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Dear Brother:

One of the most gratifying things in life recently has been the fact that a few brethren wrote that they missed these occasional notes from an ivory tower. Even Theophilus unbent enough to write: "I really miss your yellow sheets. I used to read myself to sleep with them — but now I have to take sleeping pills. It would be cheaper for me to take a collection for Valpo than to buy all those pills." In answer, therefore, to this tidal wave of demand I have gathered my notes for this invasion of your privacy during Advent.

Let us begin by going back to September. As everyone knows, the University was host to the "Counselors' Conference" of Synod for about a week in September. Theophilus with his usual cynical myopia told me that the conference had been invited to the campus with sinister, ulterior motives. "You invited us," he said, "in the hope that come February we will give you a few more bucks in the Valpo collection."

"Theophilus," I said, "nothing could be further from the truth. It is really much simpler than that. We now have the facilities to house and feed 1500 people. These facilities were largely furnished by The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. Why shouldn't we turn them over to Synod whenever they can be useful? We have often wondered how $15,000,000 worth of property and buildings can be profitably used during the long idle summer months. The Counselor's Conference was a partial answer to the problem."

Theophilus shook his head and went away.

And so the Conference came to Valpo — and an astonishing event it was. Here were eight hundred men (and two women who wandered in by mistake) gathered not only to adopt a $21,000,000 budget for a great church-body, but also to discuss doctrine, listen to some brilliant essays, and engage in a common devotional life which was uplifting, even for the warhorses of Synodical affairs. To my amazement there were no brethren standing outside smoking while something was going on inside. The sessions began on time with every seat taken. The program was meticulously planned. All in all it was a remarkable example of the necessary fusion of efficiency and piety.

Footnote: I am not so sure about the wisdom of changing the name "Visitor" to "Counselor." I agree that the title "Visitor" is weak and inaccurate. On the other hand, the word "Counselor" is almost equally bad. It conjures up visions of a stuffy pedagogue in high school "counseling" his charges or a psychologist giving advice to young married people. Far better it would have been to anglicize or to take over bodily the majestic name of "Visitator" with all its overtones of judgment, of ecclesiastical discipline and sacred power. Well do I remember Grandfather Huetschen, forty years ago, coming into the kitchen from his daily walk to the post office saying, "Mutter, der Herr Visitator kommt." In these simple words there was the sound of Gabriel's horn announcing the day of judgment. How weak and flat by comparison are the words: "Mother, the Counselor telephoned." The change indicates that we have taken another fateful step in the shoddy process of Americanization.

As the last "Visitator" left, the first freshmen arrived at the campus — almost nine hundred of them this year swelling the total resident student body to 2,668. This is again a high mark and raises some difficult questions about the University's future — especially in its relation to a rapidly growing Synod with more and more young men and women going to college.

I still believe that the judicious planting of junior colleges for our laity would be by far the most intelligent solution of the problem. As our Concordias train the teaching and preaching ministry of the Church, so a system of junior colleges should train at least a certain percentage of our college youth within the challenging arms of the Church. Furthermore, the two systems should be kept separate so that each can pursue its objectives with high concentration and singleness of purpose. (This should bring a postcard or two.)

Dim view section: About once a day I feel that someone should write a good essay on our doctrine of the ministry — what it is, what it means, what it should be. There are some strange and marvelous things going on. Here, for example, is a note in a Lutheran publication which clearly reflects some colossal confusion. The names have been changed to protect the innocent. "St. Chrysostom's church has welcomed its new intern, Patrick J. Flannegan. He will assist senior pastor Xavier Murphy, associate pastor Isadore Levi, pastor of education J. F. Gamaliel and pastor of music W. Brahms." What a dismaying use of the beautiful word and idea: "Pastor". What, by all the saints, is a "pastor of education"?

One of the most curious developments in American (and Synodical) education is the growing number of married students on our campuses. At our American colleges about ten per cent of the students are married; at our
theological seminaries the proportion is much higher. As you know, there has been much heated debate about the meaning and values of the situation. Do the first babies and the first theological insights really mix very well? Must we share the consternation of a congregation that gets a vicar with four children? It is a difficult and touchy subject. Often the happy bride works in order to see her husband through college or seminary. As one cynical dean remarked: "These students are getting through school by the sweat of their 'fraus.'" I shall now get a letter from a charming young bride who will tell me that helping her new husband through the seminary was one of the finest experiences of her life. She is making a definite contribution to his work. I applaud. But the nagging doubts remain.

Dim view section continued: The daily press brings the news of the death of Halford Luccock, professor of homiletics in the Yale Divinity School, author of many books, and the real "Simeon Stylites," columnist of The Christian Century. I knew him best as Simeon Stylites, and in that role he often said what needed to be said with vigor, gentleness and grace. Several years ago, for example, he mounted his white horse and took after the people who reduced the great English language to a muddy and flaccid jargon. Under the title "I Like Four-Letter Words" he wrote: "I want short words that convey long meanings, words that do not use up half the alphabet . . . You may ask for 'accommodations'; I prefer a room. You may eat 'comestibles'; give me some food. You may receive 'emoluments' for your hard work; I'll take pay." He continued: "Often young preachers suffer from the affliction of 'polysyllabism'. Both fledgling prophets and those old enough to know better often make solo flights up into the upper realms of an abstract theological jargon where their congregations lose sight of them. A minister needs to use the tongue that the congregation uses, else his big words may conceal saving truth."

Still dim view section: Perhaps I should add another skirmish to my running feud with "educationists." To keep the mail from getting too heavy I hasten to repeat that I have never taken a dim view of "educators"; my feud is only with "educationists" — those that out-Dewey Dewey. The Council of Basic Education publishes a lusty little bulletin each month which snipes at educationists with single-minded devotion. Some recent examples: A school in a midwestern state has "the children working on the problem of milk-spilling" . . . Another has a course in how to use the telephone and how to reverse the charges . . . Still another has "supervised snowballing during the winter months." What all this has to do with education is, of course, the great $64 question. Along with all this the educationists are now outstripping the social workers in the use of rich, fruity prose. For example the following: "Creative perspectives in the social studies are the mental throughways to points of arrival in intelligently projected courses of living — guiding insights for worthy social aspirations and concerns. They should provide outlooks, access routes and ramps which relate them to the situational problems encountered wherever life may lead." The editor adds: "Somebody is going to get traffic-bound on the ramps. In any case that is awful stuff to get on your tires."

After I read this I wandered through my bookshelves in order to find Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch's famous book "The Art of Writing." By the way, if you have never seen this, I am sure that you will enjoy it very much and learn a great deal from it. I believe, for example, that the chapter on "Jargon" should be read by all preachers, teachers and writers at least once a month. Quiller-Couch insists that much modern writing and speaking is hopeless because we have not learned how to speak directly and clearly. His classic example: "He was conveyed to his place of residence in an intoxicated condition." Compare this with the power and punch of: "He was carried home drunk." It might be well to examine a sermon occasionally from this point of view. How many abstract nouns are in it? How many circumlocutions? How many good, sound monosyllables? This, I think, would be an instructive and valuable study.

University note: All three of our science departments are now receiving direct support for research from agencies of the Federal Government. This, too, is a curious development. In the long-view it may mean that certain areas of study on American campuses will be much stronger than others. The Federal Government may actually control and direct the development of an institution by giving help to one discipline and withholding it from another. This is one more reason why private sources, especially churches and alumni, should be particularly vigorous in their support of the whole institution. Only in this way can we maintain a good balance between the various disciplines of the liberal arts. In other words, Theophilus, we need a good collection in February.

Backward look: At this writing the national elections are still the subject of much punditing and editorializing — much of it sheer nonsense. For example, the so-called "religious" question was religious only in a secondary way. It was "ecclesiastic" with a few religious overtones. The basic question was and is: How far and how much do you trust the American Catholic hierarchy? Not the average priest — not Mr. Kennedy — not even the Pope — but the American hierarchy! There is the Ethiopian in the cordwood. This is the real problem, and it will be for some time to come. I do not know just why, but during September and October I found the following conversation from Alice in Wonderland singularly apt and appropriate:

"Do you mean that you think you can find out the answer to it?" said the March hare.

"Exactly so," said Alice.

"Then you should say what you mean," the March hare went on.

"I do," Alice hastily replied, "—at least I mean what I say, that's the same thing, you know."

"Not the same thing a bit!" said the Hatter. "You might just as well say that 'I see what I eat' is the same thing thing as 'I eat what I see'!"
This seemed to be the basic problem in the national election.

Quotation of the month: "No praise can flatter unless it comes from someone who is also free to blame."

Have you ever been disturbed in the middle of a sermon by Deacon Sauerbraten who rises and heads for an exit just when you reach your most important thought? Theophilus has solved the problem. He makes the following statement at the beginning of a sermon: "I have been requested to ask a gentleman in this audience to step out into the narthex to talk to a woman who claims he owes her $2.40 for some laundry she did for him over a month ago. She does not want to embarrass him by coming into this church to insist on his paying her, but she knows that he is here and wants him to come out and settle with her within the next thirty minutes so that she can get back to work on time. I am glad to make this announcement, and I can assure the gentleman concerned that if he leaves before I finish the sermon I shall understand and excuse him."

Problem section: Theophilus drifted into the office the other day, and after scraping the mud off his shoes, said fraternally, "You look like something the cat dragged in. Do you have any problems which are not your own fault?"

"Theophilus," I said, "I got one big serious problem. As you know, Valpo has the only Lutheran law school in the country. It is a good school with a distinguished record. It is 85 years old. It has an excellent faculty. But its physical facilities are positively bad. Thirty thousand books are crammed in where there ought to be only twenty thousand. The students are in the same old building with four hundred undergraduates in arts and sciences. There are not enough offices, classrooms, reading rooms and practice court rooms. Of course, we were aware of this for some time, but it suddenly came to a head with a visitor from the American Bar Association in the person of Dean Lockhart of the University of Minnesota Law School. He is a nice fellow, but he is also a first-rate dean—and he put his foot down. 'Boys,' he said in essence, 'you have a good school, but you must have better facilities. The American Bar Association of which you are a member will be very unhappy if you do not do something and very soon.' So, Theophilus, this is what I am worrying about. It would be a tragedy if the Lutheran church in America would lose its only law school. The Roman Catholics have 21; the Methodists 9; the Baptists 5; and—here we sit with only one."

Theophilus nodded sympathetically: "That's really rough, but what are you going to do about it?"

"Well," I said, "we took the problem to the Board of Directors of Synod and the College of District Presidents in November. At both places we met with understanding and generous response. They stand ready to help us. Just how and when has not yet been decided, and that is our real problem right now. We hope to present something definite in the early spring. Meanwhile, I hope you will keep your ears and eyes open and let me know what you think."

Theophilus nodded his head. "Problems like that," he said, "we will always have until Gabriel blows his horn. They are the real signs of progress in the Kingdom." With that he sighed and went away.

Footnotes for Christmas: While Caesar Sleeps: On the quiet Judean night in which our Lord was born about five or six people knew about it — Joseph, Mary, the shepherds, perhaps one or two guests from the crowded inn. All the rest of the world was asleep on that night — completely oblivious to the fact that something was happening which would mean the end of everything that had gone on before — the end of the false gods they had worshipped — the end of the twisted ideals they had cherished — the end and the death of a world whose cup had overflowed. And all this ended that night in the faint whimper of a Child. Over in Rome Caesar was asleep on the restless pillow of empire. Up in Gaul Pilate was perhaps dreaming of the day when he would be governor of a province. In Jerusalem Herod had nightmares of revolution and the loss of his throne. And the Child that was to turn their world upside-down was asleep in His mother's arms.

God was a Baby, one of the most important families on earth was housed in a stable, angels were talking to shepherds, a proud king was restless in his sleep because a Child had been born, and the heavenly choir sang before the smallest audience in its history. Everything was upside-down!

This brings us to a great important truth which we must remember again this Christmas when we look to the future with such anxious eyes and questioning minds. This is a great historic axiom. God's way of doing things is never our own way. He has His own approach, His own time, His own answers, and He gives them in the Bethlehem way. Things happen when and how He wants them to happen, and only many years later we suddenly discover that despite its apparent unreason His way was the best way, His answer the most reasonable under the long view of the clarifying years.

Now at Bethlehem that first Christmas night there was only one group that knew what it was all about, that knew something about its meaning and purpose and end. This was the choir from the realm of glory. And they sang! They had no anxious fears or questions or doubts; they knew that after the long centuries of waiting that God's plan was working out as it always does; they knew that this was the divine seal of the years of hope, as it always was and always will be; they knew that the Child, now forgotten in the manger and soon to die on the cross, was the end of all their hopes and dreams, as He always will be. And so they sang!

There can be no doubt that men and women who are uncertain, fearful and afraid cannot sing well. They just haven't got the heart. If we read our newspapers and magazines correctly, much of the vaunted courage with which
we are supposed to face the future as Christmas comes is not a singing courage and faith. It is just whistling in the dark! In fact, we have attempted to build our uncertainty and fear into a working philosophy of life. The strange attitude, "this is the best I can do so it must be good," is at the bottom of many of our fears and uncertainties. It has no place in our commemoration of Christmas. At the manger we drop our burden of uncertainty and fear and join in the song of the angels, "Glory to God in the highest; peace on earth, good-will toward men."

As Christmas comes, there are undoubtedly some things that we would like to forget — mistakes, failures, some besetting sin, an unkind word, malicious gossip and jealousy. And beyond these the world's cruelty and the world's selfishness, the great cunning and power of evil, perhaps some hidden unhappiness or personal weariness.

With all these in our hands and hearts we come to the manger again this Christmastime. And suddenly they disappear! The Child divides our lives into before and after, just as He has divided the history of the world. His hands reach out from the manger and take away everything but forgiveness and peace and the new song in our hearts which will make it possible for us to conquer life and time and the burden of uncertainty. It may be dark and noisy on Christmas night. There may be darkness and bedlam over the world — but the stars of Christmas shine as soon as it is dark enough and the angels sing as soon as we are quiet enough . . .

My good wishes for a blessed and happy Christmas.

Sincerely yours,

O.P. Kretzmann