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Dear Brother:

Before I left in June for three months of wandering in Europe, I received a letter from a brother in Iowa: "I deserve an honorary degree from Valpo because I am the only man in our circuit who is not conducting a tour to Europe this summer. I'm going fishing!"

I, too, did not conduct a tour. I did, however, meander around Northern Europe, taking notes on what I heard and saw, especially at Helsinki. In the hope that you may have a few leisure moments some cool fall evening, I am sending some of these notes to you. They are only the random observations of an innocent abroad in the afternoon of the twentieth century.

Exactly 30 years have come and gone since Joseph Wood Krutch wrote his little book *Was Europe a Success?* The noted American critic felt that the gathering shadows over Europe justified his use of the past tense. Thirty years of history changed many things. With astonishing vitality Europe not only survived the dark days of Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin but went on to an almost miraculous social and economic rebirth. Almost all of Europe is now more prosperous than it has ever been in its history.

For example, I am writing these notes at a window overlooking the Rhine. From my observation post I can see five separate and distinct forms of transportation — two railroad lines, one on each side of the river; buses, ships, and planes overhead. And all these are busy night and day in a pulsating stream of traffic which is completely strange to Americans. The waiter at my table tells me that 400 to 800 ships and barges pass his window every day. The gate tender at the railroad crossing on the Bier-Gasse reports that he must lower and raise his gates every five or six minutes each day. I sat down on the bench before his little hut and did some checking. Within thirty minutes, seven trains had passed the crossing — even the freight trains storming along at more than 80 kilometers an hour. I wandered down to the river and talked to the boatman who pilots a little ferry to the town on the other side. He said that he often had to wait twenty minutes in order to thread his way through the dense traffic on the river.

For a week I roamed the streets of a great city listening to anyone who would talk. Another week I spent in a village of 3,000 inhabitants asking questions of the man in the street. I examined scores of store windows and went into just as many offices and shops as I possibly could. Everywhere the story was the same — the Common Market has been astonishingly successful, and has brought a new and unprecedented prosperity to all its members. Europe is again a success. How long this will last I am unable to tell.

Vignettes: From the window of my room overlooking the Rhine I could see the town across the river with its church in the center. With my glasses, I can read the time on the tower clock. For three days it has stood firmly at 2:30. Today I boarded the little ferry to visit on the other side of the river. As I walked up the hill into the town, I turned to look at the other three sides of the tower clock. All three of them facing the town showed the correct time. On the return trip I asked the ancient ferryman why only the side of the clock facing across the river always stood at 2:30. He laughed and said in untranslatable German: "That is a gesture of independence, contempt, and indifference. It doesn't make the slightest difference to us on this side what time it is on the other side. In fact, we like to mix them up whenever we can."

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Now and then the BBC brings excellent examples of British humor. For example, the news that Khrushchev was swimming in the Black Sea in a rubber ring was the subject of much comment. BBC found a London cockney woman who also uses a rubber ring for swimming. She reports on its advantages and says that it is safe and comfortable: “People laugh at me, but I am happy that I can share this manly sport with Mr. Khrushchev. Let us raise a glass of cabbage water to Mr. Khrushchev for his rubber ring.”

A beautiful organ recital in the Sankt Petri Kirche in Hamburg at dusk on a Saturday evening — a good time to hear an organ in preparation for Sunday. The organ is one of the fine Beckerath instruments which provide such an interesting comparison with the products of Schlicker and Holtkamp in our own country. The climax of the concert was Franz Liszt’s remarkable “Variationen uber Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen”, which I had never heard. After an eloquent echo of the meaning of the four words, at times painful in its intensity, the composition ends with a simple, stately version of the chorale, “Was Gott tut, das ist wohl getan” without a single decorative note — just the majestic calm of the divine charity and the balm of Gilead. You can recommend it to your organist.

There are one million Spaniards and Italians working in West Germany today. Most of them receive board and room and they send all their money home. They are bellhops, maids, gardeners, porters — all the menial jobs in which the newly prosperous German is no longer interested. A curious sidelight is that even though you may be able to understand and speak German you are once more face to face with a blank wall. A tourist in Germany today could get by much better with a knowledge of Spanish or Italian. The reaction of the higher echelon of German workers — the conductor, the assistant manager, the head waiter — is always the same: “Die verdammten Spanier”.

Theophilus sat quietly reading a paper while I finished some chores. When I finally looked up, he was standing at the window watching students leaving their four o’clock classes. “Look,” he said, “what do you think of all the stuff in the papers these days — the H-bomb, the race for the moon, men floating around in space, a plane that will fly three times the speed of sound — do you sometimes hear the echo of the Tower of Babel story? It is the same thing, you know — poor sinners begin reaching for the sky. Think it over. I’ll see you Monday.”

We were talking to the captain of the Cunard liner who had sought refuge from some feminine tourists. We were not much better — like all tourists we asked questions. Where, we wanted to know, had he been last night and the night before at dinner time? He looked somewhat uneasy: “For about thirty hours we have been in the iceberg area. This time of year I always stay on the bridge as we go through these waters.”

“But,” we asked, anxious to show our profound knowledge of the sea, “what about radar? Doesn’t that give you sufficient warning?”

He looked at us somewhat strangely: “Against ice,” he said, “radar is only 50 per cent effective. It is always disturbed by the clutter of the sea — all sorts of objects — large fish, just the motion of the waves, almost anything will throw it off — this is the dangerous clutter of the sea.”

He wandered off — as he said, “I am supposed to circulate” — and I went to the window to look out over the sullen waters. His phrase haunted me — “the clutter of the sea.” The minor things, the little things are so loud that they drown out the great warnings of the sea — and of life. I resolved to recommend the phrase to a brother as a sermon topic. How many of us are deceived and betrayed by “the clutter of the sea”? The text: The Revelation of St. John 21:1.

NOTES ON TEEN-AGERS . . . For almost a week, imprisoned on a small ship in the North Atlantic, I found myself thrown into the company of teen-agers. As a matter of fact, I must admit that the first day I sought them out. I wanted to see them in their native habitat. There were about thirty or forty of them, apparently journeying to Europe under various pretenses.

May I now report that I have never seen a more unsavory lot of human beings? With only a few exceptions, they were unkempt, illiterate, and incredibly stupid. Their conversation was the talk of backward children: “Look, a fish.” “That ain’t no fish.” “So I says to Annie, ‘Wanna swig outa my bottle’?”
Over in the corner by the ropes several of them were always making love like young amoebas in spring. When an adult hove into sight, they were arrogant and contemptuous. Apparently no one had a right to invade their little dirty world.

Their behavior and appearance were all the more saddening because there were also about a dozen youngsters from India aboard. They were heading for school in England. They were well dressed, well mannered, and invariably courteous. Again and again I saw them watching their American counterparts with the dignified interest of a biologist at a zoo.

Again, I wondered, as I have these many years: What makes these children what they are? How have they become so arrogant and so stupidly unaware of the rules of the past? Reluctantly, I must admit that it is almost all our own fault. We have set them up on little pedestals and they have contemptuously accepted our homage: “Teen-ager, what do you think of God?” Once I even saw a frightening brochure: “Religion on Trial before the Teen-age Mind.” “Teen-ager, is the church doing right by you? Teen-ager, do you think our moral standards are too strict? Teen-ager, are your parents really fossils?” And so on. The result was predictable. We have earned their contempt. Even when we try to answer these questions, we should not have asked them in the first place. Now they feel that we do not know any answers. We can only turn to them in the pathetic hope that they can supply the solution of our problems.

The answer? Treat the teen-ager with the gentle, intellectual irony with which our Lord met Nicodemus: “Thou knowest not these things?” The immature mind has no claim to our respect. Their little untrained heads need discipline, not freedom. Behind us are the great voices of two thousand years and they must not be drowned out by illiterate children in blue jeans and bobby socks.

May I add, of course, that not all teen-agers come under this indictment. There are many, many who have been reared in Christian homes, have the proper respect for authority, and are aware of the fact that they have just begun to set their feet on the high road to wisdom and holiness, and these — and not my friends on the ship — are our real hope for tomorrow.

Thirty minutes between trains at Cologne permitted me to pay another visit to the cathedral. A sudden wild wind was blowing and several hundred people had sought refuge in the nave. I noted with pleasure that some stained glass has been added on the north and south sides. In my judgment, this Dom is still one of the greatest expressions of the Christian faith to be found in the world. But I do not want to talk about that now. On the way out of the north door I picked up a little pamphlet containing a message of the German bishops concerning the problem of mixed marriages. I submit a few paragraphs in exact translation for whatever they may be worth. I feel that from our own confessional viewpoint, we could and would say exactly the same thing. The bishops write:

What one of the two wedded people believes and loves the other denies: Holy Confession, Holy Mass, Holy Communion, and so on. Both live religiously in different worlds, each one lonely on his own shore. They feel it and they suffer under it ... Why is the Church opposed to these mixed marriages? Because she knows what pain a mixed marriage can bring to men and women . . . The gulf between the parents is transmitted to the children. There comes a day when in the soul of the child the question is asked: “Why does my father not make the sign of the Cross? Why does he not pray? Why does he not go to Church?” Over the children a deep shadow begins to fall. A Christian mother kneels with her child at the communion rail, but the father stands to one side and is silent . . . When the young bride comes into her new home, she places her religious pictures into a hidden drawer. She would like to have them on the walls of her new home, but she does not hang them up. She knows that he does not like them, and she does not wish to hurt him. Religion, which should be the strongest tie between a man and wife of the same faith and the source of the highest harmony and deepest comfort, becomes in a mixed marriage only a disturbance and a cause for misunderstanding and anger. As a result religion sinks more and more into the background.

And so we came at last to the Fourth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation at Helsinki, Finland. These few paragraphs are a worm’s eye view of the proceedings. I tried very hard to be an observer of the observers.

It is perfectly clear, of course, that Lutheranism today is a global church. There were speakers from Australia, Tanganyika, Southwest Africa, Sweden, the United States, Germany, and so on. Four languages were in constant use. The documents which we carried around from session to session were enough
to paper 210 North Broadway. When I left 24 hours before the sessions ended, we were at Document 97. I had already sent three heavy packages of material home to examine on long winter nights. It is clear that we must now add mimeograph machines to telephones as one of our great modern curses.

Since only the delegates and the official visitors and observers could be seated in the “Aula” (a good old name), closed circuit television had been set up in various rooms at the University. Several times I left the “Aula” in order to watch the proceedings on the television sets. I was delighted to see that again and again the camera was turned on the twenty observers from Missouri who sat faithfully, day after day, taking voluminous notes and putting on their headphones only when a brother spoke one of the Scandinavian languages. I must add that they took them off again when they discovered that he was not saying anything in any language. Throughout it all they managed to look properly mysterious. It is interesting to note that without exception our entire delegation was at least bi-lingual and in some cases, tri-lingual.

It is evident that there has been a steady trend toward confessionalism in the Lutheran World Federation. The Barmen Declaration of 1935 and the Anti-confessionalism of some of the members of the World Council of Churches have had a salutary effect on the thinking of the leaders of the Lutheran World Federation. For this reason the basic study document “On Justification” aroused much discussion. The general impression given by the public press that the assembly flew apart on this question is not accurate. What they were arguing about were certain details and the manner in which certain problems had been expressed. It is true, of course, that the German theologians can go down deeper, stay down longer, and come up drier than any other group in modern Christendom. A disinterested observer told me that almost all these men are highly trained theologians — a condition which sometimes can obscure the green pastures of the Word.

In addition to the Doctrine of Justification, the other major subject before the assembly was the Nature, Structure, and Function of the Federation. It is evident that the Federation is going through some growing pains. It could become an organizational Frankenstein like the Methodist Church in America, but the danger is made somewhat remote by the proper and jealous emphasis of the individual member churches on their rights and prerogatives. If hell knows no fury like a woman scorned, the Church knows no anger greater than the fury of a bishop, a “Kirchenrat,” or a superintendent whose power is in danger. In one of our discussion groups a young Danish nonconformist suggested that all bishops would have to be burned at the stake before his Church could make any progress. The suggestion was received by the group with warm interest. My Danish friend added that the present situation in Denmark is “organized chaos.”

In the particular area of organization, the men from Missouri again demonstrated our peculiar genius for this type of work. A subcommittee of the entire group of Missourians studied the constitution of the Federation and presented some exceedingly wise and far-reaching suggestions which created wide attention.

Sidelights: One of the venerable vice-presidents of The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod felt like having fried eggs for breakfast one Sunday morning. His English order was met with a blank stare. He tried German. “Eier — nicht gekocht — gebraten.” A triumphant smile of understanding illumined the face of the waitress. In five minutes he had his order — two raw eggs swimming despondently at the bottom of a soup plate — really and honestly “nicht gekocht.”

Voice of a brother at a pastoral conference: “Are the results of this sort of thing really worth the time, money and effort, or are they merely junkets for synodical officials and a few disreputable characters like yourself?” I think I can testify with some degree of objectivity. Make no mistake about it — Missouri’s voice is heard with real respect. In my own discussion group the chairman said again and again, “auf die Missourianer (a strange word) mussen wir Rucksicht nehmen.”

One afternoon when the “discussion groups” were meeting I got lost in the vast halls of the University. I opened door after door in pursuit of my own little circle of familiar faces. In several of the groups into which I looked a Missourian was speaking. Perhaps it should also be said very clearly that the leaders of the Lutheran World Federation consistently treated the Missourians with unfailing courtesy and kindness. We were given every possible privilege.

Voice of the brother in the rear: “Well, what did our men talk about?”

Answer: Always the same things — the authority of the Word of God — the great need for adherence to the Confessions, not only “de jure” (that is, in the constitution of the member churches), but
also “de facto” (in actual life and practice). They testified against unionism and separatism. They expressed their misgivings openly but always charitably. In other words, at these meetings Missouri was making a contribution to world Lutheranism which could be done at no other place and in no other way. This is really “testimony” at its highest and best, infinitely far removed from raving and ranting in mimeographed sheets somewhere in a corner of North America. And may I — not a synodical official — say that our “observers” did their assigned task exceedingly well and thoughtfully.

They were always conscious of our own weaknesses, of the evident integrity and orthodoxy of many leaders of the LWF, and of the grave problems confronting world Lutheranism in these shoddy and apostate and almost eschatological days. This was really “Missouri” at its best — responsible, honest, courageous, and charitable.

Footnote: All of us were very much pleased that the sentimental ecumenism of the 30’s, visible also in sections of the LWF at that time, had disappeared completely under the challenge of the Luther Renaissance and the rediscovery of the lasting greatness of our Confessions. I found only one exception to this. In my own section there were some so-called “youth leaders” (whatever that is), mostly feminine, who were starry-eyed relics of the past. “Please”, they said, “not so much emphasis on the Confessions. Let us have more universal love, more meeting each other with open arms.” A psychiatrist could do a lot with this. I made a careful study of these fugitives from the ecumenical woodwork and came up with the conclusion that there is a definite relationship between the appearance of a woman and her sugary interest in ecumenism. The more unkempt they are, the more straggly their hair, the more they are devotees of this illiterate approach to the life of the Church. They have seldom read the Bible, and never, of course, a book of theology. My colleague from our Springfield seminary dismissed them quickly: “Theological and ecclesiastical beatniks.” We can only hope that they are not lost in the true and final ecumenicity of Judgment Day.

Sidelight: Throughout all the sessions the new president of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod conducted himself with wise and calm intelligence. Under his firm hand the Missouri observers met every day for several hours and threshed out the problems which had come before them during the sessions of the General Assembly.

Sidelight Two: On one of the latter days of the Assembly one of our Missourian lay observers, a man who made a very real contribution to our thinking, handed me the following note: “Man standing alone in the nakedness and shame of his self-conviction and conscious despair sees the grace of God which enables him to exercise and to practice acceptance and faith in the efficacy of the vicarious substitution of Christ Jesus, whereby reconciliation with his Creator is effected. This is the one means by which he may or will receive inner peace of mind and heart and conscience and worshipful gratitude. This gives meaning to the struggles and vicissitudes, the sufferings to which he is subjected and with which he is confronted as he moves, thinks, contemplates and views with awe, as he relates himself to his fellow man and to the phenomena which surround him on all sides in this world. This is also the one means — and no less — for a lively and joyous hope in the world to come . . . This writer stands firm in his finite yearning for brotherhood in Christ Jesus, his Savior and Lord, and for continuing reconciliation with God through Him. At times he is sorely tempted to conclude that ‘the world and they that dwell therein’ are joined together by the Triune God in, as it were, a joint venture. This is, however, repugnant and unworthy. I am ready, willing and eager to be reproved, instructed and forgiven.” An eloquent statement coming from a post-modern twentieth century man.

Sidelight Three: As I was standing at the hotel desk in Helsinki one morning, there was a bishop in the line in front of me. A little Finnish girl, apparently dazzled by the purple vest of the bishop, asked: “How do you do?” It was clearly the only English that she knew. To my astonishment the bishop launched into a speech: “How do I do? That is a good question. That is what I ask myself every morning. How am I doing? Good or bad? How is my stomach doing? How is my heart doing? And so, my dear, I am very glad that you asked that question. I shall now think it over and let you know.” Thoroughly frightened, the little receptionist hastened to the manager. While I could not hear the conversation through the half-open door, I could see her making little circular motions with her finger at her temple.

Finally: What is the future of the Lutheran World Federation? It is hard to tell. In general, I can report that the discussions and topics at Helsinki were better, more profound, and closer to the heart of Lutheranism than the pronouncements in Minneapolis in 1957. Of course, like every pastoral
conference, the LWF has its good theologians and its bad theologians. The parable of the tares among
the wheat is also true of theologians and churchmen. Martin Niemoeller, for example, hardly deserves
the name of Lutheran — if he ever did. His kind, however, are not the real powers in the Federation to
day. My impression is that the present leaders are trying hard to draw the organization into the good,
clear channels of classic Lutheranism. They are facing an enormously difficult task because they are
working against four hundred years in which almost every Lutheran body went its own sweet way.
Only now are they beginning to be aware of one another and of their common heritage. Luther and
the Confessions lighted the way at Helsinki and their rays, burning away the dross of the centuries,
were as strong as ever. Example: In my own discussion group there was a professor-doctor (these
are always strange characters — a professor is not so bad, a doctor can be understood, but a professor-
doctor is impossible) who presented a doctrinal statement of the position of the LWF which was a mis-
shapen child of neo-orthodoxy and the indifferentism of EKID. Before some of us could get the floor to
express our horror the venerable bishop of Latvia, bent by the years of sorrow, got the attention of the
chairman. In a ten-minute, brilliant analysis of the essence of Lutheranism, shaking his finger at the err-
ing brother, he demolished him. This was the last we ever heard of the professor-doctor proposal.

And so — I believe that we should keep a close eye on developments in the LWF, help in every
way we can, and pray that the Holy Spirit would use its members as a channel for His continuing
grace and power in our darkening world.

Final Word: The election of Dr. Fredrik Schiotz, president of the American Lutheran Church, to the
presidency of the LWF on the last day of the assembly can be hailed with joy by everyone who sees
the problem of world Lutheranism with clarity and hope. In a confused and complex situation he will
be a calm, realistic, and conservative leader. He deserves our intercessions.

I am now completing these notes on the boatdeck of a little ship in the Baltic Sea. The sun has
gone down, and our wake is no longer golden, but the long northern twilight permits me to see enough
to write. Just so, the sun has gone down over much of our world. It may even be that we are in the
sunset of time and history. But there is still this lingering light over the earth, this strange, luminous
understanding of the world and the church which flows from Bethlehem and Calvary. This evening
hour may darken down into a blacker night than man has ever known before.

But God's cause is safe in God's hands. Just for this he came down to our twilight world, to
lighten our darkness, to hold us against the coming of the night, and to give us a new sun and a new
dawn. The Lord of the Church still lives and the Comforter is not dead. If we, at this late hour in our
little place in time, can add a bit to His perennial glory, not limited by sunrise and sunset, we have
done what we could.

There are some more notes but they can wait until a later hour. My good wishes for a rich
measure of divine benediction.

O. P. Kretzmann