By Jim Denney  
Thresher Religion Editor

Christians may no longer continue professing a view of God “out there” or “up there” as one who is fixed, according to Dr. Dietrich Ritschl. “We must speak of a God who changes.”

In his Chapel lecture last Thursday, Dr. Ritschl described the “conflicting images of the present” that confront modern Christians. Lack of concensus appears to be the item of the day: in addition to the cleft that exists between Biblical interpreters and theologians, there is a wide variance of opinion within dogmatic theology itself.

As well, virtually no one adheres to the idea that Christians can formulate ethical insight.

Helplessness Extended
Helplessness in the theological realm extends over denominational lines and is one of the factors in the growing ecumenical movement, according to Dr. Ritschl.

Optimism in the use of language has disappeared since the years following World War II, and the “articulation of faith” has become a major problem for theologians.

“We are no longer certain that human words can convey our thoughts.” Because of the inability to express concepts, American theology has seen the translation of familiar, “but irrelevant” words into the so-called “secular language.”

Sees Extremes
Dr. Ritschl sees two extremes between which American theologies vasculate today. The first, in violent reaction to the required study forthcoming.

Scripture Quoted
“It’s hard to find a place where such a plan works happily,” declared Dr. Hole; whereupon Dr. Mackey demanded a definition of “happily,” and the matter was summarily dropped.

The program concluded with Dr. Isele’s criticism of the “atheletics” section of the Ten Year Plan, which he called “the Scriptures.” The Plan promises a “continuing effort toward maintaining as high academic standards as are feasible with respect to athletes”—and this, Dr. Isele termed “hypocrisy.”

European theological tradition, espouses the view that “God is dead” and that Christ is the all-important factor in Christianity.

The other declares that God is understood in terms of the type of life led by men. This latter view, which is more the traditional American usage of God, relegates Jesus to a very minor role.

The question being raised about God today is not, however, answered by any of the theologies presently in vogue. Nor, indeed, can strict adherence to traditional theology provide a solution to the problem.

Unchanging God
A great deal of the problem lies in the fact that since the days of St. Augustine, God has been conceived as “unmoving and unchangeable.” In Augustinian terms, “history is God’s mishap,” said Dr. Ritschl, “and the true-believer must overlook history” in order to understand God. In this same type of thought, man’s maturing is viewed as only relative to the fixed nature of God.

This view is in direct opposition to the one presented in the Bible, according to the speaker. God is spoken of in the Scripture in terms of historical acts that are very much limited in time. “God changes in history.”

Demands Opposites
“Nothing does not change (about God) is his faithfulness to us.” The God that at one point demanded that the people of Israel go to war and at the next point demanded the opposite is only the “same,” said Dr. Ritschl, in the concern for His people.

It is in terms of the past experiences with God that Christians ought to speak of God. Recollection of encounter with God is that upon which Christians must build hope for the future. God’s faithfulness is the memory held throughout history.

Moses was refused a definition of God which to which he could commit his people. He was only given a “direction.”

In this same way, the Church must function in the circumstances it is presented with only the remembrance of the past. "And," said Dr. Ritschl, "we are not memoryless."