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Dear Brother:

If the faithful slaves in the mailing room have returned from their vacation, this will land on your desk sometime in early October. It is an interesting and somewhat dismaying fact in the life of the Church in the twentieth century that with the first falling leaf the saints gather once more and the army of God returns from the seashore or the mountains to the activities of the Church Militant. Please accept my warmest good wishes for your work between now and Trinity Sunday, 1965. Let nothing get you down...

Also the University begins anew. We face again the annual "barbarian invasion". It is, however, also the generation which will see the Church into the third millennium of her history. A few items about the University: Enrollment this year about 3300... About 200 more will be doing graduate work on the campus... The Inner City Peace Corps is arousing much attention beyond the boundaries of the Lutheran Church. It is being taken over by a number of other church-related colleges... The College of Business Administration will be formally opened on October 23... The University now has four colleges... Another successful venture is our Directed Studies group which consists of students who have an exceptionally high standing... In September, 1965, we hope that these Directed Studies students will be the first members of the fifth college on our campus, "Christ College". I will write you more about that one of these days... Concerning finances: Our budget is $6,500,000. We still need about 30 to 35% of this total from sources beyond tuition, fees, room and board. For a number of years $1 million in current support would enable us to carry out our program very effectively. If you can give us a lift in this effort, I shall be most grateful. I hope, too, that you will include us in your prayers so that the dawning academic year will be a successful and happy one.

Elegy: Perhaps I am getting old and soft. (Voice from the rear: "The 'perhaps' is superfluous.") I must confess, however, that as I read parish papers and local Lutheran journals with the first cup of coffee, my vision blurs more often, and I discover somewhat ashamedly that my eyes are wet. It happens most often when I read a simple notice: "Mrs. Anna Jones, wife of Pastor Jones, died last Friday at the age of 64. She was laid to rest on Sunday afternoon. She is survived by the Rev. John Jones and five children."

Why the unbidden tears? Certainly not for Ann. She has transferred her activities from one Kingdom to another, and she is very content and very happy. My tears are rather for John. After forty years this sudden, staring emptiness, the listening in his study for her voice, the vacant seat on the aisle in church — many years ago with squirming John Jr. or Elsie on her lap — but more recently with her hands folded, beating back the waves of pain. What now about all the things that had never worried him — food, clothing, a new stove for the kitchen, or a new rug in his study? What now? My tears are for him. There are too many memories and too many broken threads.

Some time ago a friend of mine remarked that many pastors marry again after such a loss. These remarriages are, of course, the highest possible tribute to the first wife. A man — a pastor — has seen for forty years what it means not to be alone, and his heart seeks the strength of a non-interchangeable love — the great power of a common devotion to a common task.
And then my thoughts turn upward to Ann. There must be a very special place in heaven for her and her sisters — a very quiet and beautiful place, with no telephones, no worn carpets, and no last year’s hats. When she arrived last month a very kindly angel asked her what she would like to do most. She said, “I would like to sit still for about two hours, but no more than that. There is something John asked me to do.” But soon she was not tired any more, and now a very good and a very understanding God lets her walk softly in the high halls of heaven with — after so many years of church choirs — only the best seraphim singing for her and only the most golden trumpets sounding from the gates. Perhaps, being the God He is, He has a very special cloth with which He gives her His last and greatest gift, a gift which He bought on a dark Friday afternoon — He wipes away all tears from her eyes.

So now she walks in beauty and in peace. I shall write a letter to John, very inarticulate and quite useless, but I do want him to know that a few of us are with him in his hour of loneliness. The last time I saw Ann she was knitting in a balcony in Cleveland, Ohio, as she watched her husband and a thousand others try to lift the Church a little closer to the City which she now knows and loves so much better than we.

Strange-doings — or what-goes-on-here department: I had really promised myself (and Theophilus) that I would pay no more attention to the journals which will disappear on the morning when a great church-body will come to itself. One of my professors is sick unto death, and I have no time for these curious evidences that we are not yet in the Church Triumphant.

And yet — people insist on sending me quotations, clippings, and photostated articles. I really do not know why unless they want to see to it that I feel the full weight of the cross assigned to me. So I read the stuff and the temptation to answer overwhelms me. Most of the material is an ecclesiastical sitting duck if there ever was one. Item: Somebody sends me a copy of a letter written by a heterodox brother to one of these journals. Apparently he was a student on our campus for several summer sessions. Because he was a Seminarist, the University gave him a generous scholarship. On the basis of this extended and profound experience he now reads the University out of the Church. After a gentle word about our “soul-destroying modernism” he begins his expose with a quotation from a sophomore coed who allegedly said: “This is a Christian school with pagan overtones.” There are other charges too — the wrong textbook for a class in religion — a conference with certain coeds holding heretical opinions (these coeds pop up with curious regularity) — a Human Relations Institute which was “soft” on Communism — a biology class in which an evolutionary connection seemed to be established between water plants and land plants — and so on. In the final sentences the Ethiopian sticks his head out of the wood-pile: “I have told many laymen about my experiences at Valpo. Several have stopped contributing to the University. In Christ Jesus” — At this point I choked on my morning coffee. Is all this really “in Christ Jesus”? This obvious bias — this quoting of a sophomore coed (who probably knew who her interviewer was) — this misunderstanding of a professor, a devout Christian who is teaching biology — this Christian and loving desire to take a few dollars away from the University, so that a professor’s children get less to eat? Is all this really “in Christ Jesus”? I note with dismay that I have now become serious — and that is exactly what the writer of the letter wanted. I shall therefore go on for another moment. My spies inform me that all these publications are now making a real pitch for the support of the laity. “The laymen are disturbed” — “the laymen want to know” — “the laymen are withholding support from missions” — and so on.

Now this is smart — really smart. If you cannot disturb the shepherds as they go about their God-given tasks — if they vote you down and out at district conventions from coast to coast — if they reaffirm their faith in the leadership of Synod — throw a firecracker among the sheep! Cry “wolf, wolf” in the hope that the sheep — all God’s children — will panic and stampede. Say anything which will weaken their faith and persuade them to leave the Church of their confirmation vow and try to find their God and Savior elsewhere. The shepherds are a tough and loyal lot. We have failed to move them. Let us therefore go after the laity. Smart — very smart! Behind this strategy there is, of course, a scarcely hidden contempt for the sheep. They are really not so bright — they cannot tell good theology from bad — they can be led up blind alleys and down dangerous ways. Well, all this may be smart, but it is not wise. The sheep are wiser than some may think. They look up — as they have always done — and they know, with a fierce and final wisdom — that they are not being fed — no, not by this sort of thing — so far and so tragically removed from I John 4, II.

Yesterday I sent this to Theophilus with the question: “Shall I say this?” Here is his answer:

Dear O.P.:

Go ahead and say it. You won’t stop these ‘strange doings’ by saying it, and you will give some people the impression of being either an irascible old man or a scoundrel who has been caught with the goods on him, but it will be good for your blood pressure and your digestive apparatus to get it out of your system. And one does have some responsibility to the cardiovascular and gastrointestinal systems through which God sustains his life. (The ancients were not as mistaken as some people suppose when they located the seat of the emotions in the heart and the bowels. They knew at least that these are the organs that go most immediately and most obviously out of whack when the emotions are wrought up.)
But having said it, forget it. The last word on these “strange things” was spoken almost 2500 years ago by Nehemiah, the rebuilder of Jerusalem. He had his critics, too — a couple of chaps named Sanballat and Geshem. These guys were also great ones for discussions and debates, and on one occasion they sent Nehemiah an invitation to come and meet with them in one of the villages of the plain of Ono. But Nehemiah sent them word, saying, “I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?”

The late Admiral David Farragut expressed essentially the same idea in more earthy language when, on the occasion of a naval operation, he passed the word: “Damn the torpedoes! Full speed ahead.”

You judge our hostile brethren a bit more harshly than I would be inclined to judge them. When I think of the things I have said and done “in Christ Jesus,” particularly when I was about the age these men are now, I am quite willing to forgive for the sake of being forgiven. No man ought to put anything down in print until he is at least forty, but they are doing it, as I did it, and I would guess that one of these days they will be as embarrassed as I am to read what youthful rambunctiousness and an immature theology prompted them to write. But that’s the trouble with life: we have to live it forward but we can evaluate it only backward.

Meanwhile, don’t worry too much about what these guys are doing to the laity. It was an unsophisticated little girl, you remember, who blurted out the terrible truth that the Emperor had no clothes on; and I suspect that it will be the laity that will stop this business if it threatens to get out of hand. They are not, you see, very sophisticated theologically, so when they come to the point of having to make a judgement on these recurrent quarrels in the Church they fall back upon our Lord’s simple and pragmatic rule of thumb: “By their fruits ye shall know them.” We have seen the fruits of Valparaiso University and have found them, with rare exceptions, good. We will be interested to see what fruits your critics have to offer.

Cheers —

Theophilus

There are occasional moments when I feel that all of us would benefit from a dose of G. K. Chesterton. If you ignore his curious emotional attachment to Rome you can find many things in him which the post-modern world ought to hear again and again. He was, of course, a master of hyperbole and few of his dicta are literally and totally true. There is, however, always a swift and bitter taste of truth. More than many others, he reminds me of the validity of Whitehead’s famous statement that “there is an element of excessiveness in all true greatness,” or his own definition: “A saint is one who exaggerates what the world has forgotten.”

However you rate G. K. C., here are a few items from various volumes which I managed to re-read during the past few months:

“It is a good exercise to try for once in a while to express any opinion one holds in words of one syllable. If you say ‘The social utility of the indeterminate sentence is recognized by all criminologists as a part of our sociological evolution toward a more humane and scientific view of punishment’, you can go on talking like that for hours with hardly a movement of the gray matter inside your skull. But if you begin: ‘I wish Jones to go to jail and Brown to say when Jones shall come out,’ you will discover with a thrill of horror, that you are obliged to think. The long words are not the hard words; it is the short words that are hard. There is much more metaphysical subtlety in the word ‘damn’ than in the word ‘degeneration.’” It might be a good idea to examine last Sunday’s sermon from this point of view.

Or: “I am tired of the shilly-shallying and sham liberality of the famous Lambeth report on what is quaintly called ‘Birth Control.’ It is in fact, of course, a scheme for preventing birth in order to escape control.”

Or: “We are all somewhat wary aware that some modern Churchmen call continuous change progress; as when we remark that a corpse crawling with worms has an increased vitality; or that a snowman slowly turning into a puddle is purifying itself of its excretions.”

Or: (He is talking about race religion): ‘Needless to say there was no such nonsense talked in Luther’s time or for long after his time; and, least of all, to do him justice, by Luther. Germans were turbulent and a little barbaric, as he was himself: but it is only fair to him to say that he was a Christian, in the sense that he believed that nothing could be done except in the strength of Christ. A superbly typical story reaches me from Germany; that some of the Nazis started out to sing the great Reformer’s famous hymn, ‘A Mighty Fortress is Our God’ (which sounds quite promisingly militaristic), but found themselves unable to articulate the very words of the beginning of the next verse, which ran, ‘With might of ours can naught be done.’ This by the way, is one of the many passages in which Chesterton is much more acute and accurate than Shirer in his book about the Third Reich.

Or: In a charming passage he envisages a revolt against the young: “It might have been a rebellion of oppressed parents breaking the yoke of servile obedience now laid on them by their tyrannical sons
and daughters. It might have been the father breaking out of the coal cellar with the original big stick, or the maiden aunt emerging from the bedroom armed with a poker; and the joyous spectacle of their smashing the gramophones and the saxophones and the ukuleles, hurling away the cocktails, wrecking the racing cars and generally showing that there is life in the old dog yet.” The same could be said, I believe, of G. K. C. even in the year of our Lord 1964. I would recommend that you choose one of his volumes in paperback, possibly his best, “Orthodoxy.”

Theophilus reports: As I announced several months ago, Theophilus has now become the book editor of this learned journal. If you ask: “Can I trust him?” I can only say that you would recognize his name immediately and that he is a very smart cookie. When he says “read” — read!

Dear O. P.:

This summer I, like many of the brethren, packed off with a hammock full of books so that I could alone during at least two weeks for neglect during the other fifty. I have a couple of observations. The first of these has to do with CPH, our own outfit. Have you noticed the serious turn its works have taken recently? I tumbled into and out of the hammock with no less than four of Concordia’s big projects: Merton Strommen’s Profiles of Church Youth, your man Al Huegli’s edition of Church and State under God, Bill Danker’s Two Worlds or None and Dean Lueking’s Mandate for Mission. They have one thing in common: they represent searching but loyal looks at the church and at our church. Hooray for them: I hope by next summer I’ll have another four like them to take along.

Let me make a prediction: one of the best-received books this fall will be by a Valpo veteran, Jaroslav Pelikan. Harper and Row is printing his Obedient Rebels; it is an up-to-date look at the Reformation and it will be published at Reformation season. Just to stay provincial (I guess I could say “parochial” now that Valpo is a parish) for another moment. I want to hark back to one of the best Spring books. Dick Luecke’s New Meanings for New Beings. Dick is one of those philosopher-theologian-pastors who always finds that things are harder than they are, which they are. He wrote this book for people in parishes: I hope our pastors at least will check it out. (I detect a lot of sermon outlines, on the Baptism and Temptation of Jesus, snuggled away in the book.) Dick’s book was published by an L. C. A. house called Fortress.

After that summer line-up you will soon accuse me of being “Alt-Missourisch.” Well, I figure as long as our boys are producing as well as anyone else, I’ll start with them. Now that I’ve proven how safe I am, let me mention too that with autumn upon us I am sneaking a peek at some Vatican Council stuff. Our members read so much about it that we pastors have to keep a jump ahead of them. The most fun (and they tell me it is quite reliable, too) is Presbyterian Robert M. Brown’s Observer in Rome. Have you seen it?

Theophilus

Stray Notes: I have noticed with some dismay that the “camel’s nose argument” is becoming an increasingly important part of our weaponry in all sorts of arguments. How often have I heard a brother rise to his feet and say: “This is the camel’s nose in the tent. Let us be very careful.” It is clear that this is a particularly low form of the “argumentum ad hominem.” A high and noble argument is subjected to an ecology which is immediately distasteful and repugnant to the individual. Item: You say something good and strong and right about the race question, and your opponent observes that a negro will marry your daughter. Your lofty argument becomes a camel’s nose at dusk in the desert, wet and cold and altogether unlovely.

Perhaps it is also true that this argument is the Mohammedan form of an ancient theological principle. “If you were trained at certain seminaries, you will recognize it immediately. Its Western Latin form is: ‘Principis Obsta’ — which interpreted means ‘resist all beginnings.’” Its sanctions therefore come from certain forms of theology and not logic. Example: A reverent and humble liturgy in the life of the Church will lead to idolatry, Mariolatry, and other such sin and shame. This form is particularly obnoxious because it drags heavenly things into the desert of our world.

Many years ago someone said that history is a perennial struggle between paralytics and epileptics. It is quite clear that the “camel’s nose” — wet, cold and unlovely—is one of the weapons of the paralytic.

The program for the third session of the Vatican Council was announced about a month ago. When they convene in September, the reverend fathers will take up considerations of Schemata in the following order: The Church—the pastoral duties of bishops—the schema on ecumenism and two declarations (one on the Jews and the other on the Church in the modern world)—and finally, a discussion of the schema on divine revelation.

It will be interesting to all of us to note that there will then be nine schemata remaining—all of them pretty tough. They are—on the Eastern churches—on missions—on religion—on priests—on the lay apostolate—on the Sacrament of matrimony—on priestly institutions and seminaries—on Catholic schools—and on the Church in the modern world.
Elsewhere in these notes I shall refer to the trickery of the ear. Both the eye and the ear can really play havoc with our understanding of things. Look, for example, at the following poem which appeared in “Trade Winds” in the Saturday Review some time ago:

“Mycon tree!
’Tis of these
Wheat-land, dove-lip,
Burr tea
Of the icing;
Land-dove—the pill
Grimm’s piracy!
Land, wear
My father’s dyed
From ever remount
Inside—
Let free, dumb ring!”

One of my star students turns up with a quotation from a British journal “Private Eye” which is a devastating take-off on Bishop Robinson’s notorious book Honest to God. It reads as follows:

“I believe ... or not as the case may be ... in a Supernatural Force or at least Abstract Concept consistent with the intellectual and scientific developments of the Twentieth Century, Maker of Heaven and Earth insomuch as that does not involve acceptance of the existence of a ‘Heaven’ in the traditional sense or rejection of the latest theories explaining the creation of life in the simpler terms of amino-acid. But not necessarily in Jesus Christ Our Lord, a belief in Whom would involve the begging of certain questions which I am not prepared to go into at this stage. (It follows that the claims made on His behalf, which usually follow at this stage, such as the Virgin Birth and other allegedly miraculous details of His alleged life on earth, can for the present purposes be omitted.) I believe in the Holy Church of England, the only Church broadminded enough to have a floundering intellectual who doesn’t even subscribe to any of its basic superstitions like me as one of its Bishops and Pastors, in the Communion of Saints, whatever that may mean, the Resurrection, or at any rate something, and the Life Everlasting or not as the case may be. AMEN.”

A magnificent article on sociologists from the London Times Literary Supplement: “A sociologist is one who takes three years and $10,000 to tell you that there is a whore house on the corner which you knew all the time.” Or, “a sociologist is one who present statistics of ‘male and female professors of English broken down by age and sex.’”

More strange doings: For several years I have watched—with weary distaste—a comparatively new development in the history of the Church Militant—the insistence on the presence of a tape recorder at all gatherings with brethren who have met to discuss problems of the Kingdom. Apparently the practice is based on a non-canonical Scripture passage: “Where two or three are gathered together, a tape recorder must be in the midst of them.” (I Beelzebub 2:32) I have given the matter much careful thought. Apparently this is either an un-Lutheran form of perfectionism or an un-Christian sadism. Under the reading of perfectionism the demand for a tape recorder seems to be based on the idea that everything said in the warmth of a debate or the informality of a discussion is complete, final and perfect and that it must therefore be preserved for posterity. It is the last word. The speaker can never say anything better. This is crypto-perfectionism at its worst.

Seen as sadism the tape recorder syndrome is, of course, the idea that a man can be haunted and persecuted for all time by an unhappy phrase or an incomplete statement. “This is what the man said in 1950,” cry the tape recorder disciples, “and we can now throw it into his face and shout it from the housetops until he totters into his grave—perhaps even beyond that.” Surely the Lord will spend a part of Judgment Day listening to tape recorders which we shall bring with us before His awful throne.

Whatever the theology and psychology of the tape recorder idea may be, we often forget that as an instrument of truth it is singularly inadequate and weak. Have you ever seen a copy of one of your sermons taken from a tape recorder? It is a shattering experience. Did I really leave all those sentences incomplete? Am I really so illiterate, particularly in the wrong places—“a” when I thought I said “the”—a solemn looking sentence which I uttered in a sarcastic tone—is this what my good people really heard? The answer is clear. Between the tape recorder and its final use is the perennial trickery of the human ear. It is most evident in the little short words, the articles and prepositions, which so often determine the true meaning of a sentence. It makes all the difference in the world if I have said “the God” or “a God”. Some of us (at least I) tend to swallow these small words—and thus get into endless trouble.

After long study I have therefore resolved never to get into a room where three of us are gathered together—the brother, I, and the tape recorder as judge between us. I may be old-fashioned, but I prefer that the third presence be our Lord—the Lord of forgiveness and mercy—who has known for thousands of years how weak and inarticulate we are when we try, as we must, to pour His thoughts into our poor human words.
Footnote: By the way, all of this applies to our Roman friends who are constantly throwing Luther's "Tischreden" at us. Veit Dietrich, the faithful scribe, was the 16th century counterpart of our tape recorders. Aside from the weakness noted in the paragraphs above, how would you like to be quoted, forever and a day, on something you said after a good dinner, with perhaps two or three beers under your belt, and in the company of your best friends who in your opinion needed an occasional shock to blast them out of their academic rut? Luther had a brilliant, provocative mind. How he must have enjoyed baiting the solemn Philip, the serious theologians, the slavish notetaker Dietrich. I imagine that Martin had a lot of fun, and he never imagined that one day these "Tischreden" would be solemnly quoted in learned books and journals.

Footnote to 20th Century life: Three or four times during the past year our electricity has been shut off for several hours—and I have suddenly discovered again our frightening dependence on the little wires that run into our house from the pole down the road. Only a few years ago an ice storm which broke the wires in our latitude would only deprive us of light. We could light an ancient lamp (rescued from a closet), add a few candles, and life would go on. Today, however, a break in the wires or some other emergency presents a major—almost final—disaster. In a moment there is no light, no heat, no refrigeration, no radio, no television, no dictating machine, no clocks, no electric razor, no phonograph—and as we discovered a few days ago, no way to get the car out of the garage. We huddle around a few candles left from Christmas, and hope that the brave men who climb utility poles in the night will get here as soon as they can.

A lesson in all this? Really only the obvious one: We have paid for our gadgets with an incredible, almost inhuman, dependence on forces beyond our control. And perhaps another: The first result of Gabriel's blowing of his horn—the dies irae—will be the shutting off of our electricity. This is the way the end will come, not with a bang but with a whimper in the night — the whimper of children of the dark huddled around flickering candles . . . and perhaps the final glory will be all the greater.

A few thoughts for Reformation Day, 1964: It was the night of February 17, 1546. A man lay dying in a little room in Eisleben, Germany, the same town in which he had been born 63 years earlier. The world was different that night more than four hundred years ago—different from what it had been in 1483. And the difference was the measure of the work of the man who now lay quietly waiting for the end. He knew, and had known for several months that not even the rugged physical endowment of a miner's son could make up for the years of incessant labor, of agonizing thought, of toil and of tears.

The body of Martin Luther was about to die; but his soul, the great indomitable soul of him, stood poised and ready on the threshold of another dawn. It was not only the dawn of a world in which his faith would finally become sight—but also the dawn of a world here in time and space in which his spirit and his work would become one of the cloud of witnesses through whom the unwarmed spirit of the living God shapes the destinies of men and of nations.

It is, therefore, no mere accident of history that lying on a table beside Martin Luther's deathbed were some notes for an essay or lecture in which he had once more given his answers to one of the greatest questions of all time and history—perhaps now today the greatest question before the mind of man in the year of our Lord 1964.

Luther was writing some notes on the measure and limitations of man, his wisdom and his power. "It takes five years," he had written, "to become a good farmer; twenty-five years to grow into statesmanship; but one hundred years to begin to understand properly the words and full meaning of the depths of the riches of God as set down in His holy Word.

Martin Luther's notes were in Latin; and then curiously the dying man turned to the German language for his final words—and in a trembling hand he had written: "We are beggars before God. That is true."

Here is again the swift, bitter taste of truth, a truth forgotten by us over so many dark and tortured centuries. Here is something high and great for our blinded eyes and our equally blinded hearts—a truth which is even more relevant to the contemporary world than ever before — the truth that man's relationship to God — relevant faith for our time and condition — lies in our being beggars who are brought back to God by His grace, forgiveness and mercy. Only the humble, repentant and penitent "beggar before God" can really know Him in all His forgiveness and in the power and glory of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

Very sincerely yours,

O. P. Kretzmann