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The Hope of the Church and the Hope of the World

by

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1. "Hope" is to be understood in the following sense: as the consoling, encouraging and purpose-giving prospect of a future event, which promises a change for the better in present circumstances.
2. Faith without hope is not Christian faith, and love without hope is not Christian love. Both in its general sense and in its details, the Gospel signifies under all circumstances man's looking forward: towards the better things that shall come from God.
3. The Church ought and could represent and preach in the world the great all-embracing and ultimate hope: the impending return of Jesus Christ as the universal revelation of the world's reconciliation with God, which has already taken place in Jesus Christ.
4. At certain times and in certain circumstances smaller, individual and temporary hopes (in harmony or in conflict with those entertained by the world itself) should and could be included in this message of the Church.
5. The truth and the power of this message of the Church depends at all times, and under all circumstances, on whether the Church itself has already learnt the lesson, or is in process of seriously learning the lesson, that it wishes to teach to the world. In other words, it depends whether the Church's own life is rooted in the great hope for the world founded in Jesus Christ and directed towards Him: in the confident assurance that this hope is the only one - and also that it is quite certain and sufficient.
6. If the life of the Church itself exhibited confidence in this hope for the world, this would show itself first of all in the Church's decisiveness and manner of life, as a sign of the return of Christ, i.e. as a witness to the reconciliation already effected in Him between the world and God.
7. The "article of faith" *Jesus Christus Dominus mundi* is right as such, but could signify hope within the world and within the Church itself if the Church were so certain of itself and of the consequences of that faith for the future that its own life had to be a witness to the truth of that faith.

8. The statement that modern man lives between despair and secular Messianisms, between disillusionment and Utopianism, is not a Christian statement; it is a piece of arrogant, pessimistic worldly widdom. The Church which makes such a statement is a Church without hope. A Church which lives in and from its great hope founded in Jesus Christ and directed towards Him will merely pass over this statement and forget it.
9. The internal development of Roman Catholicism (from the Council of Trent via the Vatican to the most recent dogma about Mary) and the deep ignorance in the rest of the Church about the anti-Christian character of Roman-Catholicism, are not proofs of the decisiveness of a Church which is hastening towards the return of Jesus Christ.
10. The lack of mutual understanding -- exemplified by the way in which Reinhold Niebuhr and I (as ostensible or real representatives of an "Anglo-Saxon" and a "Continental" Protestantism respectively) spoke completely at cross-purposes after Amsterdam in 1948 -- was also no proof of a living decisiveness in the Church with regard to its hope.
11. The same applies to the growth since 1948 of definite confessionalism, traditionalism, institutionalism and liturgicalism in many Churches. Whatever may be the bases or the explanation of these movements, they have nothing to do with the life of a forward-looking Christendom.
12. The Church, which in the present East-West conflict has failed to find any definite independent line, and which has found nothing better to say about the Korean conflict (for instance) than what we heard at Toronto and after, should not imagine that its own knowledge and experience are adequate to enable it to tell the world, where its hope lies.
13. It would be presumptuous for the Church to do so, since it has left Martin Niemöller and Gustav Heinemann in the lurch in their struggle against the madness of German rearmament.
14. The same applies to a Church which has apparently decided to hold its Second Assembly not in India or Africa, but near Chicago!
15. The same applies to a Church which does not seem to have noticed that it is out of place for a Church, that is awaiting its Lord as Lord of the world, to be celebrating the Jubilee of an Apostle!
16. The question of the relation between the expectation of the Kingdom of God and the "anxieties and struggles of history" will have some meaning when (and only when!) the Church has the good conscience to live in expectation of the Kingdom of God, instead of existing on different expectations, or living merely in the past. All discussions on this question are doomed to failure, and all Messages from the churches are bound to be hollow and unauthentic, unless the Church's good conscience in its own relationship to the Kingdom of God is obvious and can be assumed as a matter of course.
17. The question which the Church must face about its own life in hope is today the concrete form of the question concerning the presence and the work of the Holy Spirit.
18. The Second Assembly that is planned for 1954 should not be convened, nor should its Message be prepared beforehand, unless the question has been squarely faced: have we really been given a spiritual mandate for it? is there a spiritual need for it? is it spiritually possible?