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January 7, 2013: The Error of Theism and Atheism is the Same and Must be Overcome Together

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Title: The Error of Theism and Atheism is the Same and Must be Overcome Together

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1/7/2014—I am studying Eberhard Busch's book, *The Great Passion*, which introduces the theology of Karl Barth. I have paraphrased in the title of this blog entry a line from that book. In Barth's view, both theism and atheism mistake the nature of God. For what Barth calls theists, who are monotheists who share this erroneous view of God, and for self-proclaimed atheists, God is an absolute being who lives in and for himself, independent of humans. Theists believe such a being exists and atheists deny that such a being exists. Barth agrees with the atheists that such a being does not exist, but in Barth's case, because this is not the nature of God. God is for and with humans. The image of God is Jesus Christ. The image of God separately existing somewhere apart from us is false, as far as Christianity is concerned. The theist and atheist both project this false view of God out of pride because both would like to be this kind of being. Both identify with this kind of God. The theist identifies with this kind of God in the theist's religious life. But it is really just a projection, as Feuerbach wrote, of himself. The atheist denies the separate God exists but would affirm that this is an ideal existence and wants to be himself absolute and independent. For Barth, this is a second and related mistake. For just as God is for us and with us and not an absolute being existing alone, so man is not a being absolute and alone. Man's authentic way to be is relational, as this is God's way to be. Reality is relational. Nothing exists apart. The error that Barth sees is perfectly stated in Descartes' "I think, therefore I am." This is a projection of a human being alone and independent. There is not even this kind of thinking. I am always thinking of another. But what a difference if the formulation had been, I think of you and therefore I am. It is typical of Barth to see the believer and the nonbeliever in the same boat. This is the kind of thinking we must learn to help overcome our divisions.