

Seton Hall University

eRepository @ Seton Hall

The Bridge: A Yearbook of Judaeo-Christian
Studies, Vol. II

The Institute of Judaeo-Christian Studies

1956

Hope and Despair at Evanston

Edward H. Flannery

Institute of Judaeo-Christian Studies

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarship.shu.edu/jcs-bridge-II>



Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#), [Catholic Studies Commons](#), and the [Jewish Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Flannery, Edward H., "Hope and Despair at Evanston" (1956). *The Bridge: A Yearbook of Judaeo-Christian Studies, Vol. II*. 23.

<https://scholarship.shu.edu/jcs-bridge-II/23>

Edward H. Flannery

HOPE AND DESPAIR AT EVANSTON

ON AUGUST 27, 1954, at Evanston, Illinois, the Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches voted 195 to 150 to strike from a statement on "Christ—the Hope of the World" any reference to Israel's part in Christian hope. This, the most turbulent session of the seventeen-day Assembly, was, at the same time, one of the most important, for it represented a great ecumenical victory in that 162 denominations from forty-two countries succeeded in affirming in theological terms their unity in Christ as the sole hope of mankind. It was also the session that witnessed the sharpest divisions and educed the strongest negative emotions. Strangely, the reef on which the concord of the Assembly was shaken was the people of Israel.

The conflict was largely unforeseen and came as a painful revelation to most of the 1,242 delegates and participants. There was rapid fire from several quarters against affirming a special connection between the destiny of the people of Israel and the fulfillment of the Christian hope, as well as against affirming any special obligation to bring the gospel to Israel. Political, sociological, and scriptural issues were raised, and soon the discussion became hopelessly ensnarled. The vote was taken, the references scotched, and the question recommended for further study. Two days later the Second Assembly closed, with little prospect of an early resolution of the problem that had so shaken it.

It will not be unprofitable, nor ungracious I trust, for a Catholic to study this failure of the World Council to resolve a question which tests the metal of our theologies, of our moral attitudes, and of much of our thinking.

THE MAIN THEME

A FIFTY-PAGE Report on the Assembly's Main Theme, "Christ—the Hope of the World," was presented at Evanston as the fruit of three

years of study by an Advisory Commission, made up of some thirty theologians and churchmen of high rank, such as Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Charles Malik. The Commission had met in three major sessions to draft a "common word on the Christian Hope as the result of genuinely ecumenical encounter."¹ Its first efforts were marked by extensive disagreement, yet in the end a Report signed by all members was handed over to the Executive Committee of the World Council.

On August 15, the first Sunday of the Assembly, the Report, published four months previously, was formally presented to the plenary body by Edmund Schlink, rector of the University of Heidelberg, and Professor Robert L. Calhoun of Yale, both members of the Advisory Commission. Their addresses offered interesting contrasts. The standpoint of the Continental theologian was frankly biblical and eschatological: "Christ is the end of the world," he said. He is our hope because He liberates us from all binding ties to it. Christian hope begins where human hope leaves off, in His second coming. Speaking for those for whom earthly hope had failed, mostly Europeans who had seen Nazism and Communism at work, Professor Schlink told his listeners that the apocalyptic passages of the New Testament "illuminate the whole of human life and the situation of the Christian in the world and become a definite stronghold, by means of which God makes it possible for man to live, to suffer and to die joyfully." Professor Calhoun, a Congregationalist, spoke rather of temporal hope, of the gospel as "a word for this world." He was the spokesman for those of "activist" temper, mostly Americans influenced by the "social gospel," with its emphasis on the value of the human person, on the brotherhood of men, and on love as a social force. "We must conceive of Christian hope," he declared, "primarily as assurance that our best efforts will succeed, with God's help."² Here was the tension that had marked the discussions of the Advisory Commission and that would mark the deliberations of the Committees and the sessions of the Assembly.

For the most part, reaction was in Professor Calhoun's favor. Evans-ton, obviously, was too thriving an American community to serve as a setting for Professor Schlink's eschatological message. Already it was

1. "Report of the Advisory Commission on the Main Theme," p. v; in *The Christian Hope and the Task of the Church* (New York: Harper, 1954).

2. See *The Christian Century*, August 25, 1954, pp. 1004, 1006; *Time*, August 30, 1954, p. 64.

clear that the Assembly's mood was optimistic and somehow modernist, suited rather to the temperament of many of the Americans and Anglo-Saxons present than to the more somber view of the Continentals, and in a way foretelling the vote the Assembly would take on Israel.

The Report on the Main Theme is a lengthy statement, rhetorical in style and homiletic in genre. Divided into three sections, "Christ Our Hope," "Christ and His People," and "Christ and the World," it makes these chief points:

1. Christian hope is centered in Christ crucified and risen, in Him who has "overcome the world," all the powers of evil, sin, and death. It cannot be spoken of unless judgment and repentance are spoken of too, for it stands under the sign of the Cross. No mere extension or reaffirmation of human desires, it looks forward to where human hopes end—to the end of this world and to the kingdom to come.

The story of Christian hope is told in the Scriptures. The Old Testament recounts its coming forth from God the Creator and its growth in Israel. Men gripped by God's promise and possessed by His Spirit foretold that the Messiah would come to redeem mankind from sin; and none of Israel's failings could deter God from His plan. The New Testament announces that the promised Deliverer has come, whose life, death, and resurrection have brought a new life, a new community, and a new hope.

In one sense, Christian hope has already been fulfilled. In Christ, history is transfigured; a new humanity and a new age, the reign of the Spirit, has begun. By the power of the Spirit, the Christian can surmount suffering and triumph over evil. His hope, then, is fulfilled, but not fully; it is a having and a hoping.

A pilgrim, he must carry on the warfare of the flesh and the spirit. Hence a twofold temptation assails him: to give too much attention to this life or to stand aloof from it. It is by faith and fellowship that he shall be victorious. "A true index of our having and hoping is given to us in the sacrament which under various names—Lord's Supper, Holy Communion, Eucharist, Mass—is common to the whole Church."³

Fulfilled and yet expectant, the Christian's hope looks to the future. He knows that the pure in heart shall see God as He is, that in a new heaven and a new earth the dead shall rise, and that the holy city shall appear. But he does not know at what moment his hope shall be realized, so he must watch and pray. To hope for the coming Day is

3. Here, as all through the Report, it is the voice of Protestant theologians that is heard. For the Catholic, the difference is greater than one of name.

not to say that earthly endeavors and hope are vain. The consummation of all things "means neither that the history of this world will be swept aside as irrelevant, nor that our efforts will be finally crowned with success."

2. The one concrete result in history of the tremendous Event comprising the incarnation, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, is the Christian Church, which bears responsibility for the world for which Christ died. A historical society, living among other societies in the world, the Church is yet not of the world. By proclaiming the gospel, by worship and sacraments, by its fellowship in the Holy Spirit, it carries on the work of Christ. Its members are members of Him and yet frail, ignorant, and sinful men. For this reason it ever stands under the judgment of God and in need of forgiveness. It fails particularly when its members are self-righteous or arrogate to themselves the things that await them only at the end of the way. Its task is to preach the gospel to all men without exception, and its mission, therefore, is "the most important thing that is happening in history."

The Church is essentially one, and yet its unity is concealed, even mocked, by the many divisions between and within the various Christian communions. A scandal, the divided state of the Church hinders its missionary effort to gather all men into unity. Hence each denomination must examine itself to find what steps could be taken toward greater unity. The Church is also holy, but, always tempted to settle down among secular societies, it must live in humility and penitence and be constantly renewed in Christ until the final victory.⁴

3. A divine purpose overarches the whole of the world's history, and because God is its Lord, Christians must reject the doctrines of automatic progress or of fated decline. But though God is history's Lord, human responsibility has a part to play, and human misuse of knowledge and power complicate the flow of history. Men have their own hopes and plans, which do not always take the divine plan into account, and in so far as they do not, they are deceptive and misleading. It is the task of the Church to sift what is truth from what is deception in them.

In this age of encircling despair, there are many hopes around which

4. This, the best of modern Protestant thinking on the Church, does not square at every point with the Catholic vision of the Church. A Catholic would never say that the Church is under the judgment of God, even though he is painfully aware that he and his fellow members are. Nor would he, in his sorrow over the divisions among Christians, declare that Christian unity is hidden. To him it is manifest in the Catholic Church. On these points, see the statement by Catholic theologians quoted in the closing section of this survey, "Catholic Response."

men rally, but four of them seem to be representative. Democratic humanism, scientific humanism, Marxism, and Nationalism hold out glowing promises. All such secular hopes doubtlessly include partial truths and possibilities, yet, promising too much, they are interlarded with illusion and evil. To those in their grip, the Church must demonstrate that the gospel alone can conserve what is best in them and add what is lacking. "The Church needs to be warned against clouding its witness and neglecting its present duty by a disproportionate emphasis on other-worldly hopes."

To those who have abandoned hope and become embittered by injustice and suffering, as to the atheistic "existentialists," who have renounced hope in favor of despair, the answer is the same: Jesus Christ, who "has plumbed the depths of human existence as no one else, [who has] passed through the darkest night of the human soul . . . before rising victorious," is the hope of all without exception. Hence the Christian, in his daily work, in social and political action, is to bring this hope to all, especially to those lacking the necessities of life, to the ignorant, to the godless. Serving Christ in serving them, he will strive to bring them justice, freedom, truth, and peace. "The life of service lived in Christ is therefore a life of unquenchable hope."⁵

Such is the Christian hope as described in the Report on the Main Theme. Immediately after its presentation to the Assembly, the Report was handed over for study and criticism to the delegates, divided into fifteen study groups, which discussed it in four two-hour sessions during the following several days. After this it was passed on to a Co-ordinating Committee, made up of the secretaries and chairmen of the study groups, who brought with them the recommendations of their respective groups. From these recommendations, the Co-ordinating Committee, under the chairmanship of Bishop Hanns Lilje of Hanover, evolved a Statement designed to serve as an introduction and a corrective to the Report on its final trip to the floor of the Assembly and from there to the member churches themselves.

In the hands of the study groups the Report met with considerable criticism. Few rejected or accepted it in its entirety. Many felt that a "note of joyous affirmation and radiant expectancy" was missing. Some wished that a strong solidarity toward non-Christian religions had been

5. This condensation of the Report uses, as far as sentence structure allows, the words of the Report itself, whose complete text may be found in *The Christian Hope and the Task of the Church*.

emphasized; others did not. Again, some found too sharp a distinction drawn between the Church and the world. But the brunt of the criticism bore on the failure of the Report to include Israel in the perspective of Christian hope. To understand what happened in the study groups and on the floor of the Assembly on this subject, we must retrace our steps.

THE DEBATE ON ISRAEL

THE debate on Israel's destiny at the Plenary Session of the Assembly was not planned but adventitious. Yet from the time that the World Council of Churches first met at Amsterdam in 1948, a series of events converged on Evanston, in such manner, we now see in retrospect, as to render the flare-up on the floor of the Assembly all but inevitable.

FORESHADOWS

At Amsterdam, the World Council had received—but not adopted—a pronouncement on Israel which recommended that the member churches include the Jewish people in their evangelistic work, and which told of the need to study the causes of and remedies for anti-Semitism, the opportunities to co-operate with Jews in social and civic affairs, and the many questions raised by the creation of the new state of Israel.⁶ The Council resolved that "the Assembly recognizes the need for more detailed study . . . of the many complex problems which exist in the field of relations between Christians and Jews."⁷

The Assembly's resolution found echo in several quarters of the Protestant ecumenical world. Without delay the Committee on the Christian Approach to the Jews, a branch of the International Missionary Council of the World Council, set to work on a symposium on the relations of Judaism and Christianity. The results were published in 1954 in *The Church and the Jewish People*, under the editorship of Göte Hedenquist, a Lutheran pastor, director of this Committee. It was an important pioneering effort. Not only did its authors fulfill the directives of Amsterdam but they probed some of the deeper theological prob-

6. The complete text of the Amsterdam "Report on the Christian Approach to the Jews," of which these recommendations are a part, can be found in *The Church and the Jewish People*, ed. by Göte Hedenquist (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1954), pp. 201-203.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

lems binding and separating Israel and Christianity. It was their hope that their reflections would offer a stimulus to discussion at the oncoming Evanston Assembly.

From 1951 to 1953, the Advisory Commission on the Main Theme and the various Preparatory Commissions⁸ drafted their reports and surveys. None of them came to grips with the question of Israel in any form whatever. The Commission on the Main Theme, we have seen, was content to allude to Israel's function in preparing the path for the Gospel by Law and Prophets, but made no reference to its possible relation to the Christian future, to Christian hope. So also the Committee on Intergroup Relations, which acknowledged Israel's place of privilege under the Old Covenant but emphasized rather the oneness of the human race in the New Dispensation, in which "there is neither Jew nor Greek."⁹ In its Survey, this Commission specifically excluded an "explicit treatment of anti-Semitism, principally because this question involves other issues of such depth and scope as to place a full consideration of it outside the bounds of a discussion on race."¹⁰ In its Resolutions, however, this Commission did affirm its opposition to anti-Semitic prejudice as "incompatible with Christian faith," and recommended to the Central Committee that study of the problem be pressed forward in conjunction with the Committee on the Christian Approach to the Jews.¹¹ At one moment during the deliberations of the Commission on Evangelism, the possibility of making special mention of Israel was entertained, but it was then abandoned as a problem too special for its survey. The other Commissions maintained a hands-off policy on the subject.

Some efforts were made to combat this timidity toward the question of Israel's hope. Most notable was doubtless that of a group of students working under Karl Barth, theologian of Basel and member of the Advisory Commission on the Main Theme; their memorandum was circulated among the delegates at Evanston but, it seems, never published. Entitled "The Hope of Israel," it deals with the problem under

8. The Preparatory Commissions dealt with the six topics planned for consideration, other than the Main Theme: Faith and Order, Evangelism, Social Questions, International Affairs, Intergroup Relations, The Laity.

9. "Intergroup Relations," pp. 25-33; in *The Christian Hope and the Task of the Church*.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

11. *The Evanston Report*, ed. by W. A. Visser 't Hooft (New York: Harper, 1955), p. 159.

six points. The first three see Israel as the people of hope: It is messianic hope, the expectation of the kingdom, that is the life of Israel, that gives unity and meaning to its history, that yields the secret of its preservation. In spite of their purely political origin, Zionism and the state of Israel must be taken as a sign of the vitality of this hope in our day. The Messiah has come, and with Him, the memorandum continues in the fourth point, the pardon, the peace, and the kingdom of God. But He was rejected and crucified by His people. (It is disappointing to note that here the Barthian memorandum seems to place the responsibility on all Jews, past and present.) Because of the sin of rejection, the promise of God has been transferred to the Church. Still, Israel's election remains, and if the Church is to be alive to its own hope, it must keep alive its interest in the Jewish people. This is the fifth point, while the last shows that Christian hope cannot find its fulfillment unless Israel returns to Christ. Hence the Church must announce its hope to the Jews and, by its whole existence, bear witness to it. Yet their coming into the Church will be the work of none other than Christ Himself.¹²

The points of this memorandum were amplified by Göte Hedenquist, who gave a précis of Barth's views on Israel as contained in his *Dogmatic Theology*. What follows here is extracted from this précis, aided by reference to Barth's own text.

There is only one, everlasting Israel in the Old and in the New Testaments, one Israel with one Lord. The people of Israel, before and after the birth of Christ, and the Christian Church, become visible on Pentecost, are two forms, two aspects, of the one, inseparable communion in which Jesus Christ has His existence in earthly history. Jesus is in one person Israel's crucified Messiah (and as such the hidden Lord of the Church) and also the risen Lord of the Church (and as such no other than the revealed Messiah of Israel). Though the old and the new Israel are two aspects, two "economies," of the one grace of God, there is only one history, beginning in the old, having its center in Jesus Christ, and hastening toward its goal in the new. Israel, as the chosen people of God, is potentially also the Church for the world, as the Christian Church of Jews and of Gentiles is still only a little Israel surrounded by the nations of the world.

From the days of the apostles, the Church has understood itself as a

12. See Paul Démann, N.D.S., "Israël à Evanston," *Cahiers Sioniens*, IX, 1 (March 1955), p. 63.

Church of Jews and Gentiles, and as the "Israel of God" (Gal 6:16). Were one to deny this unity, one would deny Jesus Christ Himself. The very existence of the Synagogue alongside the Church is an ontological impossibility, a wound, indeed a void, in the Body of Christ, which is utterly intolerable. Does this create a "Jewish question"? Does it not rather pose a question to Christians? Can they rest as long as an estranged, opposite Israel faces the Church? "Jewish missions" is really not the right word for the call to abolish the separation, a call which, without ceasing, ought to go forth from the Church to those brethren not yet recognizing their unity with it.¹³

Pastor Hedenquist's summary was part of an address given on August 8, just a few days before the Evanston Assembly. This was the opening day of a four-day conference at Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, which the American branch of the Committee on the Christian Approach to the Jews had convoked with a view to studying the problem of Israel's hope in the light of the Evanston Main Theme, "Christ—the Hope of the World." The proceedings of this Conference were the furthest evolved position Protestant theology had taken on the question of Israel. Two excerpts from addresses by the German-born Franz von Hammerstein and the Austrian-born Dr. Frederick Neumann, both engaged in pastoral work in the United States, elucidate the position taken:

Israel has a special place in God's Revelation. Even today it keeps this place. There is no final hope for the Church without the Jews, without Israel. Therefore we should not only love Israel, but know it and try to understand it better than we do.¹⁴

Our destiny as a Church is in a mysterious way bound up with the destiny of God's Old Covenant people. Before the full number of Jewish musicians have joined in, the eternal kingdom orchestra cannot start performing the jubilant symphony of the love of God in Christ, the Redeemer of all. It can only do some rehearsing.¹⁵

The Conference concluded by issuing a set of resolutions which summarized its findings and was distributed among the participants in the Evanston Assembly four days later. It read in part:

13. This summary is drawn from Hedenquist in *The Christian Approach to the Jews*, Addresses Delivered at the Pre-Evanston Conference (New York: National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., 1954), pp. 4-5; and from Karl Barth, *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik*, IV/1 (Zurich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1953), pp. 747-749.

14. *The Christian Approach to the Jews*, p. 31.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 92.

The Christian hope cannot be fully comprehended without relation to the hope of Israel, manifested not only in the Old Testament, but also in God's continuous dealings with the Jewish people. The existence of the Synagogue and of the Jewish witness to the God of Abraham after two thousand years of Christian history is a challenge to the Church. The Church cannot rest until the title of Christ to the Kingdom is recognized by His own people according to the flesh.¹⁶

This Conference recognizes the urgent and imperative need for a united work of Christian witness in the new State of Israel, calls the attention of the Churches in the United States and Canada to the immediate opportunity for evangelism in this new State.¹⁷

Amsterdam to Evanston, then, was not a path of rectilinear progress toward a clear and common formulation of Israel's place in Christian hope. Contrariwise, the seeds of conflict were unwittingly being sown. On one side, the Preparatory Commissions were markedly reluctant to include the people of Israel in their Reports and Surveys; on the other, the Committee on the Christian Approach to the Jews and the followers of Karl Barth called vigorously and insistently for Israel's inclusion. The lines seemed drawn. But no one as yet suspected the troubles ahead.

DEBATE ON THE FLOOR

Acting on complaints made in the fifteen study groups that the Report on the Main Theme did not allude to Israel's hope—complaints inspired by the findings of the Lake Geneva conference and by the Barthian memorandum—the Co-ordinating Committee, under Bishop Lilje, suggested two references to the people of Israel. The first spoke of the need for a "statement of the New Testament concept of the ultimate fulfillment of God's promises to the people of ancient Israel and the consequent special responsibility of the Christian Church for the proclamation of the hope in Christ to the Jews." The second declared: "The Christian concern for the Jewish people, scattered over the whole world, is a sign of hope. It was the hope of ancient Israel which was fulfilled in the coming of Christ. His Church cannot rest until the title of Christ to the kingdom is recognized by the people among whom He came in the flesh."¹⁸

16. *Ibid.*, p. 127.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 128.

18. See Robert Smith, "Israel at Evanston," *The International Review of Missions*, XLIV, 174 (April 1955), p. 200.

On August 25, in his presentation to the plenary Assembly of the Report on the Main Theme, Bishop Lilje emphasized that in asserting the Christian hope, there must not be left unmentioned the biblical witness to the bond between Israel's fate and the consummation of that hope. Nevertheless, it was not long before a barrage of criticism came down on the two rather timid references to Israel. The first to speak was Bishop W. H. Stewart, a Church of England prelate from the Old City of Jerusalem, who charged that they were superfluous, since by His death Christ was the hope of the whole world without distinction. After him, Dr. Aziz Sorial Atiya, president of the Higher Institute for Coptic Studies in Cairo, took the floor and pleaded with the Assembly to strike them out, for fear that they might be interpreted as an approval of the new state of Israel. Bishop Lilje answered that, while political interpretations must be avoided, the issue was too important to be omitted. A resolution was passed to amend the Statement and present it again to the Assembly on Friday, the 27th.

For a nonparticipant, the sequence of events on Friday is hard to follow. Two exciting sessions were held, one in the afternoon, one in the evening. In general, those opposing any reference to Israel were divided into two camps. Arab Christians, including the Coptic Orthodox churches, the Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch, and the evangelical churches of Syria and Lebanon, fearing political implications in the references, wanted them dropped in their entirety. They were joined by Charles P. Taft, mayor of Cincinnati and one of the most outstanding Protestant laymen in the United States. In the spirit of the "good will" movement, he called for the deletion of the second half of the first reference: ". . . the consequent special responsibility of the Christian Church for the proclamation of the hope in Christ to the Jews." "I think," he said, "it would jeopardize my friendships and my relations with my Jewish friends."¹⁹ Bishop Angus Dun, an American Episcopalian prelate, sided with Charles Taft.

The situation was not without its touch of irony. Orthodox and fundamentalist Arab Christians struggled side by side with American "activists" in an effort to prevent European eschatologists from affirming Israel's place in Christian hope. Philo-Semites, anxious not to offend Jews, worked hand in hand with anti-Zionists who, more than anything else, feared giving help to the new state of Israel. The alliance was an uneasy one, yet effective and marked for success.

19. See *Time*, September 6, 1954, p. 42.

Tense moments were not the scarcest commodity at the Friday sessions. Dr. Farid Audeh of Beirut, president of the Council of the Evangelical Churches of Syria, pleaded with the Assembly not to aggravate the difficulties of Christians in the Near East, and had some hard words for the state of Israel which put the entire body ill at ease. A cablegram from Dr. Charles Malik, Lebanese ambassador to the United Nations, sent after his departure from Evanston, had a strong effect on everyone. In what seems a misreading of the text and tenor of the references, a misapprehension probably engendered by the third point of the Barthian memorandum, he declared in part that while there undoubtedly was in the Bible a profound aspiration to see the Jews return to the Cross and to recognize Jesus as the Messiah, this authentic aspiration did not have the least relevance to the state of Israel or the return of the Jews to Palestine.²⁰ A second talk by Bishop Stewart, who resides in the Kingdom of Jordan, had an anti-Israel flavor, disturbing to many. A calmer address by Dr. Atiya had a quietening influence; it was, nonetheless, a very effective plea for deletion of the references.

There was little doubt at this point where matters stood. The opponents of the references had drawn considerable applause. Many neutral delegates, especially Americans, were swayed by the violence of the opposition; rather than chance a rift in the Assembly, they threw their support against retaining the references. Those who favored them, mostly Continental churchmen with their grieved memories of Hitler's persecution of the Jews, were thunderstruck. Unaccustomed to the political view taken in the Assembly, they saw in it a new form of anti-Semitism; not having counted on this turn of events, they seemed at a loss as to what to do. They appeared as if hypnotized, it was said;²¹ actually, they were scandalized, but were unable to find a foothold against the wave of opposition rapidly assuming tidal dimensions. At last, Dr. H. Berkhof, a Dutch Reformed pastor, took the stand and explained that the question was not political but biblical and was based on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans. The people of Israel, he declared, has not been finally rejected by God. Robert Smith, editor of the *Quarterly News Sheet of the Christian Approach to the Jews*, spoke in the same vein. Applause rose from the German, French, and Swiss sections.

20. See Démann, *loc. cit.*, p. 66.

21. *Quarterly News Sheet of the Christian Approach to the Jews*, XXIV, 4 (December 1954), p. 4.

The moment for a ballot had arrived. Votes were cast in an overcharged atmosphere and had to be counted three times, so great was the confusion. The result was clear, however: by a vote of 195 to 150 the Assembly had repudiated the allusions to Israel's part in Christian hope. Immediately after the vote Dr. Franklin Clark Fry, sensing the confusion of many delegates, called, in the name of a group of Lutheran delegates, "for further study and ecumenical conversations" on the issue. Bishop Stewart objected to this motion, but it was carried anyway—a poor consolation for the defeated forces.

The last word had not yet been spoken. On Saturday morning, some of the delegates who had been in favor of the references gathered to draft a minority declaration. That evening, before the plenary Assembly, Dr. Joseph Sittler of the Lutheran seminary at Maywood, Illinois, read their declaration, which bore the signatures of twenty-four outstanding theologians from England, Scotland, France, Holland, Norway, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Switzerland, Canada, and the United States—it is perhaps not unimportant to note that six of them were from this country. The signers stated that their concern was wholly biblical and should not be confused with any political position taken toward the state of Israel, and then continued:

We believe that Jesus Christ is the Saviour of all mankind. In Him there is neither Jew nor Greek; but we also believe that God elected Israel for the carrying out of His saving purpose. Jesus Christ as Man was a Jew. The Church of Jesus Christ is built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, all of whom were Jews, so that to be a member of the Christian Church is to be involved with the Jews in our one indivisible hope in Jesus Christ. . . . Whether we are scandalized or not . . . we are grafted into the old tree of Israel (Rom 11:24), so that the people of the New Covenant cannot be separated from the people of the Old Covenant. . . . Our hope in Christ's coming victory includes our hope for Israel in Christ, in His victory over the blindness of His own people. To expect Jesus Christ means to hope for the conversion of the Jewish people, and to love Him means to love the people of God's promise. In view of the grievous guilt of Christian people towards the Jews throughout the history of the Church, we are certain that: "The Church cannot rest until the title of Christ to the Kingdom is recognized by His own people according to the flesh."²²

22. *The Evanston Report*, pp. 327-328. The quotation which closes this excerpt is from the Findings of the Pre-Evanston Conference.

AFTERMATH

Reaction to the Assembly's vote was widespread and varied. Some critics were optimistic and tended to make light of it; others were bitter and aggrieved. Generally, the decision was not considered a repudiation of the stand taken at Amsterdam; it was clear indication, however, that little progress had been made since then. The *Quarterly News Sheet* advised against interpreting the vote as a denial of the biblical basis of Israel's hope, preferring to see it as the result of a failure to recognize what was at stake. But the same magazine termed the event a "false compromise."²³ Both anti-Semites and philo-Semites fail to understand the mystery of Israel and the hope of Israel; for both, Israel is a worldly power, Pastor Berkhof charged. But he too warned against reading too much into the vote, deeming that some progress had been made in the very fact that the issue had become a major one on the Assembly's agenda.²⁴ Hendrik van Oyen, a Calvinist theologian of Basel, was not so content with what had happened: he described the debate as a significant defeat, a grave defection, and a sad page in contemporary religious history which fills one with shame.²⁵

THE SOURCES OF DESPAIR

THESE comments lead us to inquire into why Evanston despaired of coming to a full affirmation of Israel's part in Christian hope. But first a word of warning. There is no reason for a Catholic to be complacent about Evanston's failure.²⁶ Were a group of Catholics to convene in order to discuss Israel's hope, there might be similar oppositions and embarrassments, nor would they be immune to political passions or emotional influences. Yet we have all reason to assume that in the end a Catholic gathering would decide the issue on a biblical and theological basis; that the "mystery of Israel" would take precedence over political, social, practical considerations.

23. *Quarterly News Sheet*, XXIV, 3 (November 1954), pp. 6-10.

24. *Ibid.*, December 1954, pp. 6-7.

25. See Démann, *loc. cit.*, p. 71.

26. Father C. J. Dumont, in an article in the French Catholic quarterly *Istina*, warns against this course: "Let us not smile too quickly at the difficulties which our non-Catholic brethren meet in an area where we ourselves find it so difficult to rise above similar opposing tendencies" (as reported in *The Ecumenical Review*, VII, 3, April 1955, p. 278).

Though not a defined dogma, the doctrine of Israel's final return to Christ is theologically certain, for it is most firmly anchored in the sources of the Catholic faith. It is the promise of the New Testament as it is the teaching of tradition. St. Thomas gives witness to this when he writes in his Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans:

If God for the benefit of the whole world has permitted the misstep and the dispossession of the Jews, how much more generously will He restore their ruins for the advantage of the whole world. . . . And what will be the effects of their reintegration, if not to call back to life the Gentiles, that is to say the lukewarm faithful, when on account of the progress of iniquity, the charity of a great number shall have waxed cold (Mt 24:12).²⁷

It was left to Luther to strike the first discordant note in the harmony of Christian teaching on Israel. In violently anti-Semitic terms he contradicted the belief in its final turning to Christ and dubbed it "foolish" and "groundless."²⁸

Yet it was not Luther's deviation which governed the Assembly; indeed, Lutheran theologians were conspicuous among the signers of the minority declaration. This is not to say that theology played no part in the Assembly's decision. True, there can be no question that political considerations were a powerful factor; some think them to have been the most powerful, overriding all others. But this, I fear, is an oversimplification, for, underneath the political lines, the deeper and less visible theological lines were drawn. There were in the main three factions to share the stage. First, there was the Near Eastern bloc, comprising Arab Christians, who adopted a point of view exclusively political and in opposition to the state of Israel. Next, there were the mainly, though by no means exclusively, Continental theologians, who adopted a wholly theological and biblical stand. Lastly, there were the neutrals, mostly Americans and Anglo-Saxons, potential candidates for either of the other factions. This last was the decisive faction, for neither the first nor the

27. *Comm. in Ep. ad Romanos*, xi, 2; as quoted by Jacques Maritain, *The Living Thoughts of St. Paul* (New York: Longmans Green, 1941), pp. 83-84.

28. "A Jew," he wrote, "or a Jewish heart, is as hard as wood, stone, or iron, as hard in fact as the devil himself, and hence cannot be moved by any means. . . . They are young imps condemned to Hell. . . . Those who conclude from the eleventh chapter of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans that the Jews will all be converted toward the end of the world, are foolish and their opinion is groundless" (*Sämtliche Werke*, Jena ed., VIII, 109; as quoted in Pohle-Preuss, *Dogmatic Theology*, Vol. XII, *Eschatology*, St. Louis: Herder, 1917, p. 106).

second was able by itself to muster sufficient votes for a majority. Two groups made up this neutral faction. The first sided with the Arab Christians through sympathy or fear—fear of causing a split in the Assembly. The second, headed by Charles Taft, was devoted to “good will” as a principle and refused to single out the Jews in any theological context. Both groups combined to throw their weight with the Christians of the Near East to eliminate the references to Israel. It was against this alliance that the terms “compromise” and “opportunism” were hurled by some Protestant critics.

How are we to explain a neutrality which permitted considerations of “good will” or of harmony in the Assembly to overrule all scriptural and theological claims of Israel’s hope? Such a neutrality is obviously not a surface manifestation; rather it has its roots in certain modern Protestant theological thinking. To focus our attention only on one school, influential in the United States, that of neo-Reformation theology: such thinkers as Paul Tillich, Reinhold Niebuhr, and H. Richard Niebuhr have molded the outlook of many American Protestants. The point of interest here is what these men think of the nature of Christianity, of the Church, and of Scripture. If I may summarize their common thought in the simplest of terms, I should say that, partly under the influence of Emil Brunner and Karl Barth, they have come to believe in the “total otherness” of God and the radical relativity of everything else, including Christ, the Church, and the Bible. An earlier Protestant liberalism had subjectivized God, and religion generally, reducing Christianity to a mere ethics. In a strong reaction against this kind of liberalism, these thinkers, seeking an absolute objectivity on which to found faith, have swung to the opposite extreme. They have posited this absolute objectivity in God, but in such a way as to declare relative everything else, even everything Christian. Declaring it idolatrous to see in the Church or in the Bible the voice of Truth, they are forced to deny “that the ‘Christian religion’ is somehow ‘true’ in an ultimate fashion, somehow less involved in relativism than the ‘Jewish religion’”—not to speak of other religions. H. Richard Niebuhr is but being consistent when he draws this inference:

Our problem is one of *conversion* from all the finites in which we believe, of turning from all the idols we worship. . . . When we look at the Jews we cannot desire that they should be converted to our point of view but only that they should be delivered from their idolatries and

reconciled to God. . . . The question is one of conversion to God, not to Christianity or to Judaism. Hence our fundamental attitudes with respect to the Jews must be of gratitude, of intercession for them that their faith fail not, of community—of offering them in our confession not the "truth" that Christ is the Messiah, but the statement that Jesus Christ is the one who is reconciling us to God and that it is he whom we expect to triumph, not over Jews so much as over ourselves.²⁹

The fate of Scripture in this new relativism is not hard to surmise. Since the Bible must not be "absolutized" as a source of universal and timeless truths, its interpretation must be given a new turn. Its words must not be understood as the Christian past has understood them, but in a way that makes them "meaningful to the man of our age." For Scripture speaks to us in symbols, says Tillich, or, according to Bultmann, in myths. With Rudolf Bultmann, theologian of Marburg, and his demand for *die Entmythologisierung*, the "demythologization" of the Christian faith, the nadir has been reached. For he deprives the sacred text of all real meaning and the revealed word of all objective truth. The New Testament, he tells us, is a product of its time and speaks the language of mythology, unacceptable to our scientific world-view. "Myth" is what he calls the mysteries of Christ's pre-existence, of His virgin birth, of His miracles, of His resurrection, ascension, and return; "myth" too the mysteries of original sin, of redemption through Christ's vicarious sacrifice, of baptism and Eucharist as the means of bringing Christ's saving deed to man. All these, then, have to go. What is left is Jesus' historic existence (and it is little enough that can be known of it, for the sources are choked with legend); His death (no more than a prophet's martyrdom); and faith (which, together with love, is simply native to man, his natural attitude). It is by "faith" that man can escape the world of transitoriness, anguish, and death, by faith in Christ, in whom he encounters the all-embracing love of God. But this Christ is not the Christ of history, the living Christ, only the Christ of "faith."³⁰

The neo-Reformation theologians in the United States are certainly not so radical as Bultmann; nonetheless, one finds in them a tending to-

29. From a letter by H. Richard Niebuhr; quoted in A. Roy Eckardt, *Christianity and the Children of Israel* (New York: King's Crown Press, 1948), pp. 130-131.

30. For an exposition of Bultmann's views and a critical evaluation of them from a Catholic standpoint, see, among others, Fritz Hofmann, "Theologie der Entmythologisierung—Ausweg oder Irrweg?", *Theologie und Glaube*, XLIII, 5 (1953), pp. 321-347.

ward his position. But whatever Bultmann's influence may be in Europe or here, and no matter how much weight the theology of Tillich and the Niebuhrs may have carried with the "neutrals" at the Assembly, the new relativism found response among them. Having inquired into representative American Protestant opinion on the problem that so agitated the Assembly, Dr. F. Ernest Johnson reports that there are those "who find in Rom 9-11 a permanent, normative principle that should govern the Christian attitude toward the Jews as a people." The majority, however, seem to consider this position a "narrow biblicism," not meaningful to our day. Some typical comments are:

[St. Paul's epistles] afford no sound basis upon which to erect a theory of the Church which gives it any such continuity with the Abrahamic covenant as to make the conversion of the 20th-century Jews any more important in the eyes of God than the conversion of Hindus, Chinese—or Anglo-Saxon Americans.

As I read Romans 11 it is a message of hope for Israel, but I doubt that it ever would have occurred to Paul that Christians centuries later could read his words as guaranteeing the salvation of Israel or placing the Jews' conversion in a different category from that of the Gentiles.

It is difficult for me to understand the reality of the position based upon Romans. To me the only basis of this point of view must be either Biblical fundamentalism or a sort of ivory tower theology which is removed from the practicalities and exigencies of today. St. Paul faced a definite and practical situation in his day and therefore met it head on. We are faced in our generation with our own situation and cannot find the answer by adopting the answer given many centuries ago.³¹

Here the new relativism has come down to the level of mere practicality. Am I wrong when I conclude that Evanston's failure to speak of hope for Israel in a statement of Christian hope was a failure of Christian hope itself, and at bottom a failure of Christian faith, as it needs must be? For faith is "the substance of things to be hoped for" (Heb 11:1), and hope, conversely, the reflection of the substance of faith. Never can it go beyond the truths that support it. The despair of the

31. "The Jewish Question as an Ecumenical Problem," *The Ecumenical Review*, April 1955, pp. 225-231. For a further analysis, see Harold Floreen, "Attitudes in American Churches Towards the Christian Approach to the Jews," *Quarterly News Sheet*, XXVI, 2 (June 1956), pp. 1-8.

Assembly to solve its problem seems to have sprung from a weakened and divided faith in the nature of the Church and of Scripture. And it is not without significance that it was over the people of Israel that the Assembly experienced its division.

CATHOLIC RESPONSE

CATHOLIC theologians, in their comments on the deliberations and reports of the Evanston Assembly, have generally been sympathetic. In *Unitas*, an international review devoted, as its title indicates, to the spiritual union of all men, especially of Christians, Father Charles Boyer, S.J., its editor, though regretting that a subject had been chosen which deflected the Assembly from seeking doctrinal unity, was "agreeably surprised." "We had expected nothing so positive," he said.³² *Istina*, a French quarterly which, from the stand of the Catholic faith, interprets all efforts to restore unity among Christians, confessed, in advance of the Assembly, "its unfeigned respect for the loftiness of thought and the properly Christian inspiration" of the Preparatory Reports.³³ As, before the publication of the Report on the Main Theme, Father Boyer had limned in broad strokes the Catholic concept of hope,³⁴ so, after its appearance, a group of European Catholic theologians produced a lengthy corporate effort in *Istina* on "Christ, the Church and Grace in the Economy of Christian Hope," laying special stress on what they felt lacking in the Report. They emphasized that they offered their statement not in any polemical spirit but with the wish that it might "perhaps prove a useful—and discreet—contribution to the deliberations occasioned by the Evanston Assembly." There is no room here to consider all its rich content, but a single excerpt will suffice to show its tenor:

Without the slightest doubt the sign—and a sign *in se* absolutely compelling—that salvation is come, "That they may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (Jn 17:21), has been given basically in the essential, indestructible unity of the Church, unshakably founded on the rock of Peter; but in the eyes of men a shadow has been thrown over the brightness of its shining owing to the divisions which exist among Christians. These divisions hamper immensely

32. *Unitas*, VI, 4 (Winter 1954), p. 228.

33. "Christ, the Church and Grace in the Economy of Christian Hope," p. 1, an English offprint from *Istina*, April-June 1954.

34. *Unitas*, VI, 1 (Spring 1954), pp. 3-6.

the proclamation of the message of hope. . . . This invites us Catholics to weigh our responsibilities carefully, whether for the past, for the present, or for the future. . . . The charity of Christ compels us to acknowledge the mistakes of those who have gone before us, not in order to judge them, but in order to diminish the gravity of the results which have followed. However, because the Church is for us infinitely greater than and vastly different from the sum of her individual members—for she is the sum of realities and facts through which and in which Christ Himself is made present to us, communicating to us His life—we refuse, just as our Orthodox brethren refuse, to proclaim the defection of the Church herself. She is the Body of Christ and His Bride. As such she has not fallen away and she cannot fall away. But alas! we, her members, do sin. . . . Our penitence must be deep, sincere and active; but rather than in the grandiloquent proclamation of a repentance of little practical effect, it will consist in the really hard, patient and courageous work of changing our own sinful lives, of healing the wounds caused by our separations, of doing all we possibly can, with God, to put an end to our separations themselves.³⁵

To this study were appended a number of weighty theses by Dr. Karl Thieme of the University of Mainz, set forth because, as the author says, the theme of Christian hope cannot be discussed unless the hope of the Jewish people is expressly considered. Speaking in the name of "Catholics of Gentile stock" (cf. Ac 15:19; 21:25), he declares—though with much fuller texture than can be given here: We hope, in common with our separated "elder brethren" of the stem of Abraham, for the day of the Lord, which will surely come. But, in still irreconcilable contrast with them, we hope for that day to be the glorious enthronement of Him who began His kingship in the obscurity of His cross and resurrection: the returning Jesus of Nazareth. We believe, in common with our "elder brethren," that the living God revealed Himself first to the patriarchs and then at Sinai to the entire chosen people, and that His promise of mercy to them will never be broken. But, in still irreconcilable contrast with them, we believe that redemption has come to fallen mankind in Jesus, God-made-man, and that the fulfillment of our hope is attained by our sharing in Jesus' saving work, through the sacraments. Finally, God's love binds us indissolubly to our "elder brethren" through the revealed truth of the Scriptures of the Old Covenant and also through our sure confidence in their future ingathering and thus

35. *Litina* offprint, pp. 21-22.

our union with them; but it still separates us from them because we see in Simon bar-Jonah and his successors the foundation stone of the renewed people of God, because we see him who sits on the seat of Peter seated also on the seat of Moses. Further, God's love obliges us not to conceal from our "elder brethren" our differences and their salvific importance, rather to tell them of them in a brotherly exchange till the day comes when there will be "one fold and one shepherd" (Jn 10:16) and when all will call upon the name of the Lord and will serve Him with one consent (Soph 3:9).³⁶

Eager for opinions on his theses, Dr. Thieme approached, among others, Father Oesterreicher, who wondered whether certain thoughts should not have been expressed with a little more precision. He suggested, for instance, that it might have been better to call the Jews instead of our *elder* brethren, just our brethren, separated because of Christ, and yet loved in Christ, very much as St. Catherine of Siena greeted the Jew Consiglio as *O carissimo fratello in Cristo Gesù*, "Dearest brother in Christ Jesus." For, he said, Israel is truly the "elder brother," the worker first called to the vineyard, only in relation to the Gentiles (see Lk 15:11-32; Mt 20:1-16). On the other hand, God's universal covenant with all men not only excels His particular covenant with the people of Israel, but the New is in a way before the Old. *Quod ultimum est in executione, primum est in intentione*; the last in accomplishment is the first in design. Israel's singling out was as a trustee of universality; from its first breath it was a prophet of catholicity. Hence when Abraham was blessed, his blessing was to redound over all the world. And before Israel's Scriptures tell of Abraham, they speak of Adam, the father of all men, to which Jewish legend adds that when God gathered clay for Adam's body, He took it from the four corners of the earth.

His raising this or similar points, Father Oesterreicher stressed, must not cloud his warm agreement with Dr. Thieme's theses and concern. Israel, people of tears, of Christ's tears and of so many of its own, is forever chained to expectation, he said, and on this note I should like to end my survey. There is no more startling title given to Israel in all of Scripture than Zechariah's "prisoners of hope" (9:12).³⁷

36. *Ibid.*, pp. 30-32.

37. For the full text of Father Oesterreicher's comments and Dr. Thieme's reply to them, see *Freiburger Rundbrief: Beiträge zur Förderung der Freundschaft zwischen dem Alten und dem Neuen Gottesvolk im Geiste beider Testamente*, VII, 25/28 (September 1954), pp. 28-30.