

ECUMENISM AND SPIRITUALITY: A PROTESTANT PERSPECTIVE

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THE FOLLOWING CONSIDERATIONS are an attempt to assess the situation of modern Protestantism with particular attention to the interrelated questions of ecumenism and spirituality. And it is consciously from within Protestantism that ecumenism and spirituality are here regarded. This Protestant perspective is limited neither to Europe nor to America. The differences of the two hemispheres, great as they may still be, seem to be disappearing more and more in favor of a common approach to things religious. One should therefore attempt to speak of Western Protestantism as a whole in contrast to the younger churches. This is not only legitimate but even demanded, since the situation on what used to be called the mission fields is still more distinguished from Western Protestantism than is the latter in itself.

Any assessment of Protestantism is necessarily directed to the Church as its point of orientation. This may prove to be more of a problem than a help; for after all, is it not the Church itself that is so very much questioned today? Nevertheless, if we want to arrive at meaningful results, the orientation to the Church is inevitable. But what area of the life of the Church should we choose to hook our ecumenical outlook to? If Baron von Hügel's categories can still be applied, then there is a threefold choice.¹ In the first place, one could look at ecumenism from the point of view of church structures, particularly in their more legal and administrative aspects. It seems that the ecumenical movement, the way Protestants usually think of it, prefers to deal in this realm. One could be inclined to include in the institutional Church the aspect of its corporate worship. But although worship needs for the most part, precisely due to its corporate nature, institutional sanction, it does not so much represent the administrative aspect of church life as another aspect which we will have to mention soon.

¹ The pertinent sections in the various works of Baron Friedrich von Hügel have been conveniently collected in Douglas V. Steere, ed., *Spiritual Counsel and Letters of Baron Friedrich von Hügel* (New York, 1964) particularly chap. 6 (pp. 148 ff.): "All High Religion Has Three Dimensions."

The second alternative in focusing on the Church would be to discuss the thought patterns in which churchmen—and they hopefully coincide with theologians—think. The theological tackling of ecumenical questions seems indeed to be in vogue ever since Vatican II encouraged the dialogue with the Protestants. But there is a third realm where church life becomes manifest and which may prove to be ground as well suited for ecumenical considerations as the other two. It must be granted that the area of spirituality, as we have learned to call this sphere of the Church by borrowing an expression from the Catholics, is not as distinct and definite as either church structures or theological thought. There is an element of vagueness about spirituality, because it expresses a climate and atmosphere, an unconscious and subconscious, habitual way of life rather than something for which one is constantly forced to render account. But this aspect of the Church is no less real than the other two. Let us see what a look into ecumenism yields if it is done from the point of view of spirituality. In other words, let us try to detect the major ecumenical trends of modern Protestantism as they may not yet have been spelled out either administratively or theologically.

Wherever Protestantism feels the burden of the mandate of the unity of the Church, this unity seems to be partly already assumed and partly still envisaged. Where it is already assumed, it has mainly to do with the interrelationship of parts within Protestantism. Where the unity is still envisaged, the vision turns to a Protestantism as it relates first to even further parts of Protestantism but then also beyond these to Catholic churches—since Vatican II, particularly to Roman Catholicism.

The unity which Protestantism already assumes extends first of all to those elements which all forms of Protestantism seem to have in common. These account for the general Protestant climate or atmosphere which we have mentioned. They may be hard to define, but they do go across all customary Protestant parties. Some Protestant issues are decided no longer along but across denominational and confessional lines. Often liberals and conservatives do not split as such but among themselves and join hands across the fences. To take an example, the classical free churches of America and the classical state churches of Europe, in facing the social issues of the day, have come up with an-

swers that are not typical for either of them. We have already observed that the American and Continental differences within Christianity yield to a common Western outlook. And there may even be something in the making that transcends the distinction between the Western and the younger churches. The resulting question is: What is this that lets the old battle lines fade away and overcomes classical distinctions?

In the most general terms possible, I suggest that the climate which permeates all groups is a climate of transition. If it is legitimate to talk about transition, we have to ask the further questions of the whence and where. Transition from what to what? Here the suggestion is that we are experiencing, may be again experiencing, a transition from an emphasis on doctrine to an emphasis on life. This the Church has experienced several times in ages past. The historical terminology, therefore, is that we are possibly involved in a transition from an age of orthodoxy to an age of pietism. The emerging pietism will, however, necessarily be as different from classical pietism of the seventeenth and eighteenth century and even neo-pietism of the nineteenth century as the just-dying neo-orthodoxy was different from Nicean orthodoxy, medieval orthodoxy, and Protestant orthodoxy of old.

☐ To buttress this thought by a look into history, could it be that there is something like a law operative in the development of the Church? Already in the New Testament we have the contrast between charismatic and Catholic Christianity. In the ancient Church, Nicean orthodoxy established itself in contrast to heresies like the Donatist and the Montanist. In the Middle Ages, the Scholastic emphasis on the intellect was always balanced by the voluntaristic orientation of mysticism. Some even bridged the two in an intellectualistic mysticism. The Reformation, for its part, faced the issue of radicals, mostly spiritualists, on the one side and conservatives, mostly institutionalists, on the other side. When Protestantism had developed its own scholasticism in the seventeenth century, the prime emphasis was again on the mind. And classical pietism challenged precisely this with its emphasis on the heart as the core of the Christian existence. The worship of reason in which the Enlightenment indulged in the eighteenth century was challenged by the primacy of feeling in the various awakening and revival movements. Should it not be possible, therefore, to understand the modern developments as reactions against dominating orthodoxies?

If this interpretation is at all acceptable, then we can ask the next question: What is the new situation towards which we are developing today? The first answer is that the new situation is not made up of just one single element but is a composite of many streams.

Thus far we have concentrated on the common atmosphere which Protestantism has in its various parts. Now we have to say that the assumed unity extends also to those elements where Protestantism is at variance with itself, or that the general Protestant climate allows one to deal with various positions and even embrace extremes.

It is one thing to say that what determines the present phase is a reaction against preceding developments, of which the two World Wars form probably the most integral part. It is another thing to account for the manifoldness of the reaction as it is able to embrace extremes. This can be understood only by assuming that it is precisely the reactionary factor which provides the underlying unit. If to speak of a reaction sounds too reactionary, it may be preferable to speak of today's response to the problems inherited from the past. This is our thesis (though at this stage certainly not much more than a thesis), that our age is characterized by its responsiveness rather than its much-applauded creativeness. Such an assessment should really be discussed in detail—which we cannot do here. Let us at least ask the question: Where are the great creative spirits in the world of Protestant churchmanship, theology, and spirituality? The dearth in this realm may well support our thesis.

Two things need to be further elaborated. If present-day Protestantism is essentially of a responsive character, then we would want to know more of the front to which it responds. The front addressed is orthodoxy. The orthodoxy we speak of is not only embodied in the neo-orthodoxy of the Continent. In this country orthodoxy may appear in a uniform and sterile appeal to pluralism and democracy, or any other secular given data to which the Christian existence has to submit. The orthodoxy of revelatory theology, as expressed by Karl Barth, is matched, e.g., by the natural theology of John Cobb, who to me has given the most able theological expression to the reigning orthodoxy of this country.² Both orthodoxies, however, whether European or

² Cf. John B. Cobb, Jr., *Living Options in Protestant Theology: A Survey of Methods* (Philadelphia, 1962) particularly Part 1 (pp. 17 ff.): "Natural Theology."

American, whether sacred or secular, whether related to revelation or to nature, fall under the judgment of Ernst Benz, that they tend to end up in cold theologism.³ And this is the front that is being questioned.

The modern answer to inherited orthodoxies is threefold. On the far left there is the violent rejection of orthodoxy. On the far right conservative elements still attempt to operate within the orthodoxies given. And in the center there are other concerns dominant that allow indifference to orthodoxies. These three responses to orthodoxies are connected to each other in that all of them proceed rather from issues of spirituality than from church structures or thought patterns.

The radical left of today sails under the flag of the God-is-dead movement, with Thomas J. J. Altizer as its main prophet. His American resurrection of Nietzsche is paralleled in Europe by another posttheistic theology, under the leadership of Dorothee Soelle. Even a brief look into the writings of Altizer⁴ and Soelle⁵ reveals that the God-is-dead movement, in violently attacking given church structures, is theologically rather eclectic, indeed immature. The reason lies precisely in the fact that this movement has first of all to be understood as a revolt in the name of Christian life over against the Christian Church and Christian thought. While Altizer assails the traditional Christian Church, Soelle's front is more traditional Christian thought.

Altizer's insistence upon a complete incarnation of God among man which no longer leaves any room for a transcendent God is dangerously reminiscent of movements which the Church has declared heretical. Although Altizer speaks abundantly of the Jesus of history as the crucial figure in his thinking, has he not in fact given up the genuinely historical element of Christian faith in favor of a more ahistorical mysticism? After all, he admits his indebtedness to mysticism.

³ In a review of Horst Bürkle, *Dialog mit dem Osten* (Stuttgart, 1965), in *Christ und Welt* 18, no. 35 (Aug. 27, 1965) 10, Ernst Benz summarizes his often-expressed criticism of neo-orthodoxy classically as "... einer Einstellung, die zu einer beklagenswerten Verarmung der christlichen Frömmigkeit und zu ihrer Reduktion auf einen frostigen Theologismus beigetragen hat."

⁴ The main recent writings are: Thomas J. J. Altizer, *The Gospel of Christian Atheism* (Philadelphia, 1966); Thomas J. J. Altizer and William Hamilton, *Radical Theology and the Death of God* (Indianapolis, 1966); and the earlier Thomas J. J. Altizer, *Oriental Mysticism and Biblical Eschatology* (Philadelphia, 1961).

⁵ Cf. Dorothee Soelle, *Stellvertretung: Ein Kapitel Theologie nach dem "Tode Gottes"* (Stuttgart, 1965).

He may not be consciously aware of existing similarities to Jacob Boehme's thought; but he does know how his own thinking has been anticipated by Meister Eckhart. When Eckhart, in the tradition of negative theology, distinguishes the personal God, whom the Christians worship in positive terms, from the Godhead that lies behind everything and yet can be approached only negatively, then he has thereby given the framework in which Altizer operates;⁶ for in view of the Godhead of the higher order who is describable only negatively, the positive God of the Christians is but a shadow that does not really exist. The Christian God is really dead or ought to be dead. If such an interpretation of both Eckhart and Altizer is correct, then it makes sense to conceive of Altizer first of all as a mystic who re-enacts in his own person the traditional clash with the organized Church. Since his approach to theology is, therefore, not primarily on the intellectual but on the voluntaristic level, it requires proper initiation into his stance before one can truly understand him. In summation, Altizer represents first of all a revolt of spirituality against the orthodoxy of the Church.

The case lies somewhat differently with Dorothee Soelle. As a student of Gogarten, her attack is directed against inherited ways of theologizing. The great scandal in her eyes is orthodoxy's metaphysical, ontological theism. Having discovered history as the only vehicle of revelation, she flatly rejects all ups and downs, all natural and supernatural contrasts, categories of the here and the beyond. Concretely, she not only rejects the actual metaphysics of Greek origin with which the Church has operated for so long, but she emphatically asserts that we have reached the stage where any metaphysics has become completely incompatible with expressing the heart of Christian faith. Here she has taken up a thought of Luther, who insisted so vehemently that metaphysics does not allow God to be God.⁷ Although Miss Soelle is probably more respectable theologically than Thomas Altizer, yet she

⁶ This thought Eckhart develops much in his German sermons; cf. Raymond Bernard Blakney, ed., *Meister Eckhart: A Modern Translation* (New York, 1941). The originals are in the edition by Josef Quint, *Meister Eckharts Predigten* (Stuttgart, 1958). The crucial sermon "Unum deus" is unfortunately only in Quint, pp. 211-22.

⁷ See especially Martin Luther, *De servo arbitrio* (WA 18, 600 ff.); available in English in J. I. Parker and O. R. Johnston, tr. & eds., *Martin Luther: The Bondage of the Will* (Westwood, 1957).

does not present a theological system either. It is the concept of vicariousness that serves in her thoughts as a prism which both bundles and separates all of her thinking. Thus, theologically she is also rather eclectic. She can be so because her final concern is not theological thought as such, but a way of stating what properly reflects modern Christian existence, which is Christian faith as lived today. She too, therefore, is ultimately motivated by questions of spirituality.

The center seems to accuse orthodoxy of not properly taking into account the given structures of the world within which we have to operate. Its representatives are less concerned with the rightness or wrongness of orthodoxy than with its relevancy. Therefore they have swiftly turned away from theological questions in the narrow sense to the concern of ethics. It is Dietrich Bonhoeffer who has served as the great initiator of this way of thinking both in Europe and in America.⁸ His own pilgrimage on the two Continents has certainly contributed to his quest for genuine secular Christianity. His conception of the worldliness of Christian faith has made history. In Europe it is above all Friedrich Gogarten who still pursues this quest of proper secularism.⁹ One should not, however, overlook the fact that for Gogarten secularism is intricately related to Christology. Younger men carry even further the quest of the world as the arena of Christian faith. Trutz Rendtorff has recently come forth as an advocate for the Hegel renaissance which we are beginning to experience.¹⁰ Hans-Eckehard Bahr is similarly engaged in an interpretation of the self-understanding of the modern world.¹¹ We will hear much from these new men.

⁸ Cf. Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Eberhard Bethge (Munich, 1957-61). See particularly his *Ethik*, ed. Eberhard Bethge (6th ed.; Munich, 1963).

⁹ See, e.g., Friedrich Gogarten, *Verhängnis und Hoffnung der Neuzeit: Die Säkularisierung als Problem der Kirche* (2nd ed.; Berlin, 1958); *Jesus Christus, die Wende der Welt: Grundfragen der Christologie* (Tübingen, 1965); *Die Verkündigung Jesu Christi: Grundlage und Aufgaben* (Tübingen, 1965).

¹⁰ Cf. Trutz Rendtorff, "Überlieferungsgeschichte als Problem der systematischen Theologie," *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 90, no. 2 (Feb., 1965) 81 ff. This article was reviewed and discussed by Friedrich Mildenerger under the title "Fundamentaltheologie oder Dogmatik?" in *Evangelische Theologie* 26, no. 12 (Dec., 1966) 639 ff. See also Trutz Rendtorff, *Die soziale Struktur der Gemeinde: Die kirchlichen Lebensformen im gesellschaftlichen Wandel der Gegenwart* (2nd ed.; Hamburg, 1959).

¹¹ Cf. Hans-Eckehard Bahr, *Poiesis: Theologische Untersuchung der Kunst* (Stuttgart, 1960); *Totale Freizeit* (Stuttgart, 1963). A study on the rise of the *Neuzeit* is presently in print.

In this country Harvey Cox's study of the secular city represents a similar concern.¹² Based on both Bonhoeffer and Gogarten, though misunderstanding them at places, Cox can also do very little with inherited orthodoxies. And the new morality as advocated by Joseph Fletcher also bypasses orthodoxy.¹³ Thus we may conclude that the neutral statements of the center, neutral with respect to inherited orthodoxies, are also much more concerned with questions of modern living than with those of the doctrinal realm. It seems appropriate, therefore, to categorize them too under a resurgence of questions of spirituality.

On the conservative right the all-pervading concern for spirituality becomes even more apparent. Following the initiative of Vatican II, Roman Catholicism has struggled much more consciously with spirituality than the Protestants, who, however, have recently come around to adopting part of the Catholic terminology. The restlessness in modern Catholicism which touches questions of life more than doctrine is exemplified first in the re-evaluations of the religious and secular ways of life and the priestly and lay vocations. Both branches of classical spirituality, asceticism and mysticism, seem to be subject to new discussion.¹⁴ In the contemplative orders even more than in the ones stressing the apostolate, asceticism is being reinterpreted. One senses a reluctance to defend asceticism any longer in traditional Neoplatonic terms. There is a reorientation happening not only to the fathers of the Egyptian desert but above all to biblical injunctions. In the area of mysticism, St. John of the Cross seems to be rediscovered as the great evangelical teacher of the Church. If my information is correct, St. John is no longer the adopted saint of the Carmelites alone, but is equally cherished by Jesuits, Dominicans, and Franciscans.

What about the Protestants and spirituality? For long centuries the Reformation has discredited asceticism within Protestantism. Today, however, new monastic orders spring up on Protestant soil. Men and women search for new forms of spirituality as signs of the world to come raised in the wilderness of this world. They struggle again with the problems of a proper asceticism.

¹² Harvey Cox, *The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective* (New York, 1965).

¹³ Cf. Joseph Fletcher, *Situation Ethics: The New Morality* (Philadelphia, 1966).

¹⁴ This information I owe to conversations and correspondence with Ernest E. Larkin, O.Carm., Professor of Spiritual Theology, Catholic University, Washington, D.C.

As to mysticism, various things could be said. First of all, negatively speaking, one should recognize that the quest for mysticism never died in Protestantism. It was conserved, and unfortunately most of the time adulterated, in various awakening and revival movements. An immediate religious experience with the divine, in a spiritualistic sense, is still being advocated in Protestantism. Today its main sphere of appearance is whatever may be comprised under the term and practice of evangelism, genuine or vulgar.

From a positive point of view, however, the best modern Protestant theology of spirituality is embodied in the writings of Jürgen Moltmann, appraised by many as the rising star on the theological horizon and one who is about to make Barth and Bultmann history. In his theology of hope Moltmann brings together the results of recent scholarship in the field of eschatology, molding them into an outline of theology where the motivation is thoroughly historical.¹⁸ He transcends Al-tizer's vehement attack on the Church by strictly seeing it as a people of God on the way from here to there rather than an institution statically placed between the here and the beyond. Through openness toward the future, he has also overcome the mere denial to metaphysics of a role in theology, as claimed by Miss Soelle. Furthermore, he goes beyond those who are content to stay in the realm of ethics. In the perspective of hope, ethics is a necessary consequence, but not a constitutive element from where one could begin. Compared with Moltmann, the other names whom we have mentioned are still in the process of learning to walk. Moltmann seems to be the one who takes the real step forward, which is possible precisely because he is consciously or unconsciously motivated by questions of spirituality; for hope, the center of his thought, makes all church structures transitory and all theological patterns open to the future. Yet it is something to live by. Thus hope is a principle of life, and particularly of the corporate life of the Church as the People of God. This allows Moltmann his new approach. In his new approach, however, he does not attempt to theologize in the air. He is consciously based on a tradition which

¹⁸ Cf. Jürgen Moltmann, *Theologie der Hoffnung: Untersuchungen zur Begründung und zu den Konsequenzen einer christlichen Eschatologie* (2nd ed.; Munich, 1965). See also his contribution in *Geschichte: Element der Zukunft* (Tübingen, 1965) and his article "Theologie in der Welt der modernen Wissenschaften," *Evangelische Theologie* 26, no. 12 (Dec., 1966) 621 ff.

he reinterprets. He stems out of the German-speaking Reformed tradition. Thus he shares, with the Reformed tradition in general, the concern of the third use of the law. Granted, this is hardly recognizable in his work. It appears, however, at those places where he shows his disinterest in theological questions that do not relate to the life of faith as the modern Christian tries to exemplify it. Furthermore, Moltmann shares in the German branch of the Reformed tradition as it has always modified the stern Calvinistic legalistic emphases of Western Christianity. The practical humanistic emphases of Bucer and of Dutch and Northwest German Reformed Christianity seem to have been conserved in his thinking. This type of the Reformed tradition has again and again been touched by mystical streams. And it may not be accidental that Moltmann has written some of the best articles available, for instance, on Jean de Labadie and Gerhard Tersteegen.¹⁶ Who can study these figures without adopting their quests of a proper Christian spirituality?

One other point of the spirituality concern of the conservative right needs further clarification. We have already suggested that their modern piety differs as widely from earlier pietism as does modern spirituality from ancient spiritualism. The change has come about with a new understanding not only of *pietas* but even more of *spiritus*. The crucial issue at stake is indeed the proper concept of the Spirit. Protestants should have discovered long ago, and Catholics seem to be in the process of discovering now, that no spirituality can be based on a Greek understanding of the spirit. It is just not Christian to contrast a higher life of the spirit to a mere material life in the body. The life of the spirit is not metaphysically above the life of the body. The life of the spirit is the life of the Holy Spirit and only historically ahead, so to speak, of the life in the body as ruled by this eon. Spirit is strictly to be understood as the Holy Spirit. Thus the new quest for spirituality does not ask for spiritual life as such, but poses the question of a life in the Holy Spirit. From here the whole idea of sanctification takes on new dimensions: God is claiming the world through Christ, and Christ is operating in the world through the Holy Spirit, who is

¹⁶ Cf. Jürgen Moltmann, "Jean de Labadie," *Evangelisches Kirchenlexikon* 2 (2nd ed.; Göttingen, 1962) 1015 f.; "Grundzüge mystischer Theologie bei Gerhard Tersteegen," *Evangelische Theologie* 16, no. 1 (Jan., 1956) 205 ff.

the governing principle of His People, the Church, and of the individual members of this Church, His Body, as they participate in its corporate life at large. It is indeed the concept of the People of God as the Body of Christ as the starting point for ecclesiology which draws Catholics and Protestants together today. The formulations of Vatican II closely correspond here to the traditional Protestant concept of the priesthood of all believers, misunderstood as it may have been by the Protestants themselves. Thus the quest for spirituality cuts across boundaries, appearing as a rediscovery of the laity among the Protestants and a new emphasis on the lay apostolate among the Catholics.

If these thoughts have reflected the unity assumed, we should also discuss the unity envisaged. An understanding of Protestantism as such, both as a whole and in its variety, needs to be complemented by a study of Protestantism in relation both to its own parts and particularly to Roman Catholicism. To begin with the first point, it is obvious that Protestantism is today spiritedly engaged in overcoming its divisions. Inner-Protestant ecumenism is at work to bring together its different confessions (on the European scene) and denominations (in the Anglo-Saxon world). In this effort, two approaches seem to compete with each other; both receive a particular color if regarded from the viewpoint of spirituality.

The first approach advocates regional church union. This has traditionally suggested itself for the mission field, where the historical differences of the Western churches were no longer understood. In addition, the minority situation of the younger churches no longer warranted a splitting of forces. But in most cases the regional unions have been bought at the price of a reduction of faith to the lowest common denominator. Is it not true that the Protestant church unions in France, in Canada, in Japan, and in South India may have been able to pool their resources but thereby have not necessarily increased the essential dimensions of the witness of Christian faith? In other words, the inherent danger in regional church unions seems to be an impoverishment rather than an enrichment. Regional churches tend to become provincial in outlook.

The reasons seem to have to do with the question of spirituality. The differences in church structures can be overcome pragmatically and are usually settled by compromises. The differences in theology,

regarded as not world-shaking anyway, are, if not denied, at least neglected. One settles on some fundamentals. In most cases the different spiritualities for which the different ways of worship stand are not even faced. It is not even acknowledged that there may be deeper differences between Lutherans and Calvinists, between Methodists and Baptists, than church structures and thought patterns suggest. Where are the questions dealt with as to how a Lutheran differs from a Calvinist in the way in which he understands and, even more, lives his faith? Where are the questions dealt with as to what constitutes the Baptist way of doing things over against the Methodist way?

The temptation to water down differences seems particularly great in this country. The churches may have helped to shape the country; now the country shapes the churches. A national ethos permeates all American churches. And it is so easy to identify it with Christianity. Therefore, the church unions contemplated among Protestants in this country tend so dangerously to settle for an American church, a church in which the American way of life becomes the bond of union. The American church, however, is the American heresy of the Church. What shall we do in this situation? If neither church forms nor doctrinal commitments allow us to tackle the question of ecumenism properly, why not begin by making the hidden differences of spiritualities conscious in order to overcome them?

There is indeed another, though less popular, way towards inner-Protestant union. For lack of a better word, one should call it a confessional approach, which becomes most apparent when seen from the vantage point of spirituality. It has mainly been advocated by the European churches and is more and more adopted by the younger churches. Again and again is it being engendered when churchmen engage in ecumenical conversations; for in their actual conversations to work out church unions, the question constantly arises: Who are you? The very pragmatic attempt to unite with others raises the wish to understand the other with whom one is about to enter into a union; and the other side must render an account if it wants to participate in a meaningful union. Thus the confessional approach to inner-Protestant union consists of four steps. In the first place, there has to be a careful exercise in defining one's self-understanding as a church, while never giving up the actual meeting with others. One needs such self-

understanding, in the second place, in order to attack the conflicting positions of others and, even more importantly, have one's own position attacked by others. Only in this way is there hope, in the third place, that in all candor we may be able to overcome at least some of our differences. This will then hopefully lead, in the fourth place, to a deeper unity than the one worked out on geographical levels only. One could put it another way. In realizing that it is the love of the Lord of the Church which is our mandate for ecumenism, and in further realizing that it is the love towards each other which actually starts the process of unification by motivating us to meet with each other, we nevertheless balance the quest for love with a quest for truth. It is precisely the quest for truth which seems so often to be sacrificed on the altar of love. But just as truth without love is harsh, so love without truth is inordinate.

Since the World Council of Churches is the main instrument, directly or indirectly, in achieving inner-Protestant unions, we should now ask the question as to where it stands in relationship to the two approaches outlined. On the whole, one can say that the WCC received its start mainly from regional motivations. In its formative stages both the Anglo-Saxon leadership and the repercussion of the mission fields have set the agenda. But during its history the WCC has been led more and more to embrace the Continental approach. This has become visible first in the Christological basis to which the members subscribed.¹⁷ Fortunately, the confessional element has been pushed further, particularly through the participation of the Eastern churches. Now it is not only a Christological but even a Trinitarian formula to which the members of the WCC commit themselves.¹⁸ Let us hope that we may find even more theologoumena in common while we seriously struggle to make our hidden differences apparent and to overcome them in love. This is indeed an approach of Christian spirituality.

We are ready to tackle our final point. If the above description of Protestantism is correct, then it may now be clear why Protestantism observed with such a keen interest what Vatican II has done not only for Roman Catholicism but for the Church as a whole; for just as the

¹⁷ Cf. *First Assembly of the World Council of Churches: Findings and Decisions* (Geneva, 1948) p. 91.

¹⁸ Cf. *The New Delhi Report* (New York, 1962) p. 426.

Reformation did not remain an inner-Protestant event but challenged Roman Catholicism to reconsider its stance, so now many Protestant churches will be forced to reconsider their stance in the light of Vatican II. Unfortunately from a Protestant point of view, Roman Catholicism reacted to the Reformation by narrowing and hardening its position at Trent and in the resulting Counter Reformation. One of the most hopeful signs of the *aggiornamento* is that it is paralleled by a reinterpretation of Trent. Now the Protestants have to rise from the laurels on which they have rested so long and reinterpret the Reformation in the light of the opening-up in Catholicism. And, speaking very literally, only God knows where we will end up. Two things need to be said in this context: the first one has to do with an over-all appreciation, the second with the major details involved.

Again, it is not so much from the viewpoint of church structures nor from the viewpoint of theological patterns but above all from the viewpoint of spirituality that we formulate what seems to us the most important question. In the light of progress within Roman Catholicism and stagnation within Protestantism, the question is this: Did Catholicism become Protestant? Is the Roman Catholic Church of today Protestant enough for us to return to Rome? To say it in the words of Helmut Thielicke: Was the history of Protestantism perhaps just a fever in the body of the Church catholic, though a healing fever?¹⁹ It is my conviction that for many churches the way to Rome is in principle open. It can here be stated only as a thesis that for various reasons those churches that pride themselves on being radical would find it easier to return to Rome than the so-called magisterial churches of which one would expect it first. To put it bluntly: the typical free churches, particularly of the Anglo-Saxon world, and the Roman Catholic Church have one great factor in common, namely, a spirituality based on principles of anthropology that tend toward a Semi-Pelagian position, although Roman Catholic writers particularly would probably eschew the term. Wherever free will is advocated for man's relationship with God and consequently devotional practices are built on it, there common ground has been found. And this seems to apply to the far left and the far right alike. The real stumbling blocks are those Lutherans who still adhere to Luther, and those Calvinists who

¹⁹ Cf. Helmut Thielicke, *Leiden an der Kirche* (Hamburg, 1965) p. 147.

still take Calvin seriously, and those Anglicans who do not resent Cranmer, and even those Catholics who follow Augustine. Those who still are sincerely indebted to the Reformation raise the most crucial questions, which point even further back in history and explain the above inclusion of Augustinian Catholics; for it is indeed their Augustinian, even Pauline, understanding of election and predestination, interpreted as the motivation for a Christian life, that is diametrically opposed to any humanistic Anabaptist or Vulgar Roman free-will spirituality. Here the main work still needs to be done.

The major details in the ongoing dialogue between Protestantism and Catholicism have to do with four main constitutive elements of Christian spirituality. They are related to its basis, Scripture, to its context, the Church, to its form, worship, and to its object, Christ. Within Christology, however, it is not so much Christ Himself who presents a burning problem, but His mother Mary, who has received such a prominent place in Catholic devotion and who today is so consciously defended in Christological terms. Similarly, the arguments about the Church have a focal point, namely, that of the magisterium in general and the papacy in particular.

Protestants are indeed grateful for the new appreciation which Scripture receives in Catholicism. And one wonders whether the two camps still differ on this point. It is gratefully acknowledged that Roman Catholicism no longer regards Scripture as on the same level with tradition. Catholics now see the two held together in a more dialectical function—still, however, by the Church. But how does Protestantism see Scripture? The *sola scriptura* principle of the magisterial Reformation has been individualized first by the radicals, then by many others in the main Protestant traditions, as if it were to mean that only my personal interpretation of Scripture counted. Yet, since many Protestant churches are very unhappy with a complete individualism, the next step was that in fact the churches themselves took over the interpretation of Scripture for their members. Thus the center of authority in many Protestant churches is, for all practical purposes, parallel to Roman Catholicism. It is no longer Scripture as such, again and again asserting its own authority as the *viva vox evangelii*. Rather, it is Scripture on the leash of a church. The most illustrative examples are the fundamentalists of the Anglo-Saxon world—for instance, the so-called

Churches of Christ. With them it is not Scripture as such which is the basis of their life, but a strait-jacketed Scripture, as officially, semi-officially, or unofficially authorized by the larger body. And since many of the other free churches have also adopted some fundamentalistic principles, one finds similar emphases on the Church rather than Scripture among the Methodists and Presbyterians as well. Thus Hans Küng is right when he says that most Protestants are more Catholic than they realize.²⁰

But there remains a remnant of Reformation reaction, particularly of the Lutheran persuasion. It keeps insisting that in spite of the historical character of Scripture, which after all they themselves have discovered, the Church needs to be under the judgment of Scripture, rather than its judge. In adopting the canon, the Church has once for all given up its right to be above Scripture. In this sense the principle of *sola scriptura* is still upheld as the fortress of the Reformation. Where do we go from here at a time when the Catholic is learning what the Protestant may have forgotten, namely, to turn to Scripture as the main source for his own devotional life, individually as well as corporately?

With regard to the Church in general and the magisterium and the papacy in particular, the problem may not be as grave as most Protestants make it, if Peter Meinhold may be followed.²¹ The reason is twofold. First, there is a plain misunderstanding on the side of Protestants. So many of them think that any papal decisions may at random become part of the Church's teaching. Thus they have mistaken the office of the pope personalistically and have made it into a caricature; that is to say, they often believed the pope could make dogmatic pronouncements as his own fancy struck him. They did not realize the limitations the ex-cathedra conditions impose on official teachings of the magisterium. Thus they have also lost sight of the promise which Christ gave to the Church at large that He would lead it into all truth through the Holy Spirit and not allow it to err *in toto*. Even less do

²⁰ See, e.g., Hans Küng, *Kirche im Konzil* (Freiburg, 1963) particularly pp. 147 ff.: "Das Protestantische und das Katholische."

²¹ Best summarized in Peter Meinhold, "A constitution 'De ecclesia' du point de vue évangélique luthérien," *Irenikon* 38, no. 3, 309 ff. See also his *Ökumenische Kirchenkunde: Lebensformen der Christenheit heute* (Stuttgart, 1962) particularly pp. 205 ff.: "Die Stellung des Papstes in der Kirche."

they appreciate that it is but this promise of Christ which Roman Catholicism sees embodied in the papacy properly understood.

The second reason is related to the fact that even Protestants subscribe to the principle of being led into all truth themselves. It may well be that they restrict this hope to their own group and thereby become sectarian. Yet it need not be that narrowly conceived. But I would know of no church body that does not believe in a participation of this promise. If this is correct—and here we follow Meinhold—then the problem Protestants and Catholics are facing is not the primary problem of the principle of authority but the secondary problem of the localization of authority. In principle we all believe and affirm that Christ will keep us as His Church in truth. But where do we localize the authority? Who speaks for the Church when Christ leads it into truth? Is it the papal office? Is it a council? Is it a general conference? Or is it an individual pastor? Once it is seen that all of these possibilities do indeed reflect the same kind of concern, embodied in all Christian spiritualities, then there may be hope that we can move on from here. Christian spirituality does not have its own principle in itself. It is an attitude which presupposes a church endowed with authority, wherever this may be located, which responsibly sets the landmarks, last but not least liturgical, within which proper spirituality is nourished. Protestantism is just beginning to understand that spirituality needs by definition to be liturgical spirituality if it claims to be Christian.

Thus we have already reached our third point, the question of liturgy. It must be granted that there are still very many Protestant churches to which liturgy is an abomination. Historically speaking, they just continue in the poverty which comes with lack of catholicity. But it is equally true that the liturgical movement is not restricted to Catholicism; it has found various expressions in different Protestant churches. And the motif behind these movements, questionable as they may be at times, are on the whole genuine. Very few can participate in liturgical movements and be interested over long periods of time if the questions concern only the beautifying of worship services. They will necessarily stumble over the more vital questions of liturgy as the proper expression of worship and necessary nurturing soil for Christian spirituality. It may just be that most of the serious theologi-

cal encounters have happened where Protestants and Catholics worked together in the liturgical movements. Certainly, lapses still occur. Protestants, to become more liturgical, push their altars against the wall. At the same time Catholics have pulled their altars from the wall and have rediscovered biblical elements in worship. But this is just one of the ironies of history which proves the rightness of the course we are on.

The greatest obstacle probably lies in the field of what Protestants disrespectfully call "Mariolatry." Two factors contribute to the dilemma. On the one hand, Roman Catholic popular devotion to Mary seems so full of excesses that Protestants feel distracted rather than attracted by it. On the other hand, Protestants have never developed any antennae for a positive approach to Mary in the context of their spirituality. Thus both the defensive attitude of Catholicism and the offensive attitude of Protestantism need urgent correction. Research in the field of spirituality will do away with many misunderstandings. But it may be a long time before Protestants will yield an inch. The situation, however, is not hopeless. One of the recent tokens may be Bernt von Heiseler's tribute to Mary, which the late Bishop Dibelius of Berlin has praised so highly.²²

There remains one final point. That point is a plea that the ecumenical discussions of today be consciously carried into the field of spirituality. As Archbishop Ramsey of Canterbury has recently suggested, this may prove to be a most fruitful area where the mandate of our Lord can be realized "ut omnes unum sint."²³

²² Cf. Bernt von Heiseler, *Ein evangelisches Marienlob* (Stuttgart, 1966).

²³ Cf. Michael Ramsey, "Christliche Spiritualität und moderne Welt," *Una sancta* 20 (1965) 3 ff.