

CHAPTER 1

THE CHRISTIAN HOPE

Why we must Speak about Hope

In such a time as this, the Church of Jesus Christ cannot but speak of hope. He is our hope, and as we have our hope in Him we are bound to proclaim that hope to the world. This is the fundamental reason for the choice of this theme.

But we must now add that the correspondence which has followed the publication of our first report confirms our conviction that this is the right theme for the Assembly.

It is clear to us from the correspondence that our first report, in spite of its serious inadequacy, which we are the first to acknowledge, did touch a vital point. It caused people in effect to say, "We do not altogether like the Commission's attempt to define the Christian hope: but what that hope is and how it can be expressed in word and act, these are vitally important questions." The first section of the report was received with mixed feelings. While it was admitted that no treatment of the Christian hope could omit the hope that Christ will, in the words of the Creed, "come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead," there were doubts, and even a certain alarm expressed at the idea of launching in the Assembly such a discussion of the Last Things. These doubts arise from the actual situation in the churches. For many the hope of Christ's coming is vague, remote and somewhat problematical, with little bearing on daily Christian life and prayer. They point with concern to certain groups both within and outside the churches, actively at work in nearly every country and especially among the younger churches, for whom the final hope of Christ's coming in glory is of such overwhelming concern that speculation about its date and manner is a major preoccupation, to the neglect and even denial of Christian responsibilities in society. We have been asked whether the language used in our report would not, if it were accepted, increase the number of those for whom the Christian hope is

an apocalyptic hope.

The fact must be faced that one reason for the rise of extreme apocalyptic and millenarian beliefs is the virtual disappearance among many Christians and in the preaching of many churches of the distinctly Christian hope in Christ's coming again. Those who preach apocalyptic views are right in pointing out that the New Testament is full of references to a salvation yet to be revealed, a Kingdom yet to come. The response which they evoke among many who are poor, wretched and despised or disillusioned and frustrated is a reminder to us that many hearts long for some mighty change in things as they are, some great deliverance from their lot.

We are therefore encouraged to feel that a conversation within and between the churches about the Christian hope (a conversation which has indeed started already) may lead us at the Assembly to speak with greater confidence about all the matters that will be debated there.

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