one in their response: It must be God, not man. But the seed of division lies hidden in their very concord. The Christian examines the story of Jesus and says: "God has done this. He has acted as He alone willed to act. We may not understand it, but we must accept it." But a Jew, reading of the same Jesus and His claim: "Philip, he who sees me sees also the Father" (Jn 14:9), might say: "God is not capable of this limitation, this crassness. We do not understand it; we cannot accept it." Indeed, a Jewish spokesman whose wisdom and scholarship demand wide respect has formulated this difference with all the precision we could desire: "To the Christian the Jew is the incomprehensibly obdurate man, who declines to see what has happened; and to the Jew the Christian is the incomprehensibly daring man, who affirms in an unredeemed world that its redemption has been accomplished. This is a gulf which no human power can bridge."¹

I

MARTIN BUBER merits a hearing from Christians on the mystery of Jesus. He is a thinker who approaches God with the reverence and ardor of a Jew. For him God is no object arrived at by process of thought but a true "Thou" in whose presence man first finds himself, on whom he then lays hold with all his being. God is not, as Kant would have it, a "condition within us." He is an absolute.² Neither is

1. Martin Buber, *Israel and the World, Essays in a Time of Crisis* (New York: Schocken, 1948), p. 40.

2. See Martin Buber, *Eclipse of God* (New York: Harper, 1952), p. 27.

He "a projection of myself or anything of that kind, but . . . my creator . . . the author of my uniqueness, which cannot be derived from within the world."³ One who perceives the essential mystery of human life, its inscrutable and unknowable quality, the work of the Author of his uniqueness, "steps forth into the everyday which is henceforth hallowed as the place in which he has to live with the mystery." "The concrete, contextual situations of his existence" he can now accept "as given him by the Giver."⁴ According to Buber, it is this spirit of acceptance the Bible calls "the fear of God," and it is through this gate man enters "so deep into the love of God that he cannot again be cast out of it."⁵

1. An indispensable key to Buber's thought concerning Jesus is his conviction that all genuine encounter with the divine takes place without intermediaries. When he reads Psalm 81 (82), he sees the "gods," the rebellious governors and unjust judges among the Gentiles, stripped of power by God; abolishing their intermediary rule, renouncing the useless work of underlings, He Himself judges the world.⁶ "The Hebrew Bible is concerned with the terrible and merciful fact of the *immediacy* between God and ourselves. Even in the dark hour after he has become guilty against his brother, man is not abandoned to the forces of chaos. God Himself seeks him out, and even when He comes to call him to account, His coming is salvation."⁷

Historical religion has always struggled against the invasion of "non-religious elements . . . metaphysics, gnosis, magic, politics, etc.," so as to insure "the protection of lived concreteness as the meeting-place between the human and the divine."⁸ Gnosis for Buber is a spirit of certitude that forsakes "holy insecurity," an attempt to pierce the veil between the revealed and the hidden, to lead forth divine mystery into the banal light of human wisdom.⁹ God is the

3. Martin Buber, *Good and Evil* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), p. 141.

4. Buber, *Eclipse of God*, p. 51.

5. Buber, *Israel and the World*, pp. 31-32.

6. See Buber, *Good and Evil*, pp. 29-30.

7. Martin Buber, *At the Turning* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Young, 1952), p. 56.

8. Buber, *Eclipse of God*, pp. 48-49.

9. See Maurice S. Friedman, *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), p. 114. In his "Reply to C. G. Jung,"

great Imageless One, though the man of faith, Buber freely admits, must somehow inadequately "portray" Him by a likeness, in the intention of faith. The sin of philosophers (here Buber follows Pascal) is the attempt to lock God in their systems, to trap Him in a form or concept. "It is precisely because the philosophers replace him by the image of images, the idea, that they remove themselves and remove the rest of us furthest from him."¹⁰ The real God, dreadful and incomprehensible, is not to be captured by the brash philosopher whom the illusory glare of his own ideas blinds to mystery.

Another threat to the meeting of God and man is the possibility that the people of Israel may misconstrue its peculiar destiny to "become a true people, the 'People of God.'" It is the offense with which Christ charged His own contemporaries (see Jn 8:39). Yet Buber seems to absolve the sons of Abraham of this fault: "Precisely in the religion of Israel is it impossible to make an idol of the people as a whole, for the religious attitude to the community is inherently critical and postulative. Whoever ascribes to the nation or to the community the attributes of the absolute and of self-sufficiency betrays the religion of Israel."¹¹

Finally, for Buber, dogma is an enunciation *in abstracto*, in the third person, about the divine—an indispensable though unessential "projection onto the conceptual construct plane."¹² Hence, dogma itself can interfere with the concrete lived moment. Detachment is the prevailing attitude of the dogmatist and its mischievous result can be that the formula masquerades as superior to the lived moment itself. "In the religious life of Judaism, primary importance is not given to dogma, but to the remembrance and the expectation of a concrete situation: the encounter of God and men."¹³

All life at its highest and best, says Buber, is a dialogue between the "I" of the realized self, the "Single One," and the "Thou" of God. The life of dialogue is a lived unity, both between man and God, and between man and man. There can be no dialogue between God and

Eclipse of God, pp. 171-176, Buber states that Jung "abhors" faith; he also decries modern psychological doctrine which deals with mysteries without knowing the attitude of faith toward mystery.

10. Buber, *Eclipse of God*, p. 68.

11. Buber, *At the Turning*, p. 36.

12. Buber, *Israel and the World*, p. 14.

13. *Ibid.*

man, however, unless there is an initial "turning" in the direction of God, *teshubah*.¹⁴ When the prophets urged this "turning," they demanded it first from the community and sought it from individuals only as a means of realizing it in the whole of public life.¹⁵ This decision or "turning" is the work of the man who "knows that he was and is in the hand of God."¹⁶ Just as in the making of the covenant between Yahweh and Israel the decision of the people was no legal agreement but a "surrender to the divine power and grace,"¹⁷ so it must always be. This "turning" is "something which happens in the immediacy of the reality between man and God."¹⁸

It is evident from his concern for immediacy that Buber is on guard against the substitution of any image for the Reality, and that his conception of man's access to God is—for want of a better word—a mystical one. For him the true fruition of the Hebrew spirit is the Hasidic movement. By this way of piety God is reached neither through symbols nor through images, not even those of a conceptual sort. He is simply apprehended for what He is. The Hasidim do not have ideas about Him; they make surrender to Him. Him they possess and He them. There is but one midwife of the divine spirit in the Hasidic scheme and that is the zaddik, whom Buber defines as "the proven one, the holy man, the mediator between God and man."¹⁹ He embodies all the virtues needed to walk on the road of redemption.²⁰ With his integrated heart he lays hold of the shattered

14. See *ibid.*, pp. 19–20. For the difference claimed between the Hebrew notion of "turning" and the Christian idea of conversion see Buber, *Two Types of Faith* (New York: Macmillan, 1951), pp. 10–11. There Buber writes: "[Conversion] is not a matter of persisting-in but its opposite, the facing-about. To the one to be converted comes the demand and instruction to believe that which he is not able to believe as a continuation of his former beliefs, but only in a leap. To be sure the inner precinct of faith is not understood as a mere believing that something is true, but as a constitution of existence; but the fore-court is the holding true of that which has hitherto been considered not true, indeed quite absurd, and there is no other entrance." The Kierkegaardian leap is not necessarily the best expression for the wonder of faith. Still, a Christian most certainly holds that in faith he rises above his own thoughts and likings. Yet, mysterious though the events and truths are in which he believes, they are not absurd.

15. See Martin Buber, *The Prophetic Faith* (New York: Macmillan, 1949), p. 3.

16. Buber, *Israel and the World*, p. 17.

17. Buber, *The Prophetic Faith*, p. 51.

18. Buber, *Israel and the World*, p. 20.

19. Martin Buber, *The Legend of the Baal-Shem*, trans. Maurice S. Friedman (New York: Harper, 1955), p. x.

20. See Friedman, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

heart of the wayfarer and sees to its unity—"hastens the event of crystallization."²¹

All this is significant as the background of Buber's view of Jesus Christ. He is bound to reject any claim that Christ is God Incarnate for the reason that God the imageless, the hidden, cannot be manifested in any form, however holy that form may be.²² With the confession of Thomas before the risen Christ: "My Lord and my God" (Jn 20:28) we have the first "Christian." "Therewith the presence of the One Who cannot be represented . . . is replaced by the binitarian image of God, one aspect of which, turned towards the man, shows him a human face."²³ He, however, "shines through all forms and is Himself formless."²⁴ When symbols of Him, whether plastic images or theological ideas (both necessarily untrue), merge into each other, "Thou becomes He, and that means It."²⁵ This merger is fatal to the very possibility of true encounter.

When God reveals Himself, Buber tells us, He does so either directly to the individual or through the twofold channel He employs for revelation to the community: nature and history. Revelation through nature is indirect and continuous; revelation through history is an alternation of "mute times," when He seems to desert men and to hide His face, with "times of great utterance," when the course of human events is, so to speak, laden with divine communication.²⁶ Thus

21. *Ibid.*, p. 190. See also Martin Buber, *Hasidism*, trans. Carlyle Witton-Davies and others (New York: Philosophical Library, 1948), pp. 87–88.

22. See Buber, *Two Types of Faith*, p. 39, where God is said to give Himself to be seen "in manifestations, which He Himself transcends but nevertheless gives as His appearing." These manifestations, "both historical events and natural phenomena, which stir his soul," the man of the Old Testament experiences but does not interpret. "That He reveals Himself and that He 'hides Himself' (Is 45:15) belong indivisibly together; but for His concealment His revelation would not be real and temporal. Therefore He is imageless; an image means fixing to one manifestation, its aim is to prevent God from hiding Himself, He may not be allowed any longer to . . . appear as He will." (*Ibid.*, p. 130.) The Christian's attitude is exactly the opposite. He is convinced that were he to refuse belief in God-made-man, he would deny to God the right "to appear as He will."

23. *Ibid.*, p. 128. Buber defends the many anthropomorphisms of Judaism as an affair of men, as visions which passed away with them, God remaining unseen in all His appearances. But when Christians claim that the Word, that Eternal Life has assumed a human countenance, Buber complains that they oppose the biblical concept of faith in the unseen. (See *ibid.*, p. 129.)

24. Buber, *Eclipse of God*, p. 62.

25. *Ibid.*

26. See Buber, *At the Turning*, pp. 57–58; see also Will Herberg, *The Writings of Martin Buber* (New York: Meridian, 1956), p. 29 and p. 341, n. 99.

the Hebrew path "in the history of faith is not a path from one kind of deity to another, but in fact a path from the 'God Who hides Himself' (see Is 45:15) to the One that reveals Himself."²⁷

2. Martin Buber likes to call Jesus "the great Nazarene."²⁸ He sees in him a true son of Israel, one who, for all his difference, is in the direct line of prophets, since his vision of the kingdom of God is—as Buber understands it—no more than that of men living together in perfect harmony, of God's rule on earth.²⁹ He hails him as one for whom, as for any faithful Jew, the Father is a "Thou" to his "I," as one who taught that every man through unconditional living can become a son of God.³⁰ A particular concern of Buber is to point out again and again that Jesus is one who *believes* and who therefore is not possibly himself the object of a faith, that, in fact, it never occurred to him to be a mediator between God and man. From 1913 on Buber began to affirm that the primitive Church had made a mediator of Jesus, thereby distorting his teaching on immediate union with God. Buber feels he cannot recognize in Jesus the Way to the Father, for all such "ways" are detours rather than true paths; they lead only to the dead city of "It." "Jesus—though not the actual man Jesus, but the image of Jesus as it has arisen in the souls of men and changed them—leaves God open to human address only in conjunction with himself, the Christ."³¹

More to the point, Buber cannot see Jesus as God in the flesh since for him God is incapable of being so patent and comprehensible; when God reveals Himself, He does so in ways more befitting His boundless mysteriousness. "He who begins to provide himself with a comprehensible God, constructed thus and not otherwise, runs the risk of having to despair of God in view of the actualities of history and life."³² When Buber reads St. John's confession of Jesus Christ

27. Buber, *The Prophetic Faith*, p. 44; see also *Two Types of Faith*, pp. 130–131.

28. Buber, *The Legend of the Baal-Shem*, p. xi.

29. See Martin Buber, *Reden über das Judentum* (Berlin: Schocken, 1932), pp. 164–165.

30. See *ibid.*, p. 108.

31. Buber, *Hasidism*, pp. 96–97.

32. Buber, *Israel and the World*, pp. 31–32.

as true God, followed by the warning: "Children, guard yourselves from the idols!" (1 Jn 5:21), he cannot suppress the suspicion that the effect of the juxtaposition is not entirely consistent with the intent.³³ He also thinks he has found vestiges of belief in two gods in St. Paul's epistles. When Christ is included both in the work of creating and the created work (see Col 1:15–18), Buber does not seem displeased to hint at contradiction.³⁴

By his own admission, Buber is indebted to Albert Schweitzer, Rudolf Bultmann, and Rudolf Otto for his conception of Jesus.³⁵ This means that for him Jesus is an apocalyptic figure whose convictions about the nearness of the last days—at least in the later part of his career—color all his utterances.³⁶ After a certain turning point in the life of Jesus, every saying is assumed to have eschatological significance for the immediate future.³⁷ Early Christianity exceeded Jewish apocalyptic by having Jesus rise from the dead singly (according to Buber an impossibility to Jewish faith, which knows only a translation into heaven, as in the case of Enoch and Elijah), and then by endowing him with pre-existence.³⁸ It is Buber's view that in replacing the idea of translation into heaven by that of a resurrection, the apostles decided, without desiring it, for the Gentiles. "Christianity had its origin in a deformative late phase of Jewish Messianism, in which it strove, no longer to conquer history but to escape from it to purer spheres, while on the other hand, the group of peoples among which Christianity established itself had just started out to conquer history."³⁹

33. See Buber, *Two Types of Faith*, p. 133.

34. See *ibid.*, p. 134.

35. See *ibid.*, pp. 13–14. Yet against Bultmann on the notion of apocalyptic hope, see p. 89, n. 1.

36. Such is Schweitzer's view at least; the eschatology of the other two is considerably nuanced.

37. Buber surmises that the painful rejection in Galilee, notably the loss of disciples (Jn 6:66), or perhaps Peter's confession, marks the supposed turning point in Jesus' messianic consciousness. (See *ibid.*, p. 107.)

38. See *ibid.*, pp. 100, 104, 112–113.

39. Buber, *At the Turning*, p. 22. To assume, as Buber does and others have done before him, that Christ's message is somehow rooted in the much too eager expectation of the end of days by some of His contemporaries is to overlook the contrast of His preaching with Jewish apocalyptic writings. They abound in calculations of the end, in secret numbers, in terrifying portrayals of the judgment and the future woes, and in consoling descriptions of the bliss of paradise. There is little or nothing of this in Jesus' eschatological utterances, none of the overwrought

Christianity's failure, according to Buber, lies in its having abandoned the basic Jewish vocation—proclaimed by the Book and by the whole experience of the people—to redeem and to sanctify the world of here and now. It has deferred fulfillment of the kingdom to another life in another sphere. It has followed the lead of Paul and John. First they deified Jesus and then they substituted the concept of *pistis* for *emunah*, intellectual adherence to propositions about Christ and God for the faith which is the perfect trust of Jesus, the Jesus who, in the Synoptics, never once demanded of his followers that they believe in him.⁴⁰ The requirement of *pistis*, of faith, in Christ as the one door to salvation has meant that the immediacy between God and man marking both covenant and divine kingship is at an end. The weakness of Christianity is, then, that it derives from hellenistic Judaism, a debased form of syncretistic thought which is not to be compared in beauty with the faith of Israel which Jesus professed.⁴¹

3. In a foreword, dated 1907, to a collection of Hasidic tales, which appeared in English in 1947–48 and again very little changed in 1955, Buber speaks of religion as “the subduing of the fullness of existence” and contrasts it with myth, defined as the “expression of the fullness of existence, its image, its sign.”⁴² Where religion cannot absorb and incorporate myth, there religion and myth are at war. The history of the Jewish religion, he maintains, is in great part the history of its fight against the myth which “drinks incessantly from the gushing fountains of life.” A high point was reached in this struggle when “the Essenes wished to attain the goal of the prophets through a simplification of the forms of life, and from them was born that circle of men

imagination of Jewish apocalypics. His vision of the world to come is free from earthly speculations (see Mk 12:18–27). When He speaks of the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world it is not to paint in glaring colors the terrible things to come but to prepare His disciples for the test and to call them to watchfulness (see Mk 13). Above all, the reign of God comes unawares, without sensational signs (see Lk 17:20–21); and of the end no one knows the day and the hour (see Mt 24:36).

40. See Buber, *Two Types of Faith*, p. 96; for the antithesis between *pistis* and *emunah* see *ibid.*, pp. 7–12, 26, 170–173. Buber interprets Jesus' remark that God alone is good (see Mk 10:18) to mean that by it he warded off deification, belief in himself—in other words, exercised *emunah* (see *ibid.*, p. 116).

41. See *ibid.*, pp. 33–34.

42. Buber, *The Legend of the Baal-Shem*, p. xi.

that supported the great Nazarene and created his legend, the greatest triumph of myth.”⁴³

Again in 1944, Buber attributed to legend Christ's walking on the sea, his command of the winds and turning water into wine.⁴⁴ Great and thrilling as is the work of saga, he says, the veil of legend must be pierced and the pure form which it conceals laid bare. With Jesus, as with Moses, one does this by applying non-mythical criteria to recorded utterances, thereby arriving at the true spirit of the man.

In 1950, Buber wrote in *Two Types of Faith* an estimate of the Jesus whom he had looked upon with respect and awe for over forty years. In it he said: “From my youth onwards I have found in Jesus my great brother. That Christianity has regarded and does regard him as God and Saviour has always appeared to me a fact of the highest importance which, for his sake and my own, I must endeavor to understand.”⁴⁵ He referred to the “great place [that] belongs to him in Israel's history of faith,” a place that escapes all the usual categories, and viewed his own fraternal and open relationship to Jesus as something grown stronger and clearer with the passage of years.⁴⁶

In an earlier period, in 1917, describing Matthias Grünewald's altar at Isenheim, Buber spoke of Jesus as “the Man, the Man of all times and places, of here and now, who consummates in himself the ‘I’ of the world. This is the man who embraces the world without becoming

43. *Ibid.*, p. xi. Not only do St. Paul and St. Peter wage war against myths as unmanly and unclean, as vain babbling and fictitious tales contrary to pure doctrine (see 1 Tim 1:3–7, 4:7; 2 Tim 4:3–4; 2 Pet 1:16); not only are the nature cycles of pagan mythology and its effacing of the infinite bounds between God and the world completely foreign to the gospel, the whole New Testament is the very antithesis of mythical religion. Mythical religion is ahistorical. This is its motto: “Though it never happened, it always is.” To such unreality St. John opposes “grace and truth” (1:14), not an empty tale but God's fullness made flesh in Jesus, not an abstract truth but the historic fact of Christ's advent. This advent was heralded by the Baptist to whom the word of God came, not some time and somewhere, nor never and nowhere, but—as St. Luke so emphatically states—in the desert “in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was procurator of Judea, and Herod tetrarch of Galilee, and Philip his brother tetrarch of the district of Iturea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilina, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiphas” (3:1–2). See Gustav Stählin's article on “*mythos*” in Gerhard Kittel's *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1942), IV, 769–803, particularly 788–799.

44. See Martin Buber, *Moses* (London: East and West Library, 1946), pp. 123–124.

45. Buber, *Two Types of Faith*, p. 12.

46. See *ibid.*, p. 13.

manifold by its manifoldness, but who through his embrace of the world has become simple, acting in unity."⁴⁷ In 1920, he burst out: "We Jews, we of the blood of Amos and Jeremiah, Jesus and Spinoza and all who shook the earth's foundations. . . ." ⁴⁸ A passing reference in his *I and Thou* (1923) speaks of Jesus' feeling for the possessed man as differing from his affection for the beloved disciple, "but the love is the one love."⁴⁹

A generation later, in a public talk in Jerusalem on the occasion of his seventieth birthday (1948), Buber declared:

I firmly believe that the Jewish community, in the course of its renaissance, will recognize Jesus; and not merely as a great figure in its religious history, but also in the organic context of a Messianic development extending over millennia, whose final goal is the Redemption of Israel and of the world. But I believe equally firmly that we will never recognize Jesus as the Messiah Come, for this would contradict the deepest meaning of our Messianic passion. . . . In our view, redemption occurs forever, and none has yet occurred. Standing, bound and shackled, in the pillory of mankind, we demonstrate with the bloody body of our people, the unredeemedness of the world. For us there is no cause of Jesus; only the cause of God exists for us.⁵⁰

This balance of tribute and deliberate reservation is a consistent theme of Buber's when he speaks of Jesus. His writings are everywhere marked by resentment against what he thinks was done by the first followers of Jesus to his pure Jewish teaching. This conviction of an early tampering with Christ's doctrine is at the heart of what might be called his case against the Christian faith. He is predisposed to the conclusions of German rationalist and liberal scholars and finds their arguments compelling, necessary, the only scholarly and hence

47. Martin Buber, *Ereignisse und Begegnungen* (Leipzig: Insel-Verlag, 1920), p. 20; cf. Buber, *Pointing the Way*, trans. and ed. Maurice Friedman (New York: Harper, 1957), p. 18.

48. Martin Buber, *Die Jüdische Bewegung. Gesammelte Aufsätze und Ansprachen* (Berlin: Jüdischer Verlag, 1916-21), II, 173, as quoted by Raymund Schaeffer, "Die Auseinandersetzung Martin Bubers mit Jesus Christus," *Münchener Theologische Zeitschrift*, VI (1955), 155.

49. Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1937), p. 14.

50. Friedman, *op. cit.*, p. 279, quoting Ernst Simon, "Martin Buber: His Way between Thought and Deed," *Jewish Frontier*, XV (February 1948), 26.

admissible view. Moreover, a feeling of resistance to Jesus himself for openly having proclaimed himself Messiah is not wholly absent.⁵¹

Not only was the teaching of Jesus on the "oneness of the world" distorted by the primitive Christian community, but twenty centuries of misinterpretation have followed. Christianity was constructed upon a basic dualism, upon an unbridgeable dichotomy between the human will and divine grace, State and Church, "truth and reality, idea and fact, morality and politics."⁵² But man's task had never been to extirpate the evil urge within him but to "reunite" it with the good.⁵³ The conception of good and evil as two diametrically opposite forces is false. Passion, the "evil urge," must be given such direction as to render it capable of great love and service. "Thus and not otherwise can man become whole."⁵⁴ This view puts us in touch with Buber's concept of redemption, so essential to his religious thought. He knows no true, and hence no undying, evil; there is no hell. Redemption is a long, slow process; it is not an instantaneous transformation as in a crucifixion and resurrection, by which all things are won back to God. Thus he likes to regard the concepts of matter and spirit, of light and darkness in the writings of St. Paul and St. John as a foreign body, imposed on the first layer of authentic sayings of Jesus in the Synoptics.

To illustrate: Buber rejects the Greek rendering of the call of the

51. Raymund Schaeffer, in his comprehensive and extremely helpful study cited above, traces Buber's relation to Jesus as it is reflected in the various periods of his writing career. From 1901 to 1918 it is impossible to find any position of his which separates him from Jesus. Buber sees Him always in terms of the historic Jewish faith and tries to save Him from any Christian claim to uniqueness. Up until 1910 Jesus is "the central Man," "the fulfiller," but richer than all who have preceded Him. From 1910 Paul is regarded as a perverter and the introducer of non-Jewish dichotomies. By 1918 something unique is allowed to Jesus' message: The kingdom of God draws near in the immediate present. For other penetrating articles on Buber's relation to Jesus, see Franz von Hammerstein, "Die Bedeutung Jesu Christi und des ihn bekennenden Glaubens in Martin Bubers Denken," *Judaica*, IX, 3 (September 1953), pp. 143-173; "Martin Bubers messianische Hoffnung und ihr Verhältnis zu seiner Philosophie," *Judaica*, X, 2 (June 1954), pp. 65-104, and Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Martin Buber und das Christentum," *Wort und Wahrheit*, XII, 9 (November 1957), pp. 653-665. See also Urs von Balthasar's recent *Einsame Zwiesprache: Martin Buber und das Christentum* (Cologne: Jakob Hegner, 1958).

52. Buber, *Reden über das Judentum*, p. 169; see also p. 167.

53. See Buber, *Good and Evil*, p. 95.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 97.

Baptist and of Jesus to *teshubah* by *metanoiēte*, as an undue spiritualization of the old prophetic challenge.⁵⁵ The prophetic cry demanded change of man's whole being, not only of his *nous*, his mind. Again, he rebels against reading the phrase *hē hodos tou theou*, "the way of God" (see for instance Mt 22:16), as if it merely indicated "a way which God enjoins man to follow."⁵⁶ Jesus claimed to be the "Way" to God, and one of the early names for Christians was walkers in "the way" (see Ac 22:4; 24:22). But Buber maintains that the pristine and authentic meaning of the "way" is that God Himself, thanks to the Shekinah, His "indwelling," walks through human history. "The man who *turns* [emphasis supplied] finds himself standing in the traces of the living God."⁵⁷

What Buber holds against Jesus is that, standing in the shadow of the Servant of the Lord, he did not have the good grace to share the servant's hiddenness, so essential to his role. The anonymous servant suffers as a perfect archetype of his people's suffering. In his anonymity lies his special efficacy. So much is he a servant that he has no title. Being but one in a succession of "servants of the Lord"

55. See Buber, *Israel and the World*, p. 21. Though etymologically *metanoia* means "change of mind," it assumed even among the Greeks a wider meaning. All their great thinkers placed "change of mind" in a moral context: Only the man devoted to the good can think well and make right decisions. No doubt Greek thought stressed, at times overstressed, the power of the mind; still, the Greeks did not lose sight of the whole man. As Plato has it, the eye is unable to turn from darkness to light without a turning of the whole body; similarly, the mind cannot turn from the world of becoming to the world of being without a movement of the whole soul (see *Republic*, VII, 518C). But even if the Greeks had always held that in order to advance morally man had only to change what is highest in him, his thoughts, this is not the message of the New Testament, which demands the renewal of the whole man. When the evangelists and apostles adopted Greek words to proclaim the good news of Christ to the nations, they remade these words, gave them new meaning, that they could be bearers of the Word. To speak, then, of *metanoia* as a false rendering of *teshubah*, as Buber does, is hardly fair. It does not give full weight to the use of the term in Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, and Lucian—all carefully explored in A. Dirksen's *The New Testament Concept of Metanoia* (Washington, D. C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1932). It also sets aside the many citations in Johannes Behm's article on "Metanoia" (Kittel, *op. cit.*, IV, 972-976) to the effect that the Greeks employed the term for such repentance as they knew. Yet, Behm's one conclusion stands: "It would be futile to seek the origin of the New Testament understanding of *metanoia* . . . on Greek soil" (*ibid.*, p. 976). And so does the other: "What the religious language of the Old Testament expressed by *shub* and the theological terminology of the rabbis by *teshubah* . . . , the New Testament . . . calls *metanoia*" (*ibid.*, p. 994).

56. Buber, *Israel and the World*, p. 21.

57. *Ibid.*

who are granted to generation after generation, he bears man's sorrow and cleanses the world of its evil; he is reviled by his fellows but loved by God—yet his office remains unknown.⁵⁸

To think that one single event with a single person at its core exhausts the Jewish messianic hope is to distort it, Buber holds. The messianic sufferer is rejected again and again, again and again undergoes torment unto death, but he suffers in seclusion. Jesus might have been one of the many sent to fulfill Israel's hope, had he not aspired to be more than a Servant of the Lord. By not being satisfied to remain a polished shaft hidden in the quiver (see Is 49:2), he destroyed his work, for "messianic self-disclosure is the disruption of the messiahship."⁵⁹ The prophet and servant who has borne the burden of sin is "drawn out" of the quiver only after salvation has come to the people. In other words, he can be known only in retrospect.⁶⁰

4. Whatever the significance of Christ for the Gentiles—and in this significance is all the weight of Western history, Buber concedes—for Judaism,

Jesus is the first in the series of men who stepped forth from the seclusion of the servants of God, forth from the real "messianic secret," and in their hearts and in their speech attributed messiahship to themselves. That this first one . . . was incomparably the purest, most legitimate of them all, the one most endowed with real messianic power, does not alter the fact of his firstness, rather does it belong to it, belong to the awful and pathetic reality of that entire series of self-appointed Messiahs.⁶¹

Again in the concluding chapter of *The Prophetic Faith* which he entitles "The God of the Sufferers," Buber sees Messianism as a recurrent theme within the people of Israel, whose destiny is to suffer and to be comforted in their pain. When the anointing of the Davidic kings lapsed, the prophets became the anointed ones, accomplishing

58. See Buber, *Hasidism*, p. 112.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 114.

60. Buber, *Two Types of Faith*, pp. 110-111.

61. Buber, *Hasidism*, p. 114, modified translation. In German, the last clause reads: . . . gehört zu dem furchtbar eindringlichen Wirklichkeitscharakter der ganzen automessianischen Reihe. (*Die Chassidische Botschaft*, Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1952, p. 29.)

in their lives and martyrdom what the people had failed to do: to herald among the nations the dawn of God's kingdom.

It is from their midst that the figure of the perfected one will arise. . . . At the same hour when this man is allowed to go up, after persevering again and again in the hiddenness and migrating through afflictions and deaths unto true life; when he is allowed to go up and be a light for the nations, at that hour the servant Israel and the personal servant will have become one. . . . Whosoever accomplishes in Israel the active suffering of Israel, he is the servant, and he is Israel, in whom Yahweh "glorifies Himself." The mystery of history is the mystery of a representation which at bottom is identity. The arrow, which is still concealed in the quiver, is people and man as one.⁶²

It is evident from this that Jesus is viewed as a lost leader, lost to his people because of the recognition he sought. Why did he do this? And why does Buber take it amiss that he should have done it? For in the earliest period of his thought Buber seems to have held that sonship of God is simply the highest fulfillment of life to which anyone might aspire.⁶³

To answer the first question first: Jesus progresses, says Buber, from being a Jew of deep faith to one who demands absolute, unconditional love. He begins to think his own interpretation of fulfillment of Torah the only authentic one. This brings him into a clash with the Pharisees who think the same about their tradition.⁶⁴ The Temptation narrative must be interpreted as evidence of his uncertainty about his role.⁶⁵ He knows that he is the prophet of the coming kingdom, but is convinced that he is its Messiah or appointed human center only because his disciples assure him that this is so.⁶⁶ Their devotion settles his uncertainty as to who he is. When conviction yields once more to doubt, he takes refuge in the concept of the Suffering Servant. In a third change of mind, he comes to see himself in glory as in Daniel's vision.⁶⁷ Raymund Schaeffer summarizes Buber's thought thus:

62. Buber, *The Prophetic Faith*, pp. 232-234.

63. See Schaeffer, *loc. cit.*, p. 156.

64. See Buber, *Two Types of Faith*, pp. 66-67, 79.

65. See *ibid.*, p. 32.

66. See *ibid.*, pp. 103-104, 107. Buber here refers to Is 42:7; 61:2; Mt 11:5; Lk 7:22, and to Mk 8:27-29.

67. See *ibid.*, p. 112.

Starting with the conviction that only the Messianism of the prophets preserves the full dialogic nature of [man's] partnership [with God], Jesus becomes in Buber's judgment the moving example of a Jew who applies to himself the various messianic concepts, one after the other. Determined by the situation he is in, he drops them again. Finally, he leaves the prophetic world behind and in desperate apocalyptic expectation founders, no longer able to muster faith "in history's taking a new direction."⁶⁸

Buber's messianic sufferer does not take refuge in heaven or even in the life to come. To do so would be mere postponement of the challenge to some eschatological never-never land. What Jesus proposed was a way of escape to his own people, but their whole subsequent experience proves that there is no escape. The events of history show him deluded. He declared that he had come to save what was lost (see Mt 18:11; Lk 19:10), yet his people were not saved. Buber's case against Jesus as the Redeemer is a pragmatic one. Had he but redeemed—that is, succeeded in freeing the world of all its ills—a Jew could accept him, indeed, would be obliged to accept him. But no such change has taken place, and so the argument proceeds from the evidence of sorrow in the world to the impossibility of Christ's claim. Buber writes:

God's redeeming power is at work everywhere and at all times, but a state of redemption exists nowhere and never. The Jew experiences as a person what every openhearted human being experiences as a person: the experience, in the hour when he is most utterly forsaken, of a breath from above, the nearness, the touch, the mysterious intimacy of light out of darkness; and the Jew, as part of the world, experiences, perhaps more intensely than any other part, the world's lack of redemption. He feels this lack of redemption against his skin, he tastes it on his tongue, the burden of the unredeemed world lies on him. Because of this almost physical knowledge of his, he *cannot* concede that the redemption has taken place; he knows that it has not.⁶⁹

II

SO FAR I have taken refuge in the simple mechanics of research or, more correctly, of reporting what is available for all to read. I have dealt with Professor Buber in the third person. Our relation has been

68. *Loc. cit.*, p. 162. Cf. Buber, *Pointing the Way*, p. 205.

69. Buber, *Israel and the World*, pp. 34-35.

one of I-He. This may look as though he were no more to me than an "It," and the contact between us no true relationship of persons. Yet, once hearing Buber in a public lecture, although there were a thousand other people in the auditorium, I was made to feel very much a "Thou" to his "I." Surely it would be an offense against the dialogic principle if I did not address this great thinker as "Thou." Were we to do no more than fence with words, our meeting would be doomed, but should we come to know each other, for what may we not hope? However limited a meeting on a printed page may be, however probable that such dialogue may turn into an "It," I would not forego the opportunity of this encounter.

1. "I feel, Professor Buber, that long before there were the horrors of Auschwitz, and quite apart from the mortal taunts many a Jew has borne, you, on quite a different plane, have had to endure what must seem to you a painful misunderstanding of Israel's heritage. You have protested, for instance, that for Christians from the very beginning 'the Old Testament shrinks into a prologue to the New Testament.'⁷⁰ This protest perplexes me, for I have always thought that rabbinical Judaism, in giving higher rank to the oral than to the written tradition, has progressed beyond the Hebrew Scriptures—though, of course, in a direction far different from that of the Church. Indeed, have you yourself, with your concept of ever-continuing revelation, not developed what you have judged to be latent in Torah? It is true, I as a Catholic believe that God addressed His people in successive stages, that He taught His way step by step. Hence for me the Old Testament *is* a prologue to the New, but in the language of a Christian a prologue is no mean thing: The first chapter of the Gospel according to St. John, on which you based your protest, is called 'prologue' precisely because it marvelously anticipates the message of the whole. We would no more sacrifice the Old Testament than we would give up the beginning of a symphonic movement which gloriously states themes later to be unfolded. And this is not all. So inseparable is the Old Testament from the life of the Church that without it we would not be. Abraham is our father, the Commandments are our law, the psalms our prayer, the words of the prophets our comfort; the wisdom of Israel's sages guides us still.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

"But it seems your conviction that with the New Testament God's revelation lost its link with the Jewish people. The one development impossible in the divine-human dialogue was that, violating its character of vital contact between Yahweh and His people, it be turned into dogmas, propositions. But in the Church, you have told me, this is exactly what has happened. God is no longer spoken to; He is spoken about. He is no longer addressed as an immediate 'Thou'; some other intervenes. If the New Testament is right, He does not speak to the suffering soul of His chosen people, He does not help them endure their trials. On the contrary, He rejects them, charges them with obduracy, taxes them with their failure to receive His Son. And hence you feel that this cannot be fulfillment.

"I can speak only for Catholics; for us, life and dogma are far from incompatible; in fact, without dogma our lives would be empty, devoid of meaning. Would you say, Professor Buber, that the truth of the proposition: 'My right hand has five fingers' can be bought only at the price of a dead hand? If I state in what you would call a detached manner that my hand has exactly five fingers, will it mean that my hand is somehow shackled; that it will never write a thing of beauty, never respond to the touch of a friend? But dogma for us is infinitely more than abstract proposition or detached statement. So much does it set us on fire that we rise in readiness to act when we profess the Creed; indeed we often sing it. So little does dogma interfere with the lived moment—and one of our great spiritual writers speaks of 'the sacrament of the present moment,' of its unfailing offer of grace⁷¹—that we seldom feel more alive than when we declare our faith in the sight of God. Indeed, without firm anchorage in the truth of dogmas and commandments the 'lived moment' becomes an idol. Without such anchorage man cannot fully respond to the summons of God that every moment conveys; without this weight he is but dust before the wind.

"You rightly state, Professor Buber, that the man who provides himself with a comprehensible God runs the risk of despair of God. But Catholic dogma, for all its lucidity, does not trespass on God's mysteriousness. On the contrary, it is the heart of Catholic teaching

71. See Jean Pierre de Caussade, S.J., *Abandonment to Divine Providence*, ed. J. Ramière, S.J., trans. E. J. Strickland (Exeter: Catholic Records Press, 1921), p. 3.

that God is infinitely higher and holier than we wayfarers can think or say. No doubt the Incarnation brings God closer to us or, I should say, brings us closer to Him, yet this does not imply that now all His ways are clear and all His thoughts our own. Where more than in the Incarnation does God reveal Himself as the God of surprise, the God greater than even His promises? Here, more than in any other of His manifestations, He shows Himself the sovereign Lord. This again is in the line of the Old Testament. For this is how He acted toward Abraham, for instance, when first He demanded the sacrifice of his son and then unexpectedly supplied the victim. To return to your warning that where there is clear dogma there is the danger of despair, may I suggest that we apply to it the test of experience? It would seem to me that those in our generation who have despaired are not those who hold to a God mysterious but revealed; rather they are from among those for whom He was totally unknowable, for whom, finally, He was not.

"Your appeal to the episode of Cain as an instance of God's immediate protection is most apposite. I would be the last to deny that God here does directly what He usually does through His legates. But, in spite of that, is not Cain himself an intermediary for all who meet him: a living sign of His justice and mercy? I am sure you will not disagree with me that the immediacy proclaimed by the Bible is one which does not dispense with intermediaries. Whenever the Lord threatened judgment or offered deliverance to Israel, it was His way to send messengers: Moses, judges, prophets. And though the role of Jesus greatly excels theirs, still there is no break—a direct line links Him to them. You feel, no doubt, that the Jesus we believe in, the Lord in the flesh, diverts us from God. The opposite is true. You need only reflect on the writings of Catholic mystics, which I am sure you know, and you will realize that *there* is a divine-human bond so vital, close, and intimate that it can scarcely be surpassed. And were you able to witness the prayer of many a Christian, you would find a fervor in no way diminished but rather heightened by the knowledge that there is the Christ. On the other hand, I have come across in contemporary Jewish writing complaints like this:

As a religion, Judaism to my mind leaves something to be desired. History and myth are stressed to the detriment of the personal relationship of the individual to God. We read and repeat endlessly that Moses

and the other ancient prophets spoke with God. But thousands of years ago is far too remote for conversations with God to be truly vital today. Are there not those, rabbis and laymen alike, who speak with God today? Can we not hear about them in our synagogues and religious writings? Or has Judaism totally relegated revelation to the category of myth? I have this feeling, and yet the direct religious experience . . . is as overwhelming in its magnificence today as it was three thousand years ago.⁷²

2. "Let us take, Professor Buber, a step closer to the central issue. Not for a moment do I deny that the overt demand: 'Believe in me' is not found in the synoptic Gospels, but I must question your conclusions from this fact. I shall not dwell on St. Matthew's report that Jesus saw the children's faith in Him as the great reason for the reverence they deserve (see 18:6). The same Evangelist recounts the taunt at the Crucifixion: 'Let Him come down now from the cross and we will believe in Him' (27:42). What can this mean except that, for the price of a miracle, the men near the cross were prepared to offer what they knew He expected of them? True, the overt demand is missing, but the Christ of the synoptic tradition does not hesitate to identify His person with the reign of God; to make Himself the cornerstone; to claim power that is above human power. There is saying after saying in which His bidding for faith in Himself is implicit but unmistakable. Thus He called His disciples to take upon themselves His yoke, promised that He would refresh them, sent them like lambs among wolves, gave them power over the enemy so that no harm could come to them. Thus did He require that they follow Him, leaving house and father and mother for His sake. He even claimed that the heavens and the earth would perish before His word would perish.⁷³

"You probably would attribute some of these sayings to the pressures of enthusiastic disciples, or to the realized faith of the Church in the later part of the first century. But I am afraid I must call your attempt to reconstruct a growing messianic consciousness in Christ arbitrary. You find it a mortal offense that He sought recognition—

72. Jane K. Schwartz, "Letters from Readers," *Commentary*, XXV, 1 (January 1958), p. 78.

73. See Mt 11:28-30; Mt 10:16; Lk 10:19; Mk 8:34; Mt 10:38-39; Lk 14:26-27; Mt 24:35.

I marvel at the restraint and the sureness with which He slowly guided His own. Again, I can find no warrant for your assumption that the messianic sufferer must go unrecognized; indeed, it leads you to an extreme position which is not that of ancient Jewish tradition. It forces you to submerge the single Messiah in a stream of messiahs and thus to extend messianic suffering to the end of days, neither to be assuaged nor to be crowned by a resurrection. To your contention that a resurrection of Christ is against Jewish thought, which knows no individual rising, I can only answer that what we conceive to be possible is not the measure of God's power: He is the Lord, God of the unimagined and unsuspected.

"That God is the God of wonder is your belief too, is it not, Professor Buber? For what trust would it be to trust in a God subservient to the traditions of men and to the laws of nature? Yet recently you have made your own the view of Bultmann that miracle is impossible, mythological, because it is *contra naturam*.⁷⁴ And earlier you insisted that supernatural events sever 'the intelligible sequence of happenings we term natural by interposing something unintelligible' and thus pose a dilemma to the man of our time. If he is honest, he can accept them only at the sacrifice of his intellect; if he is dishonest, he may well accept lazily what he does not believe.⁷⁵ I can follow you here neither in faith nor in thought. In believing in the Christ of miracles I do not surrender my integrity, nor do I surrender my mind. Is an increase in the virtuality of a creature really impossible? Normally, the waters of a lake support a boat but not a man. Is it so unreal to think that the Creator can give to waves an efficiency beyond their own, a power He always gives to the ground?

"As I find a miracle-working Christ far from 'unintelligible,' so I see nothing perplexing in the castigation of those who did not receive Him. To me the castigation is the perfect guarantee of the authenticity of His message; winnowing fan in His hand (see Mt 3:12), He upheld the prophetic call to 'turning.' Chastise His own though He might, He did not reject them. To me Israel was never more loved than by the Jesus who wept over Jerusalem, who like a mother hen—or like the Shekinah—wished to spread sheltering wings over those who so soon were to face the terrors of Roman armies. No matter

74. See Buber, *Two Types of Faith*, p. 97, n. 1.

75. See Buber, *Israel and the World*, p. 97.

how often poor Christians reject the children of Israel from their hearts, the Church can never exclude them from her love. With St. Paul does she hope for the day when they will be one with her, and with him she holds them 'dear for the sake of the fathers' (Rom 11:28).

3. "These are some of the matters, Professor Buber, on which we are divided. To borrow your phrase, here is a gulf no human power can bridge.⁷⁶ Yet, since the grace of the Holy One of Israel is always with us, we are not condemned to stand still; we can move, however slowly, toward a meeting.

"What is it, then, that I can do? I cannot, I shall not, be satisfied with the reserved esteem Harnack accorded the Hebrew Scriptures. I must give full value to Israel's revelation, for a God of miracles is no stumbling block to me. If you will pardon my bluntness, I listen to the prophets more willingly than do you. There is this too: I can struggle to make known how deeply rooted are Jesus and His teachings in Israel's inspired past—a commonplace to the Catholic scholar—to make known their 'Jewishness' to those who tend to an inauthentic antithesis between the two covenants. And I shall learn much from your rightful concern with the true meaning of an Aramaic phrase, a Hebrew verb, a cultic custom.

"You see an affinity between the teachings of Jesus and that of the genuine Pharisees, as distinguished from those portrayed in the Gospels, a portrayal you attribute to early Christian polemic.⁷⁷ You see both, Him and them, fighting an empty, legalistic religiosity: hearts that are waste, undirected toward God.⁷⁸ Though I cannot be pleased with your supposition that in the portrayal of Christ's struggle with the Pharisees the Gospels are unreliable—they do not intend, of course, to give a complete account of Pharisaic teaching—I am delighted that your view of the Torah in a way approaches His.⁷⁹ My Catholic vision of the Torah is not far from yours, at least as you express it in *Two Types of Faith*: Not meant to be static in its quality as Law, it was a life-bestowing instruction, to be lovingly re-

76. See *ibid.*, p. 40.

77. See Buber, *Two Types of Faith*, pp. 62–63.

78. See *ibid.*, p. 64.

79. See *ibid.*, pp. 63–64.

ceived so that its recipients might decide for God. Your interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount is the most moving passage I have encountered in your writings about Jesus, for its insights into the essence of the commandments are similar to those of Christians.⁸⁰ I marvel that we are so much at one in this. Some portions of *Two Types of Faith* on *emunah* make me happy, although I cannot accept your setting in opposition *emunah* and *pistis*. But I must express my regret that you should be captive to a rationalism that permits a freedom in rewriting the Gospels which no scholar would tolerate in editing any documents enjoying a like manuscript witness.

"Though you seem to consider St. Paul Israel's enemy, I do not despair of your seeing him someday in a kinder light, this 'Saul, a Jew from Tarsus, who asserted that it was impossible to fulfill the Torah, and that it was necessary to cast off its yoke by submission to another Jew, Jesus of Nazareth . . . who had indeed fulfilled the Torah and abolished it at the same time.'⁸¹ My reason for hoping so is that he looked at the Torah through the eyes of his Master. You may think that I do not know St. Paul's teaching. Everywhere I look in his writings I find a man driven by zeal, acutely conscious of each concrete situation. Had there been no false claims for the saving power of the Law—and I mean Law, not Torah—for its complete efficacy to heal men letter by written letter, statute by statute, how different his response! Do you think that in Jerusalem, in Corinth, Thessalonica, Rome, he encountered men for whom Torah was a directing voice, God's voice demanding not merely certain deeds but man's full response? Much of what you say on *emunah* would have won his approval—what is it but the ready faith in God, the *pistis*, for which he begged?

"The 'hellenistic stream' in St. Paul ran no deeper than it had to for his missionary needs. If he spoke an unclassical Greek, he thought authentically Hebrew thoughts. He was not the hellenized noetic so necessary for your thesis.⁸² He was a great rabbi reared in Pharisaism at a time when that honorable tradition had begun to age. Divine love burst in on him from an unexpected quarter: not from the Law, not from the guidance of the great Gamaliel—and a lifetime of God's favor did not efface the memory of that failure. Fault

80. See *ibid.*, pp. 59–60.

81. Buber, *Israel and the World*, p. 190.

82. See Buber, *Two Types of Faith*, p. 172.

in the Law or no, it was an indisputable fact in St. Paul. Still, he did not think little of the Law. As he saw it, the Law was given that grace might be sought, and grace was given that the Law might be fulfilled.

"No, I do not despair of your seeing St. Paul in his true light. For more and more Jewish scholars have come to see him as a true heir of Israel's traditions. Even fifty years ago, Louis Ginzberg wrote that when St. Paul speaks of Christ as the second Adam, he 'simply operates with conceptions familiar to the Palestinian theologians,' and that for his Christology he 'is not dependent upon Philo . . . as most scholars hold.'⁸³ And recently, Robert Gordis said of the revolution brought about by the findings of Qumran: 'While in the past, parallels between Jewish Rabbinic sources and the New Testament were most plentiful for the "Jewish" *Synoptic Gospels* and much rarer for the "Gentile" Gospel of *John* and the *Pauline Epistles*, the Dead Sea Scrolls show most of their striking affinities of expression with these latter books. Much of the Gentile influence is now seen not to be Gentile at all.'⁸⁴ Warriors of light, the men of Qumran have thus returned to destroy many a liberal hypothesis. I rejoice at this destruction, and I rejoice no less that it is owed to a discovery from the Holy Land.

"To return to the central question: Christ's own claim. Can you be really sure that He did not make the claims you describe as impossible in a son of Abraham? If He did, your statement that He cannot be placed in any of the ordinary categories takes on an even deeper significance than you intended. To be honest, I find the Jesus of your conclusions an ambiguous, tantalizing figure. On the one hand you limit Him to statements comprehensible in the light of the apocalyptic of His time and make Him the prisoner of the Jewish past, on the other you grant that in the Sermon on the Mount He is rooted in, and yet transcends, Jewish faith.⁸⁵ I think there is no justification in going this far and no further. The Jesus who can say that He, uniquely, knows the divine intention, may just as readily claim to have pre-existed in eternity with Yahweh. In dealing with Him we face One who, in His own view, is unhampered by the ordinary bounds of human thought. It seems to me that a Jesus who chose to assert His own

83. *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, I, 182.

84. Robert Gordis, "The Dead Sea Scrolls: Their Significance," *Jewish Frontier*, XXIV, 4 (April 1957), p. 24.

85. See Buber, *Two Types of Faith*, pp. 68–69.

divinity accounts for the gospel report much more adequately than a Jesus whom His disciples deified.

"But, I hear you tell me, if the 'I' of Jesus to the 'Thou' of the Father is sincere, He cannot then stand between all the rest of us and God, blocking us off from the divine immediacy. The love God bears each one of us forbids it. To this I respond: The 'I' of Christ is in eternal confrontation with that Father who is a 'Thou' to Him. This intimate converse takes place in the hidden and eternal recesses of God Himself, where no man enters, whether with or without shoes—not even the manhood of Jesus. He does not rob us of the role you say is the right of every man, to speak directly to God as to his Father. The prayer of the Christian man to God is not filtered through nor recast by another, but when man the 'I' says 'Thou,' his 'I' is not an 'I' uncertain and alone. It is ineffably strengthened by union with Another, the divine, eternal Son, whose address to the Father is in the depths of the being of Yahweh. Man has no need of such aid, you tell me. I shall answer only that when God reveals the fact of eternal dialogue within Himself, I find Him worthy of perfect trust, of *emunah*. If the manhood that I have in common with Jesus can make me more fully a partner in that dialogue, I welcome the divine gift.

"Let me say one thing more, Professor Buber. The only manhood Jesus ever had was Jewish bone and soul and sinew. Though to me He is the Lord of the Covenant, He is also its son to the roots of His being. Thus Christians must ever understand God's plan for Israel and for His Church. I shall work for this understanding. Would you not do something similar? Would you not search out the meaning of redemption in Catholic belief, see its requirement that, even after Crucifixion and Resurrection, the benefits given must be 'won' by each and every man, and no less by a long, slow reconsecration of things human and earthly to the all-holy God?

"If each of us does his part and so leads others, the gulf between us may yet narrow. It will be a work of God—blessed be He—in whom our faith will not have been empty, in whom our hopes will not be shattered."

III

I HAVE taken the liberty of addressing Professor Buber directly, and he has done me the kindness of answering some of my questions. He

did it a generation ago, when in 1930 he spoke before an institute held by some Protestant missionary societies to the Jews at Stuttgart, Germany. In this address, the servant who suffers in darkness for God's sake is not submerged in a stream of many; he is acknowledged as the saviour of the nations, though not as the Messiah of Israel; "he it is who has been given as a light for the tribes of the world, that God's 'salvation may be unto the end of the earth' (Is 49:6)." ⁸⁶ Thus I should like to end this essay with Buber's own moving profession:

What have you and we in common? If we take the question literally, a book and an expectation.

To you the book is a forecourt; to us it is the sanctuary. But in this place we can dwell together, and together listen to the voice that speaks here. That means that we can work together to evoke the buried speech of that voice; together we can redeem the imprisoned living word.

Your expectation is directed toward a second coming, ours to a coming which has not been anticipated by a first. To you the phrasing of world history is determined by one absolute midpoint, the year nought; to us it is an unbroken flow of tones following each other without a pause from their origin to their consummation. But we can wait for the advent of the One together, and there are moments when we may prepare the way before him together. ⁸⁷

86. Buber, *Israel and the World*, p. 38.

87. *Ibid.*, p. 39.