

SANCTIFICATION

The Ecumenical Institute
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EXPERIENCING
RENEWED
HOPE

The task of Systematic Theology is to articulate the Christian message in response to the issues of the time. The Church, and indeed culture at large, have recently passed through a period of structural collapse and intense self-criticism. Today the church is verging on a motivating experience of renewed hope, a determined search for fulfillment, an empowering sense of the transcendent. Taken together, these three factors indicate a period of resurgence of the human spirit which is emerging both in the church and in society. More and more persons are coming to see the church as an arena in which real service to mankind can be rendered. Team ministries and community programs express renewed social involvement. Most important, a contemporary sense of transcendence seems widespread in our culture. Human fulfillment is being experienced as a new possibility in the midst of society.

IMPLICATIONS
OF
TRANSCENDENCE

The theological world has recently emerged out of the Neo-orthodox period which occupied its attention for the past sixty years. The issue of the transcendence of God has long dominated the attention of the religious thinkers. Now is the time for drawing forth the human implications of this work, taking seriously the issues of human transcendence and fulfillment, themes the church has traditionally held under the doctrines of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Life, and Sanctification. The assumption that each man can individually be responsible for his own growth and progress has been shattered in this day of the multi-national corporation, international entente, and global communication. The consciousness of nevertheless having the burden of the whole world on his shoulders has driven many to moral collapse, despairing resignation or self doubt. There is a new willingness to become engaged in service to mankind, but lacking are the depth insights into man's spiritual makeup which constitute the foundation for effective service.

TRANSCENDENCE
WITHIN
SOCIETY

A significant insight, coming out of the past half-century of reflection, is that the empirical happening of transcendence occurs WITHIN the secular realm of everyday existence. It is thus possible to speak of human transcendence and fulfillment in terms intelligible to the secular ear. This insight marks a significant advance over the mystical movement in which transcendence was spoken of as somehow outside the realm of the ordinary. The mystics attempted to assert an immediate relationship of man with God, and so find fulfillment in a disengagement from society. The theological insight that transcendence and fulfillment are experienced precisely within the mundane, ordinary dimensions of life opens up the possibility of every man grasping his life as deeply significant.

CREATIVE
FOUNDATIONAL
STUDIES

The program proposed in order to develop these implications involves four phases. First, an historical survey, including the Eastern Fathers, the classical mystics and the classical theologians, collecting and correlating material on sanctification, transcendence and fulfillment. Stage two will research the works of contemporary writings for articles, books and short papers that focus contemporary insights in this arena. It will include extensive consultations with contemporary theologians in visitation and in conference, and with representative clergy as a means of ascertaining the critical issues and of developing the format which will most meet the needs of modern society. The third phase will involve a constructive re-statement of the nature of the Holy Life, bringing into dialogue both the contemporary social experience of man and the insights gained from the theological heritage. Phase four will be the embodiment of this statement in the form of papers and a course which can involve the creative participation of clergy and laity. This would serve as the foundational work for a book.

AUTHENTIC
TRANSCENDENCE
ILLUMINATED

Classically the doctrine of the Holy Spirit has been the neglected doctrine of the Church, occupying a relatively small amount of time and interest among her theologians. On the other hand, much time and ink have been lavished on the doctrine of man as theologians seriously attempted to hammer out an understanding of human authenticity. If these two doctrines can be brought together into a significant contemporary synthesis, then not only will it serve the Church in her struggle with the times; it will also be a major breakthrough in the theological arena. It will illuminate transcendence as it is experienced by man and contribute to his wholeness without falling into the subjectivity which has crippled many previous attempts.

CORPORATE
RESEARCH
METHODS

The methods of the proposed research program will vary from those of traditional scholarship to the unique corporate research methods developed by the Ecumenical Institute. The think tank brings a group with backgrounds in related fields together over a prolonged period. Through a process of creative interaction they hammer out a document which holds the insights of many minds. While this method has by and large not been tried in the arena of theology, it is finding favor in science, social science and industry and indeed may represent a major methodological breakthrough for research in the twentieth century. Methodological innovations such as "charting" make it possible for large groups (such as the staff of the Ecumenical Institute) to survey large bodies of literature quickly and accurately capture insights for a research project.

DEEPENED
SPIRITUAL
VOCATION

The short-range result of this project will be a weekend course particularly for the clergy of all denominations. This forty-four hour course will include lectures, seminars and conversations to present the concepts and draw out the implications of the insights of sanctification for the participants' own situation. Present indications are that this will be a highly motivating experience equipping the clergy for more intense service. Such a course would be a response to numerous requests for insights and methods of renewal directed to the Ecumenical Institute. In the long range, this project may well serve as the stimulus which moves the theological world beyond its present malaise into a new period of creativity and service to the Church and the world.

BREAK-OPEN
WORK
COMPLETED

The Ecumenical Institute is uniquely prepared to undertake this project. For the past two years, building on an intense study of the works of H. Richard Niebuhr and Frederick Gogarten, the Institute staff has begun to develop a contemporary language of transcendence under the rubric of "The Other World in the Midst of This World." In the past twelve months, the staff has done a significant amount of break-open work in the realms of the Holy Life or Sanctification which places this experience in the context of man's contemporary social engagement. An outline for a weekend course has been developed, and initial surveys of literature have also been completed. The staff of this project will include two persons with Ph.D. degrees in Systematic Theology working full time with five people with graduate level educational background who are trained in the research methodologies developed by the Institute.