

ECUMENICAL THEOLOGY: ITS POSSIBILITIES AND LIMITATIONS

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The title and theme of this present lecture has been selected for some very determined reasons. First of all, this is the annual lectureship of the Graduate Theological Union, a union which in its very rootage as well as in all that it purports to do is both ecumenical in intent and theologically centered. Consequently, a theme that is both ecumenical and theological is most appropriate. Nonetheless, it may become evident, in the course of this lecture, that much of the theologizing at the Graduate Theological Union hardly begins to do justice to the depths of an ecumenical theology.

Secondly, the two recent and quite monumental works of Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: an Experiment in Christology*,<sup>1</sup> and *Christ: the Experience of Jesus as Lord*,<sup>2</sup> together with the dual publication of Hans Küng, *On Being a Christian*<sup>3</sup> and *Existiert Gott?*,<sup>4</sup> have avowedly attempted to do ecumenical theology. Two small essays by each of these theologians, in which they individually consider the methodological approach taken by the books just mentioned, provided the lead articles for an entire issue of the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, dealing with the question of an ecumenical theology.<sup>5</sup> Response essays by such scholars as David Tracy, Avery Dulles, Rosemary Ruether, Arthur Crabtree, George Lindbeck and many others fleshed out the implications of Küng's and Schillebeeckx' thoughts.<sup>6</sup>

A third reason, though somewhat tangential to the present theme, is the recent and rather frequent interventions of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith at the Vatican as regards the theological endeavors of catholic scholars. These interventions have raised the question of the credibility of the Roman catholic theologian, in the sense that one asks quite pointedly whether such catholic theologians are genuinely free in their theological studies and research or are they to adhere to some mainstream or party-line theology. If the answer is in the affirmative to the latter, then the question arises whether Roman catholic theologians are able to develop with other non-catholic theologians an ecumenical theology at all.

With these bases for a study of the limitations and possibilities of an ecumenical theology, let us now turn our attention more directly to the topic. I have arranged the material in three sections: the first section will hopefully clarify the meaning of the term "ecumenical theology." The second section will deal with the limitations of such a theology, limitations which arise both from internal and external causes. In the third and final section I will attempt to indicate the major possibilities at least as far as I perceive them, for such a theologizing.

### I. The Perimeters of an Ecumenical Theology

Perhaps "ecumenical theology" can be described better by indicating what it is not, than by enumerating its own major characteristics. In doing this, however, I am aware that ultimately the scope of an ecumenical theology, as I will present it, might seem to be too narrow for

some listeners, and I offer this description of "ecumenical theology" merely as a working description. It might be argued that all theology is ecumenical in nature, since all theology in some way helps the general theological enterprise. It will, nonetheless, be my contention that a narrower understanding of "ecumenical theology" is necessary if any advance in this area is to be made.

In the history of christian theology, therefore from new testament times onward, ecumenical theology has not always been a possibility. In the early strata of the history of christian theology the very term is meaningless. This does not imply that there was in the early church a single theology, for as is well known there was at that time a rich pluralism of theologies, evidenced by the schools of Antioch and Alexandria, and by the approaches to the eucharist as found in Ambrose and Augustine. It is not, however, until there is a division of the *oecumene*, that is, a real division between the western and the eastern churches, that one no longer speaks about a pluralism of theology within a single church, but rather speaks about different theologies within different churches. The major presupposition for genuine "ecumenical theology," then, is a division in the ecclesial *oecumene*. When this division occurs then something quite different from mere theological pluralism is taking place, and it is the avowed purpose of ecumenical theology to bridge the division.

Attempts were made historically, as we all know, to bridge the ever-widening split between the western and eastern churches. There was the letter of Innocent IV "Sub catholicae professione," written in 1254 to the papal legate for the Greek churches which deals with differences in ritual and to some extent in theological opinion.

There was the profession of faith, formulated at the fourth session of the second council of Lyon in 1274 for the Greek emperor, Michael Palaeologus, which is a brief creed of the major christian tenets. There was the small book "Cum dudum" written under Benedict XII in 1341, which unfortunately in content is more opposed to the positions of the Armenian church than a dialogue with that church. There was the bull of union "Laetentur caeli," drawn up at the council of Florence in 1439 in an attempt to unite the Greek and Latin churches; the bull "Exsultate Deo," drawn up in the same year at the same council to aid the union between the Armenian and Latin churches; likewise from the same source, the bull "Cantate Domino" formulated in 1442 to aid the union between the coptic and Egyptian churches on the one hand and the Latin church on the other. In 1585 another profession of faith was formulated under Gregory XIII to assist the union between the Graeco-Russian churches and the Latin church. In all of these documents, which attempted to bridge the eastern and western churches of the christian community, there was undoubtedly an endeavor to understand the various theological and faith positions of the non-Latin churches, but when one presses the quality of theologizing evident in these documents, one notes that there is really very little to serve as a model for ecumenical theology. On the one hand they are all so brief in nature that they do not yield an adequate model; secondly, they are all formulated from a western and Latin theological bias.

This bias has been noted as regards the sacrament of confirmation by Louis Ligier who writes:

Finally, ecumenism demands that one interpret the liturgical practice of a given church within the functioning of its own theology, not that of ours. Yet studies dedicated by us, Latins,

to the eastern liturgy of confirmation generally make an abstraction of the teaching of these communities as regards the sacramental epiclesis. None of these works, save perhaps when there is a treatment of the chaldean-nesorian rite, take into account the great prayers made over the confirmandi or over the chrism. All of them proceed as they do for our own Roman liturgy. The viciousness of this method is clear and serious. In our case, the Greeks, the Syrians of Antioch, and the Armenians do not reduce the essential rite of confirmation to the anointing with chrism and the brief formula alone.<sup>7</sup>

Although the sacrament of confirmation is not under study here, the complaint which Ligier levels at the method of much inter-ecclesial theologizing is well taken, and indicates more precisely the very area in which ecumenical theology must take place, namely, the difference of church. We will return to this.

With the reformation period of the sixteenth century, further ecclesial discontinuity began to take place. The Augsburg Confession, which Phillip Melancthon hoped might serve as an irenic document, ought to be seen in its initial stage as a sign of theological pluralism, rather than an attempt at ecumenical theology, since the evangelicals (as the proponents of Luther's views called themselves at that time) were still within the Latin church, when the Augsburg document was drawn up. Only in later decades can one speak about the churches of the reformation and only at a later date can one speak meaningfully of various "protestant traditions." In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries some brief attempts were made to reconcile the differences, but the hardened positions of the churches disallowed any significant or lasting influence to come of these efforts. This hardening of theological positions and virtual separation of the churches provide the basis why today an ecumenical theology is meaningful. Separated and isolated christian churches over long centuries worshipped as a group, reflected on the faith as a group, theologized as a group, and consequently christian traditions

developed. There is not a single christian tradition in the eastern churches; there are several christian traditions in the various eastern churches. Likewise, in the western christian world there are similarly several christian traditions, and it is the distinctness of these traditions which allows one to speak meaningfully of an ecumenical theology. In a given single tradition there generally is some sort of theological pluralism. Only when there is a plurality of traditions can we speak about an ecumenical theology, namely, a theologizing out of differing ecclesial traditions.

In our own day, as we all know, ecumenical dialogues, the so-called bi-laterals, have taken place with frequency. Often these bi-laterals have ended with a statement which is acceptable by both or all the sides of the participating members. Examples of this would be the Windsor statement, the Lambeth statement; the statements of the Lutheran-Catholic dialogues. Such documents have multiplied in the past decade, and although in the discussions which lead to the eventual agreed-on statement might clearly be called an ecumenical discussion, the statements themselves lack a very important element for a genuine ecumenical theology, namely, the wording of these statements have been so combed that areas or even issues which are divisive are either omitted entirely or so reduced that a minimum of friction is evidenced. The documents intend a maximum amount of acceptability with the result that the traditions of the various churches do not find expression in them. For instance, there are several statements on the eucharist which have been judged acceptable by theologians of various christian churches. However, these statements on the eucharist give no evidence of the tradition in which a church understands the eucharist, celebrates the

eucharist, lives out the eucharist. Much less is there evidence in these documents as regards the way in which the various churches understand, celebrate and live sacramentality, as an essential part of its christian life. The richness of these traditions is not found in such statements of agreement. This is not to say that such statements should not be formulated; indeed, they should be, and the work of such bi-lateral groups ought to continue. I am merely saying that these statements do not offer us a model, or at least an adequate model of what ecumenical theology is all about.

The inter-face between differing ecclesial traditions within the one christian community is the locus for genuine ecumenical theology. There is a tremendous difference between theological pluralism within a single tradition on the one hand and ecumenical theologizing between distinctive ecclesial traditions on the other hand. Let us now turn to the limitations of this kind of theology.

## II. The Limitations of Ecumenical Theology

When a given theologian theologizes out of his or her own tradition and does so while in contact with other theologians who are theologizing out of their own traditions, the contact might easily result simply in tandem theologizing. Themes, such as the theology of the church, the theology of the sacraments, the question of faith, etc., might be the same, but other than this topical tangent, there is little, if any, inter-theological connection. This is the first limitation, and I think it is important, since I would suggest that rather often than not this is the kind of theology we here at the Graduate Theological Union engage in. Still, one should note that a presentation of what

Lutherans understand by authority in the church, what Anglicans understand by authority in the church, and what Roman Catholics understand by the same theme, is somewhat inter-confessional theologizing but can scarcely serve as an adequate model for a true ecumenical theology.

A more profound approach to ecumenical theology has been suggested by Hans Küng and Edward Schillebeeckx in the volumes mentioned earlier. In comparing the two recent books on Jesus Christ written by Schillebeeckx, Hans Küng makes the following comment:

Nonetheless, if seen in the context of interpretive principles, despite their differences, there appears to emerge from these books a fundamental hermeneutical agreement which is shared not only by most Catholic exegetes but also by an increasing number of younger Catholic systematicians more adequately trained in exegesis. Perhaps this development will form the basis for a new fundamental consensus in Catholic (and possibly not only Catholic) theology, despite legitimate methodological and factual differences. The fundamental hermeneutical agreement primarily concerns what Schillebeeckx terms the "two sources" upon which contemporary scientific theology can draw, namely the "traditional experience of the great Judeo-Christian movement on the one hand, and on the other the contemporary human experiences of Christians and non-Christians".<sup>8</sup>

In analyzing Schillebeeckx' fundamental hermeneutical principles, which Küng claims are his own as well, he describes the first as "the first source, pole or standard of Christian theology: namely, God's revelational address in the history of Israel and the history of Jesus; the second source, pole and horizon of christian theology is our own human world experience...The living Jesus stands at the beginning and is the source, standard, and criterion of christian interpretation." Two things should be noted here: a) the christian experience of Jesus is not first and only, once experienced, is there interpretation. Rather, interpretation in one form or another is already at work concomitantly with one's experience. This is fundamental to Schillebeeckx' approach and is reiterated by him in multiple ways throughout his works.



When God addressed the human world in Jesus, some human response or experience of Jesus was simultaneously needed; otherwise, his address would be futile. But this response is already hermeneutical.

b) Secondly, both authors argue that the Jesus-event must be approached from a historico-critical framework. On this matter, however, Arthur Crabtree notes rather wryly that "the principal methodological contrast today is not between Catholics and protestants, but between those, whether Catholics or Protestants, who think historically and dynamically, and those who think unhistorically and statically."<sup>9</sup> However true this comment might be, the historico-critical method is advocated as part of the fundamental hermeneutic for ecumenical theology. It is the hope of these authors that, were Catholics and protestants alike to agree on a fundamental hermeneutical basis and a basic methodology, then eventually an adequate ecumenical theology could emerge. I see this, however, as a limitation, since it is reducing the ecumenical theological enterprise to a single hermeneutic or a single methodology.

Beyond this limiting aspect, there are also some questions which the "two source" hermeneutic and methodology raise, and more specifically as regards the first source, namely, the Jesus-event. Now it would be difficult to imagine a Christian theologian of any denomination not holding Jesus Christ as the first source, pole or horizon for theologizing, and when pressed more thoroughly the approach of Schillebeeckx and that of Küng on this matter are not questions whether the first source is not Jesus Christ but rather a Peter or a Paul or some other figure. More sharply, it is a question of the manner in which one goes about interpreting the Jesus-event. Both these authors claim that the historico-critical method must be applied. In other

words, as Schillebeeckx notes, one cites more exegetes than systematians. But there are variants even here: one might follow the lead of a scholar such as Jeremias who is searching for the *ipsissima verba* and *ipsissima vox* of Jesus, or in this broader situation, the *ipsissimus* Jesus. This approach has a certain fashionableness about it and has richly benefitted theology. There is also the well-known Jesus of history and Christ of faith approach that was advocated by Martin Kähler and more effectively by Rudolph Bultmann. There may be less advocacy of this approach today because of the influence of the post-Bultmannians, and many theologians simply disavow any connection with such an approach. Nonetheless, there is clearly an interpretation-overlay, or rather a succession of varying interpretation-overlays on the original Jesus-event, and these are found in the new testament. The Jesus of history, Christ of faith, though not ascribed to in any over-divisive way, does force one to consider the interpretive levels which are part of our christian history of theology. Chalcedonian christology is an interpretation which has its rootage surely in the new testament, particularly John, but it by no means is the only early church interpretation of Jesus Christ. This layering and diversifying of interpretations of the Jesus-event, which one can arrive at through the historico-critical method, raises the issue of where one might stop. It is quite clear that Küng, for example, tends to focus almost exclusively on the earliest strata of the Jesus-experience and its interpretations, whereas Schillebeeckx allows an openness to the entire ecclesial tradition of almost two thousand years. One recalls the early struggles of John Henry Newman, which are chronicled in both the first and second tract entitled *Via Media*. Commenting on these, Heinrich Fries notes that for Newman

the "foundation, measure and orientation is and remains the church of the fathers in its still unweakened unity and catholicity."<sup>10</sup> Newman called this the "principle of antiquity." "To the complaint of the Roman theologians: where is the boundary of this 'antiquity'? Newman would reply that the principle is clear, although the precise date might be controverted."<sup>11</sup> It would seem that this boundary date, for Newman, lay somewhere between the council of Sardica in 347 as the earliest and not later than the seventh general council, the second council of Nicaea, held in 787. What I am saying here is the Jesus-event alone, as a source, pole, or horizon, since the very experience of Jesus is already interpretation, raises the question regarding the normative area of such interpretation. This is left somewhat open by Schillebeeckx, but would have to be far more agreed on prior to any development of an ecumenical theology along these lines.

The second pole, source or horizon for ecumenical theology is human experience. Crabtree notes that this method, proposed by Küng and Schillebeeckx, is quite acceptable to a large sector of protestant thinking, since it -- the method -- can be found in the works of Barth, Brunner, Bultmann, Tillich, Kaufman and Pannenberg.<sup>12</sup> Tillich's method of correlation, for instance, hinges around the duality of revelation in Jesus on the one hand and the existential human questions on the other. The list of such leading protestant theologians which Crabtree draws up indicates that methodologically and hermeneutically there already is a consensus between catholic and protestant theologians.

Human experience, however, is not something which is readily understood, and in our day and age the areas of perplexity on this issue have multiplied rather than subsided. Not only is there a legitimate demand to regard the human experience of the first world as dif-

ferent from that of the third world, an emphasis which highlights the richness of one's cultural experiences, but there is also a great division within the western world itself between those who interpret the human structure within the categories of being on the one hand, and those who interpret it in the categories of becoming on the other. Catholic and protestant theologies have generally operated within a framework of a philosophy of being; process theology is new both to the protestant and catholic scene. Still, what I wish to state is that human experience is not a univocal item in our contemporary world. It is not an invariable, but a variable, and as such will constantly modify the theological discussion. Once again, in this bi-polar base of a fundamental hermeneutic, we discover a limitation, namely, only if and to a major degree the parties on either side of the ecumenical divide agree on a certain mutual understanding of human experience can a meaningful theological discussion ensue, and even if consensus on this aspect of human experience is to some major degree attained, the ensuing dialogue is still limited, since given another set of coordinates describing human nature and experience, different theological dimensions and insights of the material would be engendered. Let me be quite clear on this: since human experience is not a univocally understood content in today's world, and since some common understanding of this matter is needed so that an ecumenical theology might genuinely be pursued, the parties involved have from the start limited the field of inquiry, since with a different interpretation of human experience other items might indeed show up. Liberation theology, today, provides us with a good example of this limitation. The liberation theologians of Latin America are indeed indebted to continental theology, as their works show, but they have developed

a theology very apropos to Latin America, and it has been said over and over again that one cannot simply take the liberation theology of the Latin American world and transplant it to the North American shores. It must be translated in this process of transfer, since the human experience of the North American, a first world area, is quite different from the human experience of the Latin American, a third world area.

The limitations which I have noted as regards the kind of ecumenical theology which is being urged in certain areas of contemporary theological thought are, then, the following: first of all, the singleness of the method. Avery Dulles offers an excellent caveat on this matter, noting that it has happened before in the history of christian theology that a single method was established, not a plurality. This is, of course, neo-scholasticism, and as Dulles notes, "the situation was not a healthy one."<sup>13</sup> That the bi-polar method advocated by Schillebeeckx and Küng, already developed by Barth, Brunner, Tillich and others, is an excellent one is undoubtedly true; that it is or should be the only method for an ecumenical theology is probably not true.

The second limitation deals with the first pole, namely the Jesus-event itself, and the question must surely be where does one begin to draw a line as far as normative interpretation is concerned. I do not foresee a great deal of consensus on this matter. The more we understand "scriptura" from the many components of the historico-critical method (e.g., Formgeschichte, Traditionsgeschichte, Redaktionsgeschichte, etc.) the less "sola scriptura" scripture alone seems viable; on the other hand the more we understand what Congar called "Tradition and Traditions" the less viable is the ordinarily understood meaning of

the Catholic tradition, and *pari passu* the Protestant traditions. Some limitation must be placed on the interpretation of the Jesus-event; a totally open-ended approach to this event would eventuate in total disarray.

The third limitation is the meaning of human experience. All theology is, of course, limited, since it is practiced within a limited cultural framework. The selection of a certain group of coordinates to understand human experience is already limitation.

One must simply note that within a limited framework a limited ecumenical theology might be developed. Limitation of itself is certainly not inadmissible; in fact it is something acceptable, but one must be aware of the limitation and not generalize and move beyond it. I would think that it is fair to say that the fundamental hermeneutical and methodological base advocated today is accepted by large segments of both catholic and protestant theologians, and consequently provides a base for these theologians, not all theologians, to enter into a meaningful attempt at ecumenical theology. To do this, let us consider the possibilities of an ecumenical theology.

### III. The Possibilities of an Ecumenical Theology

As mentioned above, ecumenical theology becomes a possibility when separated ecclesial traditions begin to emerge within the single christian community. These traditions have an inborn integrity and richness which must be honored and respected. It might seem that the most important possibility for ecumenical theology is, then, an inter-ecclesial discussion of the theology of the church, a mutual appreciation of the ecclesial traditions of one side or the other. Indeed, these

things are desiderata and should be encouraged, and some sort of preliminary discussion of the church, that is, what does church mean, needs to be done. Perhaps this is why a bi-lateral discussion on the eucharist at times is so jejune, since long before one can speak meaningfully of the eucharist, one must have developed a theology of sacramentality, and to have a theology of the sacraments one must have a theology of the church.

Nonetheless, a theology of the church, from an ecumenical theological standpoint, must be such that it opens itself to the center of the church, namely the Lord Jesus. Ecclesiology is rooted in christology, and it is precisely on the christological base that the greatest possibilities of an ecumenical theology emerge. However, some sort of understanding of the church is a precondition for a fruitful christological discussion from an ecumenical base, and the following points ought clearly to be made.

1. The church and the kingdom are not coterminous. Ecclesiologies which claim to be coterminous with basileiologies have in the past ended in ruin, self-deception, imperiousness, pride, and are anti-gospel. If the kingdom of God is greater than the church and more important than the church, then the church, and by this I mean every church, is relativized enormously, and must see itself within such a relativized situation. I speak here out of personal involvement, since there was a time, within my own lifetime, when the Roman Catholic church thought of itself as the only valid ecclesial community; all other christians were heretics and schismatics. But the Roman Catholic church was not alone in this situation. Other protestant groups so considered themselves to be christians, and they alone, that whole

segments of christianity were as good as damned.

2. Secondly, even though a fundamental agreement that the kingdom is greater than the church is accepted, and therefore that there is a certain relativization to the particular ecclesial community one belongs to, a further step is needed, namely, a theological consideration of the church as wider than any one given christian community. This is of fundamental importance for an ecumenical theology, since those ecclesial traditions can only be honored and appreciated by another tradition if and to the extent that they are seen as validly ecclesial. The understanding of church, therefore, must be an understanding that intends church, in its deepest meaning, to be larger than a "my church" or an "our church" approach. This was a major step in the constitution on the church drawn up at the second Vatican council, in which the Roman Catholic church acknowledged "church" beyond its own perimeters. Once more there is a resulting relativization of one's church, a relativization which nonetheless enhances the particular, existential and socially identifiable church in which one stands.

3. All of this openness to what church theologically means leads however to a far more crucial step. Bonaventure Kloppenberg has called this step "the mystery of the moon," and he describes it as follows:

The Council begins its Dogmatic Constitution on the Church with the words, *Lumen gentium*. But this "light of the nations" is not the church: "Christ is the light of all nations"! (LG 1/4). From its very opening words, therefore, Vatican II seeks to give a completely Christocentric and thus relativized idea of the Church. We can understand the Church only if we relate it to Christ, the glorified Lord. The Church lives by Christ ... Only Christ is the



light of the world. He is the Sun, sole source of light. At the side of this Sun, which is Christ, stands the Church like the moon which receives all its light, brilliance and warmth from the Sun.<sup>14</sup>

This interesting analogy of sun and moon, Christ and church, tells us that only in so far as the church reflects Christ is a church church; to the extent that the church does not reflect Christ is a church non-church. Ultimately, then, an ecumenical theology must come to grips with a christology that is acceptable, at least in its general contours, by all concerned. Not that christology is first; rather, as has been just stated, some basic understanding of the church as an open-ended entity is a pre-condition for treating the christological element ecumenically.

Kenneth Stofft who is active in the ecumenical movement in the Oklahoma City area wrote two years ago in *Ecumenical Trends*:

Christology is now taking priority in theological dialogue. As such, Christology may become the major Christian contribution to the religious life of humanity. Within a strictly Christian framework, an examination of Christology would have major bearing on the unity Christians seek in "conciliar fellowship." It should become the basis for discussions on "evangelism," and aid in determining resolutions to such current problems as women's ordination, the recognition and development of ministries, the clarification of the role of Baptism, and the subsequent rights and responsibilities of the baptized within the faith-life of the Christian community. The doctrine of the Incarnation and Saint Paul's Christ-centered mysticism could surface as *the* reconciling factor between Christianity and other living world religions in addressing the question: What is the interrelationship between divinity and humanity?<sup>15</sup>

The view that Stofft suggests is panoramic indeed, and presents a high agenda for theologians working within an ecumenical framework. To some it may sound quite simple but to others there may be a very problematical horizon.

On further reflection, however, the real divisions within

the *oecumene* might easily be seen as foundationally rooted in the way in which a group answers the question "and whom do you say I am?" There have been, in the past, great divisions within the christian community over the question whether Jesus can also be called God, and those who saw in Jesus merely a super-human individual, an exemplar, an ethical model of human behavior have been classified by mainstream christianity as heretics and unbelievers. The line of demarcation, generally has been quite clear: either one claims, in faith, that Jesus is not only human but also divine, and thereby remains within the christian fold, or one denies his divinity and is excluded from that same fold. There has been a fairly constant dividing line on this matter during the passage of the christian generations.

On the other hand, the divisive element as far as the Jesus-event is concerned has far more to do with the soteriological aspect. I would not want to suggest that this is totally independent of the question of the divinity of the Lord, as is evidenced in the Greek tradition of the early church in the oft-repeated phrase, what is not assumed is not saved. Rather, the question has centered much more on two items in particular: the first is the extent of the salvation which Jesus is believed to have brought about. Is there salvation outside the church? a question which Boniface VIII brought to the forefront. Is there a single or a dual predestination? a question which the Synod of Dordrecht brought to focus in its struggle with Arminianism. What is the relation between the expiatory sacrifice of Jesus and good works? a question which prompted the entire discussion on justification in the sixteenth century. What is

the relationship between nature and grace? a question that caused deep division in the christian community as is evidenced by manichaeism, albigensianism, jansenism and puritanism. Other examples could, indeed, be brought forward to exemplify this struggle within christianity as regards the depth and heighth, the length and breadth of the saving work of Jesus.

This is not something which should astound us today, since one not only goes to the gospel message to find the good news of salvation, but one also finds in the gospel message the reasons why Jesus was unacceptable to the institutional religious body and leadership of his day, the Jewish priests and high priest; why he was unacceptable to the mainstream theologians of his day, the scribes; why he was unacceptable to the ascetical element of his day, namely the pharisees. Why did institution, theology, and ascetism reject the message of Jesus as religiously impossible? I would suggest that it was due to the message of salvation, of forgiveness, of reconciliation. Jesus's message went too far, upsetting the balance that the interpretation of the law at that time offered, an interpretation which gave foundation to the institution, to the mainstream theology and to the acceptable ascetism. What I am suggesting is that the very reasons which caused rejection, confusion, and alienation from Jesus during his own life, have in perhaps a minor way, that is, in a way not so dramatic as to lead to a crucifixion, but nonetheless a divisive way, are the reasons why communities called christian have decimated the *oecumene* into the splinterings of denominationalism. Who is saved and who is not saved has been the question, the answer of which has caused division.

This is the reason why I suggest that the greatest possibility

to an ecumenical theology is a renewed christological study, but one that is focused on the question of soteriology. To appreciate how a given christian church understands within its own faith-stance, within its own theological reflections, within its own liturgical celebration the salvation which Jesus brings, and to see in that tradition insights which might not be so deeply highlighted in one's own tradition, is the beginning of an ecumenical theology from the pole, the horizon, as we mentioned above, of the Jesus-event. To realize that the way one believes, theologizes and liturgizes this salvation in one's own stance might overlook insights and values that another church exhibits on this same saving message of the Jesus-event, offers us the openness for dialogue.

We, here at the G.T.U., are members of a union, but one wonders sometimes whether we are members of a communion. The salvation of Jesus of course exists in all nine schools and in the m.a. and doctoral programs as well; we are tolerant of each other and very courteous. What we need to do, however, is to look more deeply and consider more carefully the traditions out of which we respectively come. It is, indeed, remarkable, that after so many years of ecumenical co-existence on this holy hill little collaborative publication -- and by this I do not mean a sort of multi-lateral statement -- has been made. A few years ago under the leadership of the Lutheran school we did have a two-day meeting to discuss some aspects of sacramental life, but it was a rare event and fairly short-lived. We do have the Jewish-Christian dialogues and the symposia in world religious movements and new religious movements. But these have been sporadic. This is why I stated earlier on that what we are doing for the most part here is tandem teaching and not really

ecumenical teaching.

What is, in my view, rather evident in this spot of Berkeley, is likewise evident within the larger perimeters of the ecumenical enterprise. It has been my suggestion in this lecture that we acknowledge very forthrightly the limitations of an ecumenical theology, lest we have expectations beyond our possibilities, but also that we consider the possibilities of ecumenical theology, lest we have goals beneath our expectations. It has further been argued that we would do well to bring the richness of our traditions into a professionally theological framework on the matter of the meaning and the extent of the soteriological aspect of the Jesus-event, not for the purpose of arriving at some statement which is acceptable to all of us, nor for the purpose of reaching a view that transcends our traditions and thus to some degree might negate these very traditions, but more precisely to see and appreciate the multi-dimensionality of the very meaning of salvation itself. What divided the *oecumene* has been, at its rootage, the question of the limits of reconciliation and forgiveness. On the basis of varying understandings of the soteriological issue, anathemas have divided christian groups and churches and synods; along with this has come the mutual rejection of ministry in both word and sacrament; the refusal of eucharistic fellowship and hospitality; the denial of even the very name "church"; the witch hunts for heretics; and in a more subtle way the disdain of a group which lacks liturgical purity.

On the same basis, however, and this is the major position I am stating, a richer and more profound grasp of soteriology, which of its very nature is reconciliation, can and will reduce the anathemas and heighten the mutual fellowship that should be a hallmark of any christian

community. We here at Berkeley could, in my view, do a major service to the ecumenical movement and to ecumenical theology, were we collectively to work together in a more professionally theological way to interpret anew, out of the richness of our varying traditions, the height and depth, the length and breadth of that central mystery of our christian faith, salvation only in our common lord, Jesus himself, and such an interpretation, collectively sought, is the greatest possibility for ecumenical theology.

Footnotes

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3. H. Küng, On Being a Christian (New York: Doubleday, 1975).
4. H. Küng, Existiert Gott? (München: Piper, 1977).
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7. L. Ligier, La Confirmation: Sens et conjoncture oecuménique hier (Paris: Beauchesne, 1973).
8. H. Küng, "Toward a New Consensus in Catholic (and Ecumenical) Theology," Journal of Ecumenical Studies, loc. cit., p. 4.
9. A. Crabtree, "Methodological Consensus? A Protestant Perspective," Journal of Ecumenical Studies, loc. cit., p. 79.
10. H. Fries, "J.H. Newmans Beitrag zum Verständnis der Tradition," in Die mündliche Überlieferung, ed. M. Schmaus (München: Max Hüber Verlag, 1962), p. 82.
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12. Crabtree, op. cit., p. 75.
13. A. Dulles, "Ecumenism and Theological Method," Journal of Ecumenical Studies, loc. cit., p. 47.
14. B. Kloppenburg, The Ecclesiology of Vatican II (Chicago: The Franciscan Herald Press), p. 19.
15. K. Stofft, "An Ecumenical Agenda for the Future," Ecumenical Trends 7 (1978), p. 3.



The Fifth Annual  
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*Kenan B. Osborne, O.F.M.*

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Franciscan School of Theology

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1798 Scenic Avenue  
Berkeley, California



## The Lecturer

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