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Dear Brother:

Perhaps I should tell you immediately that the October issue of these remarks from the sidelines brought a great response of fan mail. One brother wrote: "Except your reference to Luther the whole thing is Schund literatur." This was the first time I had seen that beautiful word since Sem days, and I greeted it like an old friend. Is there anything like it in English? Another brother was somewhat more constructive: "You would have done better if you had taken some bicarbonate of soda."

And so on. I have asked Theophilus to make a study of the mysterious point at which a brother is persuaded to reach for his typewriter and start pounding away. The title of the study will be: "A Psychological Investigation of Missouri's B.B.P." (Brother's Boiling Point).

...But now Advent has come, and I would like to talk about other matters, especially Christmas. Do you sometimes feel — on Christmas Eve — that your voice is suddenly lonely and alone in a world so far away from Bethlehem? Many years ago when I was disturbed by this burden of bitter contrast I wrote a few lines under the title "And Still".

Everyone who writes about Christmas in this year of our Lord must do so with uncertain hand... No doubt Christmas has always been a study in contrasts — ever since the story of the Virgin Mother and the Holy Child was etched in sharp relief against the background of blindness in Bethlehem... "There was no room for them in the inn."... The timeless and timely tragedy of Christmas... And still — the story is true... Still the angels sing of the everlasting mercy as the dusk grows gray on Christmas Eve and the candles glow... Still there is peace on earth in the quiet hearts of those who know that the heavenly light will not fade from the blackening sky... Still above the manger the stars are bright and new, and men and women as humble and as great as the shepherds, come running to see the things that have come to pass...

"And still."... Perhaps this year our Christmas faith and joy must begin and end with those defiant words...

... "And still," writes Winifred Kirkland in the ATLANTIC MONTHLY: "I believe this Jesus of Nazareth, who wore our flesh often so joyously, who went to weddings and feasts, who watched the children playing in the market place and knew by heart their lilting rhymes, this Jesus who had watched a worn hand patch a worn coat, who had perhaps Himself helped tread the grapes in some upland vineyard, who had perhaps Himself broken a glowing lily to brighten some despairing home, who had yearned to gather all His murderous Jerusalem to the safe home place of His heart even as a hen gathers her brood beneath her wings — I believe this same Jesus stands gazing in at all our Christmas trees and at the children dancing around them, and laughs with them His laughter that shall one day ring victorious down all the dark ages. Of all His strange sayings that have been preserved to us, the strangest is: 'My joy I leave with you,' spoken to His friends on the blackest evening of His life."

And still... Despite pomp and circumstance, dictator and decay, hate and fear: "Unto you is born this day a Savior."... Son of the living God, for a Help of the races of men dead in Adam, the Desire...
of Nations. Strength of strength. King of kings. Man over men. meek Soldier without pride or pomp. a 
crib His cradle and a manger His altar . . . The music and the message of it are still sweet and true . . . Here is the center of the world . . . The shepherds have come, and for them and us nothing remains but our poor adoration, our faltering love, and His perfect peace.

... ...

Now to other matters: Before taking off for parts unknown (he is the world’s greatest traveler since 
Cain) Theophilus sends the following note concerning books this month:

Let’s assume that the Frauenverein comes through with a Christmas gift check. Let’s assume that 
the good brother who receives the check has already tapped it to take Mrs. Brother out to dinner, with 
corsage and new perfume and all that. Let’s assume there is STILL something of substance to the gift. 
If all these assumptions hold up (we predict most trouble with No. 3: what can be left after No. 27), we 
have some good ideas for the use of the remnants. Buy big books, the kind that can’t usually be afford-
ed. Like Roland H. Bainton’s THE HORIZON HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY. Usually we shy away from 
books that look as if they are only for display. This one looks that way, but its story of the Christian 
Church is well told. Another big one, prepared by Roman Catholics, is THE TWENTIETH CENTURY 
ATLAS OF THE CHRISTIAN WORLD, which is published by Hawthorn and costs $20. It is full of 
pictures.

Suppose the ladies aids don’t come through? Poor parson then can resort to paperbacks. I was 
amazed to see how much there is for today in old Philip Jacob Spener’s PIA DESIDERIA, recommenda-
tions for church reform from the Pietist era. One of the strangest, strangest books I can remember is 
John B. Taylor’s THE PRIMAL VISION. I didn’t agree with all of it; but it is one of the few books that tells 
me what the African (or other missionee) has to teach me and others already ‘Christianized’. Those 
two books come from Fortress, and they only cost $1.75 and $3.25. So a five dollar bill from a member 
of the confirmation class at Christmas time will cover them! What, good doctor, do YOU recommend 
from your readings this month?

Advent-ageously, 
Theophilus

The last question is loaded. He knows very well that a college administrator never reads anything. 
So what do I recommend? Remembering my most recent reading, I would like to call your attention to 
the RUNDSCHAU and the ABENDSCHULE, some of the finest post-modern journals in our church.

Perhaps I should also comment on the terrible pun with which Theophilus closes. Even he has his 
lapses.

It was a cool November morning when Theophilus barged into the office: "Really," he said, "I 
have no reason or desire to see you, but your little comer of life is irresistible on a day like this. You 
just go on with your chores while I sit here and find a few more mistakes in the new Catechism. Did 
you know, by the way, that this has become a favorite indoor sport in the Missouri Synod? All 
changes in the ‘textus receptus’ are either wrong or unnecessary. We got a resolution on that at the 
district convention.”

I ignored his remarks: "Theophilus," I said, "I have bad news for you. In the past two months I have 
been all over the country with my tin cup, and the story is the same everywhere. A brother in Califomia 
put it most sharply: ‘I do not believe in Theophilus. You invented him. Whenever you want to say some-
thing for which you do not wish to be held responsible, you drag in Theophilus and have him write an 
imaginary letter as coming from him. Actually, Theophilus does not exist except as a figment of 
your imagination. Right?’ "

Theophilus sat in the corner with his head down. I went on: "I am really sorry, but you will have 
to get out of here. No more letters. You do not exist.”

He headed for the door, and he really looked like a ghost. "Do you think it would help," he asked, 
"if you would publish my picture — maybe the one of me burning the mortgage which they printed in 
The Witness supplement? I was a very good picture. My district president is standing beside me asking 
me to up our budget for synod, and right behind me is Deacon Sauerbraten and Grandma Himmel-
hoch. Do you think they would believe us then?"

I shook my head. I really do not know. After all, who knows you? You aren’t even a counselor, 
and at your district conventions you are only the third member of the Excuse Committee. They would only 
feel that the picture was faked.”

Theophilus disappeared, and I turned back to the morning mail. There was a letter from a mother 
who wanted to know why we did not have maid service in Lembke Hall.
Early the next morning Theophilus appeared again and tossed the following on my desk:

"Dear O.P.:

"After I left you the other day I got to thinking and you know, what started out as an absolute 
asurdity has become a nagging question. I had always taken it for granted that I exist, but 
how do I know it? Here are all these friends of yours — neither fools nor liars, I take it — who are 
prepared to state categorically that there is no me. And here am I, one lone (and perhaps 
derrated?) voice insisting that there is a me. What is one man’s word against so many?"
Notes on a Frayed Cuff: Whether we like it or not, the Missouri Synod has now—in the brighter half of the twentieth century—been blessed with some magnificent brains. I cannot mention any names (for fear of omitting somebody), but I can think of ten, at least, who would rank with the best minds in Christendom. Some of them are among the most powerful and arresting voices in the life of the post-modern Church. Now comes the $64 question: “What shall we do with them?” Watch them with suspicion and give them the obedient and wondering mind of a child? If we do this, these gifts of God may help us to sit down and came out with this nagging question. If you come across anybody who knows for sure what the answer is, I would appreciate hearing from you.”

Just to prove that we are completely modern, I must refer to the Third Session of the Vatican Council which adjourned recently. It met in September, and sat for approximately two months. This session was worth watching because the “Venerables Patres” found themselves with some very hard nuts to crack. The discussion of these problems has demonstrated, as never before, that Rome is not nearly as monolithic as we learned at the Seminary. Look at the agenda for the Third Session: The Schema on the Church — on religious liberty (a tough one for the Spanish and South America Cardinals)—Schema on Mary (now inside “deEcclesia” — where it properly belongs if anywhere)—the Schema on the Church in the modern world (social and practical problems)—on collegiality—on mixed marriages (another tough one)—one the population explosion and birth control. A beautiful pile of hot potatoes! The last one came to a conclusion on October 29. Rome now has a much clearer and cleaner theology of marriage. Leger, Suenuens, Meyer, Bea—these names are popping up all the time and all over the place. Apparently they were particularly strong on the delicate problems involved in marriage and birth control. Essentially the decision of the venerable fathers was that after instruction, the problem should be left “to the enlightened conscience of the individual couples”. There was a good deal of sparring and a new and strange distinction between the authority of the Church and her infallibility. Somebody dug this up just at the right moment to save face. Postscript: The latest news is that the current Pope has sided with the septuagenarians of the Curia and has softened the new pronouncements of the assembled bishops. This is bad, very bad, for Rome. Even the Pope will have to be dragged, kicking and screaming, into the twentieth century to face the judgement of God over men and nations.
Please note again that these paragraphs have nothing to do with our doctrine of the ministry. The question is only: “After you have become a called and ordained servant of the Word how do you transfer your base of operations?” Perhaps these paragraphs were triggered by a visitor in the office several months ago. He happens to be a very good pastor and a very good guy. He was not born with his foot in his mouth and neither was his wife. And yet after 13½ years in the same parish, he is quite unhappy—and I suspect that his present congregation feels the same way.

Now what can he or his congregation do about the situation? Under our present system of calling, very little! He can ask the district president to place his name on the “eligible list” but he has learned to his great sorrow that quite often this list can be the kiss of death when it comes to the attention of hard-boiled elders and deacons like Sauerbraten. Some time ago a very knowledgeable synodical official told me that this situation is not as bad as it was ten or twenty years ago. This may be true, but I still remain somewhat unconvinced. It is difficult to overestimate the heartache caused by our present system of calling pastors and teachers. What has happened?

It is clear that somehow we pulled the word ‘democracy’ out of the world into the Church and attached it somewhat loosely to the doctrine of the universal priesthood. This is a logical and theological error which some of us have never been able to accept.

The answer? Probably the answer is just as difficult as the problem. However, I find as I wander around the Kingdom that there are more brethren who feel that the answer finally lies in the election of bishops or district presidents who have more power to solve these problems than they have at the present moment. Of course, the cry will go up, “This is completely undemocratic. Our sacred congregational sovereignty must be maintained at all costs.” May I express my doubts about this also? The costs are too great. All of us, of course, are aware of the fact that any other system is also subject to abuse, but I believe that a good man—bishop or district president—with this responsibility, would handle it faithfully and well. I have watched the system operate in certain dioceses of the Roman Catholic church for many years. A pastor—and/or committee of laymen—come to the bishop, discuss the entire matter and within three weeks a solution has been found. I think there are quite a few brethren who would be willing to try this system instead of the almost insurmountable walls and obstacles which stand in the way of the solution of this problem at the present moment.

Have you ever noticed that some of the best cities and towns in the United States are run by Catholics and Lutherans? They are usually well-governed, prosperous, properly conservative, a remarkable fusion of religious and civic loyalty. I need only to point to such cities as Fort Wayne and Milwaukee and possibly several score of smaller communities. It is perfectly clear that most of the problems in our country began with the riffraff that came over on the Mayflower.

University notes: When the history of the second century at Valparaiso University is finally written there will be a chapter entitled “The Irony of the Fifties and Sixties.” It will tell the story of the school becoming more theological, more thoughtful, more sure of its purpose as an arm of the Church. It will also tell of the attacks of a small group who chose this particular moment in its history to read and hound the University out of the Church. Perhaps this is another one of the strange ways of God—it compels us to look to the rock from which we were hewn, to re-examine our foundations, and to give voice to the faith that is in us.

Is it still necessary to go into detail? Item: Year by year a greater number of our graduates head for the holy ministry. Is this the mark of a school that is turning its back on the Church? Item: When we appeal for help in the Inner-City Peace Corps we have more volunteers than we can use. Item: Our Deaconess program and our Youth Leadership Training Program are growing year by year. These are professional servants of the Church, helpers for our pastors, educated without a cent of cost to the Synodical budget. Item: Each year we have scores of letters from pastors who tell us that the average Valpo graduate is among his best members. Is this the sign of a school that is leading its students to hell? (Exact quote) Item: We have the largest Chapel attendance in American higher education. We have the largest Religion staff of any liberal arts college in the United States. Our engineers become presid...
I see it, could be summed up by the answer of the laborers when they were asked why they stood idly in the marketplace instead of working in the vineyard: ‘Because no man hath asked me.’ I have always wanted to do some writing, but my understanding of the ground rules is that one writes for the church after he is asked for an article or manuscript, or after his stature as a writer has been demonstrated.” It seems to me that here is a problem which should be considered earnestly and thoughtfully not only by the leaders of our Church but also by the men in charge of our work at Concordia Publishing House. They have already made a good beginning.

Digging through the pile of notes in the northwest corner of my room, I come across some sentences written after a European journey. I was referring to a remarkable concert which we heard in the Hague one quiet summer evening. Much of the music presented had been produced by Ernest Pepping, a composer who is only a name to many of us in America. Happily he was present for the occasion. It is clear that he has a dual gift—the ability to reflect the essential melancholy of the post-modern world and then to answer triumphantly with sacred compositions of singular clarity and power.

I was especially interested in his musical setting for a fine statement of the curious inanities of “existentialism”. For those of you who can still read German I am reprinting it.

So walz ich ohne Unterlasz, wie Sankt Diogenes, mein Fasz. / Bald ist es Ernst, bald ist es Spasz; bald ist es Lieb, bald ist es Hasz / Bald ist es dies, bald ist es das: es ist ein Nichts und ist ein Was.

Hat alles seine Zeit. Das Nahe wird weit, das Warne wird kalt, das Junge wird alt, das Kalte wird warm, der Heilige wird arm, der Narre gescheit!

Lasz nur die Sorge sein! Das gibt sich alles schon. Und falls der Himmel ein, kommt doch eine Lerne davon.

Wer will denn alles gleich ergrunden ... Sobald der Schnee schmilzt, wird sich’s finden.

Das ist eine von den groszen Taten: sich in seinem eignen Fet zu braten!

The Litany of the Apathetic

The minister Says: “Our Church has stood on the same spot for over 200 years.”

The Congregation Responds: “Isn’t that nice.”

Minister: “I preach sermons that people like and never disturb anybody.”

Congregation: “We enjoy your sermons so much.”

Minister: “Our Ladies’ Aid Society has more money in the bank than any other Ladies’ Aid Association.”

Congregation: “Isn’t that nice.”

Minister: “We don’t believe the church should bring its evangelism into politics or social issues or economics.”

Congregation: “It’s so nice to have a churchy church.”

Minister: “Our Sunday school teaches the Bible from cover to cover — no new curriculum for us.”

Congregation: “Little children are so sweet.”

Minister: “We believe that charity begins at home.”

Congregation: “And ends there.”

Minister: “We don’t like anyone telling us how much we ought to give to benevolence.”

Congregation: (Pioualy) “God helps those who help themselves.”

Minister: “We believe theology just mixes people up.”

Congregation: “It is so nice to have our religion make us feel good.”

Minister: “Our deacons are the oldest men in the parish.”

Congregation: “It is so nice to have spiritual-looking men.”

Minister: “Our Board of Trustees never wastes money on new-fangled ideas.”

Congregation: “Isn’t that nice.”

Minister: “Our people are sound New England stock.”
Congregation: “We are thankful that we are not as other people are.”
Minister: “Our church is free to do as it pleases in all matters.”
Congregation: “No one can tell us what to do.”
Minister: “Our church had to close because nobody was as good as we are to continue it.”
Congregation: “Isn’t that a shame.”
Obviously: no one could sing the “Gloria Patri” after that!

A few things have become clearer during the past twelve months. In knowledge, life is probably a
process of addition, at least to anyone who has eyes and ears. In matters of faith, however, life seems
to be a process of subtraction. One believes in fewer things, but believes them more passionately. There
is less faith in man and more in God. Less in time and more in eternity. Less in power and more in
love. Perhaps that is what life is — the gradual stripping of useless baggage until we arrive at the
gates of eternity with nothing more or less than we had on our most important birthday, the day of bap-
tism. Each of us has two birthdays. The first one into the Kingdom of Power and the second into the
Kingdom of Grace. Is it not true that the second should be celebrated far more earnestly and devotedly
than the first? It was really the beginning of life, since the unending grace of God assured us of life
eternal on that day.

And so we turn for a moment to the years that remain. Even the most casual observer of life in the
modern world will agree that its deepest and darkest mark is fear. Everybody seems to be afraid of the
future. Veterans in the holy ministry tell us that never in their long experience have so many people
rushed to spiritualists, astrologers, and fortune-tellers of all kinds. There can be only one reason for
this. They are afraid, and by some desperate means, fraudulent or diabolical, they want to lift a corner
of the veil which the mercy of God has thrown over the future. This is always a sign of decay. Perhaps
it should be noted that the first recorded instance of this thing in the history of man is the time when
Saul went to the witch of Endor. When did he go? At the height of his career when his faith and trust in
the promises of God were strong and healthy? No. Everyone knows that he turned to the witch in des-
peration only when he had already arrived at the bottom of the hill, his faith gone and his confidence
shattered. There is bitter tragedy in all these attempts to peer into the future, from Saul to the woman
who saw a fortune-teller this afternoon.

Pooling good fortune and the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God.” We, now
so late and so far away, may forget that the angelic choir is part of the unchanging nature of eternity . . .
Were there, that night at Bethlehem, in the chorus of the fields and heavens, angels who remembered
other tasks? . . . The angel who had stood at the gates of Paradise Lost with the flaming sword — the
angel who visited Abraham in his tent — the angel who was with Daniel in the lion’s den — were they
not in that great company at Bethlehem? . . . Their task had changed now and their work had come to
its eternal climax . . . Now, a song which would never die, in a few years a visit to a garden by one of
them on the night when their legions would not be called to sing, but only to stand silent . . . This was
their shining hour . . . And did they not know, too, that it would never end? . . . Their song was of glory
and of peace . . . Men would again be gripped by hate and despair . . . They would fight and kill and
lie and deny . . . But their song, they knew, would be an everlasting antiphony . . . It would move down
the centuries, above, beneath, and in the earth, from Christmas to Christmas . . . In it alone would be
hope before death and after death . . . Their song would live to the 2,000th Christmas, to the 3,000th and
at length to the last Christmas the world will see . . . And on that final December 25, as on the first, the
angels will know, as we must know in 1964, that the heart which began to beat in Bethlehem still beats
in the world and for the world . . . And for us . . .

Sincerely yours,

O. P. Kretzmann