April-May 1959

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Dear Brother:

This time I may as well plunge right into the middle of things. I hope that you will not turn to the comic section until you have read these few lines.

You will recall that May 10, 1959, has been set aside for a University Centennial Thank Offering. It is becoming increasingly evident that this will be a very critical day in the history of our Lutheran university. In fact, I have been thinking of it lately as a day of judgment and decision. Suddenly it will decide some basic issues for us. A general and generous participation in the offering will enable us to make continued progress in all areas of our work— in admitting more sons and daughters of the Church as students, in raising the salaries of our faithful faculty, in beginning a modest amount of graduate work. It will lift a nagging burden of worry from our hearts. It will raise the entire University to a higher plateau of service at the very threshold of its second century.

A good offering on May 10 (perhaps a dollar per communicant) will be the greatest possible encouragement to all of us. This is, therefore, an appeal to you to give us a lift if you possibly can. The amount required is not very great in proportion to the total work of the Kingdom, but a dollar now will mean progress and peace in our time.

Your university is already an institution of which you can be justly proud. Increasingly we have found our place in the life and work of the Church. Almost four hundred and fifty graduates will again be poured back into our congregations this year. An investment in them and their successors is a good undergirding for the work and leadership of our pastors everywhere. A loyal, intelligent laity can do much to help us in the anxious years before us.

Lately I have been compelled by some assignments to think again of the basic problems confronting us in the Church today. The more I thought about some of them the more I began to feel that now in the afternoon of the twentieth century our great problem is to conduct a continuing dialogue between various elements in our life. We have now come, as never before, to the time and the hour of the dialogue, all over the world and over the entire range of human thought and experience. There must be increasingly a dialogue between the Church and the world, between culture and religion, between the Gospel and non-Christian religions, between tradition and experiment, between Athens and Calvary, between Geneva and Wittenberg, between God and man.

To each of these aspects of our great twentieth century dialogue a university, as a voice from the Church, must address itself. In the field of education it is, of course, particularly the dialogue between God and man—God as Creator and Savior and man as the saved sinner—where the dialogue should become most intelligent and thorough. This can happen with particular clarity on the campus of a university dedicated to the relevance of the Gospel to all areas of human life and history. The Church can still speak to our dying world with authority and relevance! She does so most completely and finally when she informs and illuminates and dominates the dialogue between God and man which is of the very essence of her life in the world.

This is very important. It is our conviction that we have the divinely imposed duty to develop a greater awareness of the significance and relevance of the Lutheran approach to the problems of the world. This is especially true of our realistic interpretation of the great monosyllables of life and history—God, man, sin, faith, hope, love, death. Our loyalty to the divine Word, incarnate and written, and to nothing else makes us astonishingly relevant to an intellectual world whose major weakness now in the afternoon of the twentieth century is shoddy and sinful confusion and irrelevance.

All of this requires faithful, hard and lonely work. It means the interpretation of the entire range of Holy Scripture from the creative words of the living, acting God: "Let there be light" to the fire and gold of the Apocalypse. The relationship between human knowledge and the divine revelation must be made close and warm and mutually empathetic. The goal of all true Christian education is to produce the informed, independent and loyal mind. Christian education, more than anything else, says that living is understanding. This has never been more clearly expressed than by the man who was trained at Tarsus: "Prove all things. Hold fast that which is good." A university which adopts this attitude over against the problems of life and time can certainly be of very great service to the Church living in a world so staggered by scientific developments, so complex and so unbaptized, so full of the hills of prejudice and the valleys of human misery.
PUZZLE SECTION: Cleaning up a corner of the room which is laughingly called my study I find an old issue of Harper's magazine in which there is an article under the title "What's American about America?" The author, John A. Kouwenhoven, says that the following twelve things are distinctively and recognizably American and not likely to have been produced elsewhere. Here they are:

1. The Manhattan Skyline
2. The Gridiron Town Plan
3. The Skyscraper
4. The Model-T Ford
5. Jazz
6. The Constitution
7. Mark Twain's Writings
8. Whitman's "Leaves of Grass"
9. Comic Strips
10. Soap Operas
11. Assembly Line Production
12. Chewing Gum

This list certainly is significant enough to give any observer of the modern American scene some pause. Mr. Kouwenhoven raises the question: "What is the American quality which these dozen items share?" In other words, what is the common denominator to be found in all of these? A very special prize of one year's subscription to the "Campus Commentary" will be given to the brother who finds a common denominator in this list. I wonder how many of them are a part of the life of our own people.

NOTES ON A FRAYED CUFF: One of our educational associations sends me a charming little book "On Being Retired" by the famous professor from the University of Chicago, T. V. Smith. It is recommended reading for all of us who are around or above the age of 65. It is not religious, but philosophical with a tinge of theism at the end. It is, however, a reflection of a brilliant, discursive mind, and for that reason well worth reading. At one point Professor Smith tries to prove that he himself wrote the plays of Shakespeare. He made that announcement to some of his friends and said that the argument for it proceeded along the following lines. As I read it, I was reminded of some of the discussions I have heard at pastoral conferences. Here is the argument:

What is not impossible is possible.
What is possible is probable.
What is probable is plausible.
What is plausible is likely.
And what is likely is really so.

Here is the perfect reflection of the kind of argument which we hear far too often also within the walls of the Church.

By the way, I also like the following doggerel, both for its poetic value, as well as for the sentiment which it conveys:

My grandfather, viewing earth's worn cogs,
Said things were going to the dogs.
His granddad, in his house of logs,
Said things were going to the dogs.
And his granddad, in the Flemish bogs,
Said things were going to the dogs.
There's one thing new I want to state:
The "dogs" have had a good long wait.

A recent issue of Christianity Today presents a brilliant article by our own F. R. Webber, who certainly writes as well as anybody in Protestantism today. Pastor Webber addresses himself to the question: Why our preaching fails? I like particularly the following:
A popular preacher, for example, is quite likely to take a current cliche, such as "take it easy now," and out of this vapid expression produce the following:

"Life surrounds us with all manner of temptations, and one of these is the bad habit of trying to do too much. The business man rushes for his 7:15 commuter train, the children scamper off to school, and the housewife hurries to the shopping center. We are all in too much of a hurry. We have never learned the art of sitting down for a quiet hour of getting acquainted with ourselves. Life surrounds us with too many distractions, and life puts many an obstacle in our way; but on the other hand, life will speak to us with a still, small voice if only we might learn to sit down and listen to the things that life is trying to say to us."

Having taken his original theme of four words, our preacher has said the same thing in a paragraph of 124 words. Then he restates the idea once more in different form, and continues so to do until 15 minutes are consumed. Then he says, "Let us pray."

Perhaps you will remember that several months ago our newspapers and journals of opinion brought the news that a student at the University of Detroit had finally put silence on a paying basis. According to Commonweal he decided that a dime in the Juke-Box at the Student Union would buy three minutes of silence for anyone who was tired of music and was willing to pay for an interlude of quiet. The idea seems to be catching on, and the student pioneer is already working on a further refinement—a record which will provide the same amount of silence, but which will also give out with a quiet little "beep" every fifteen seconds so that people will know that the quiet they are enjoying is bought and paid for. It looks like an excellent idea. Now if we can only find some way to substitute silence for Brother Gernegrosse's fulminations at the Winkel-Konferenz, all of us will be very happy.

Perhaps I should not say too much about this, but somebody sends me a copy of a recent commencement program at Ohio State University listing the subjects of the doctoral dissertations which were deemed worthy of the Ph.D. degree at that great institution. As you probably know, the traditional Ph.D. has been under fire for more than a decade. Even now we are conducting a series of meetings in the hope that some of the high degree of specialization which has been required will be lessened so that a broader background for the Ph.D. might be made possible. Here are a few of the subjects for doctoral dissertations which aroused my fascinated attention:

"The Biology of the Brown-banded Cockroach and Its Relative Susceptibility to Five Organic Insecticides"
"Some Aspects of the Trypsin-like Activity from the Midgut of the Stable Fly"
"Store House in Retailing with Particular Emphasis on Night Openings"
"An Analysis of the Work of the First-Line Office Supervisor"
"Studies on the Acoustical Behavior and Taxonomy of the Tree Crickets"

Somebody sends me a clipping entitled "The Committee Curse." It is herewith presented to you who have committees in your parish, without any comment.

"Way back when two men first learned to talk, they caught a third fellow and taught him. Then the three formed a committee. From then on, matters became steadily worse—and look at us today. I blame all our troubles on committees."

"Much of business, politics, and a host of otherwise wholesome activities are committee-ridden. Well run committees can be useful (but that's too long a story for this space). Too often, as the man said, a committee is a group of people who singly can do nothing and who together decide that nothing can be done.

"Committees are cursed by conversation and compromise. Between the two a committee can become a machine to complicate the simple, confuse the clear, and kill the alive. 'Buried in committee' is no idle phrase, whether applied to ideas or men.

"Someone said that a camel is a horse designed by a committee."

Still talking about committees and their work: While the reports of most academic administrators are scanned very hurriedly and are usually noted for their remarkable dullness and their emphasis on financial problems, there are two that I always read very carefully. These are produced by Chancellor Kimpton of the University of Chicago and Provost Jacques Barzun of Columbia University. In a recent report by Chancellor Kimpton on the state of the university I found the following charming paragraph:
After engaging for a respectable period in the broad, loose, philosophical rambling that faculty committees engage in, it settled down to the tough organization problem of how to obtain a single faculty, representative of the entire University, and responsible for the entire Bachelor's degree. It decided to tiptoe around the Bachelor of Science degree, for the simple and straightforward reason that those shaggy fellows in the Departments of Physics, Chemistry, and Mathematics snarl menacingly when their grim clutch on the content of their degrees is in any way threatened. The final recommendation, therefore, concerned only the Bachelor of Arts degree and the general education content of the Bachelor of Science degree. The recommendation was a good one, for the excellent reason that it really pleased nobody, and none of the parties at issue won a battle. But through some miracle of the patient and persistent persuasion of the Executive Committee the proposal was recommended by the Committee of the Council and passed the Council by a vote of thirty-eight to four.

From Milwaukee somebody sends me a note announcing the organization of SPULSST. This is the Society for the Protection of Underpaid Lutheran Secondary School Teachers. It looks like an excellent idea. I hope that they will establish fraternal relations with my own society called SPUP, the Society for the Protection of Underpaid Preachers.

Section for Mrs. Theophilus: The student body of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, regularly publishes an excellent little journal called The Quad. A recent issue brings the news that there are now regular classes for the wives of seminarians. (Shades of the day when Rule 17 of the Seminary Haus Ordnung even frowned on regular dating.) However, at this late hour in the time of man this seems to be a good idea. Topics for the wives of the seminarians include the following:

"The Pastor's Wife and the Christian Pastoral Ministry"
"The Pastor's Wife and the Congregation"
"The Pastor's Wife and the Parsonage"

After consultation with some of my friends, particularly Mrs. Theophilus, I would respectfully like to suggest some additional topics:

"The Pastor's Wife and the Deacons: Instructions for Guerrilla Warfare"
"The Pastor's Wife's Dresses: Style and Age"
"The Pastor's Wife and the Visitor: Ways and Means of Getting Another Call"

Perhaps some additional topics will be suggested by my feminine readers. I am sure that the seminary professors will be glad to have more suggestions.

It was a little after nine o'clock when Brother Theophilus knocked at the door. Apparently he had no special purpose for his visit except to get a few things off his chest. In the course of our conversation I asked him what he was doing most assiduously these days, and with a baneful glare he answered, "I am trying to meet our congregational budget. Have you ever thought of the fact that the budget can easily become a satanic device because behind it is the unholy fear that a good child of God will be asked for gifts to the Kingdom too often? Apparently he must be asked only once a year—and then not for a missionary in Japan or for a lonely old lady in an old folks' home, but for the budget! That all inclusive, almighty, impersonal Moloch that replaces the warm spontaneity and personalness of placing a little gold in the Savior's hand." I looked at Theophilus in amazement. Such heresy had not been heard in my living room within the memory of living man. "What," I asked, "do you propose to substitute for the budget?" He shook his head sadly. "Apparently there is no substitute which will be nearly as efficient as the budget, but I still don't like the whole business."

A few minutes later I returned to my corner and wondered how close he had come to a problem which really should be examined by all thoughtful men and women in the twentieth century church.

THE MINISTRY AND THE FIFTY DAYS

A word to my brethren in the ministry for the fifty days between Easter and Pentecost. Easter was, of course, the end of something. It was one of the great manifestations of the strange ways of God in history—not by the sword, or power, or the great of the earth, but by the quiet rolling of a stone by the hand of an angel the first part of human history was done and put away forever.
For our ministry, however, Easter is a beginning...the beginning of our vision of the exaltation which first reached down to the spirits in prison...the beginning of our absolute assurance of immortality, "because I live ye shall live also"...the beginning of the building of the Church Militant upon earth...the beginning of the long line of men who would dedicate themselves to the greatest task known to time and eternity, the bringing of Christ Crucified and Christ Risen and Christ Triumphant to the broken souls of men. ...On Easter morning the last phase of history began, the time of the New Testament, the Final Covenant, with its horizons stretching to the ends of the earth and to the end of time.

It was because of the empty tomb that what is known in the history of the Church as the great Transformation took place in the fifty days between Easter and Pentecost. A group of men who ran away on the night of betrayal, who had hidden in corners of Jerusalem on Good Friday, who were afraid to believe the women on Sunday morning, in fifty days became an unconquerable company of God, a group before which the Roman empire trembled and finally crumbled. These men tasted the rope, the fire and the sword, but they knew that beyond all of them there was the living assurance that no grave would be closed forever and no power on earth could defeat Him Who had beaten death.

The great Transformation in the fifty days! The foundation of the Church rested squarely on the fact of the empty tomb. Our fathers in Christ knew that here was the mightiest of the mighty acts of God, strange and new to the experience of man, comparable to the act of the first creation itself, astounding to believer and unbeliever, and bringing into a world of sin and need and death, righteousness and power and life for all who would believe that He is the first Begotten of the dead and the Prince of the kings of the earth.

All this began on the evening of Easter Sunday. A few hours after the moving scene at Emmaus He suddenly appeared for the fifth time that day, showed them His hands and His side and said to them, "Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent Me, even so I send you."

This is the perennial and everlasting charter of the Holy Ministry. The work begun on that Easter evening is not yet finished. Some of it, perhaps only a little and momentary part, has been entrusted to our hands. We as ministers of the Church of Jesus Christ stand in the great line of those whose life and work it is to proclaim His life and work, and so to bring Him to the hearts of men as the great conqueror of sin and death and the eternal Comforter of all who cry aloud in pain. Ours is a great task. We are the messengers who say again and again to a temporary and temporal world of death and decay: "He is risen indeed." Set by the hand of God, as we are, in the world’s evening hour when His plans are moving swiftly to their appointed end, we above all men at this particular moment in the history of the Church must see again the full glory and power of our message and our work.

"As my Father hath sent me, so send I you." This is the world’s greatest line of authority and responsibility. Once and for all time it establishes a straight line of purpose and work from God the Father to God the Son to the lowliest of His servants in the hidden corners of the earth and in small parishes scattered throughout the land. "As my Father hath sent me!" There was no blindness or vagueness of purpose in the mission of our Lord. It was perfectly clear that His mission and purpose in leaving His Father’s home were to dwell with the exiles from eternity, to satisfy the justice of God and to show forth the mercy of God, to do His will no matter what the cost or the consequences.

"Even so send I you!" We, too, as preachers and teachers of the Word have a mission which is sharp and clear. Our only task and our only message is Christ. To proclaim Him to the hearts of men, to bring Him into the life of our times, to hold Him high before the world, in these days of scattered energies and loose purposes, of mistaking means for ends, of feverish concern for the immediate and the temporal! It is well for us to remember again the supreme and only purpose of our life. We are sent men! We are driven men! We have no will of our own! We have no purpose but the purposes of God in Christ!

"Even so send I you!" On that Easter evening our Lord stood in a world very much like our own, with its Caesars struggling for power. He looked back upon the storms that had swept Him to the Cross. He remembered the years of loneliness, the days of defeat and the hours of death. He remembered, too, that through all of them, through life and death, he had come victorious and triumphant. I come to do Thy will, O God! There alone is power. "Even so send I you." My power is now your power, and My purpose is your purpose. If happiness comes to you, it must be the happiness which comes from the Cross. If glory, it is the glory of My resurrection. If power, it must come from the knowledge that you are Mine, My spades and My hammers for the building of My Church.
Even in 1959 only this continuing vision of the power and glory which is ours as men that are sent, will enable us by the grace of God to avoid the greatest peril to our work in the church of the twentieth century, the reduction of our tremendous mission to deadly routine, to the daily doing of little things, to organizations and meetings and general busyness. Many of us have now served Christ for a number of years. We have passed gradually from the storms and tempests of youth. Immature desires and aspirations, flagrant and manifest failures, bitter storms and high winds—for most of us these are now only memories. We have come into a calmer stretch of water. Life is more settled and orderly. Habits are fixed. This is a very dangerous time for the servants of Christ! Without our knowing it we may forget the great fifty days, the tremendous period of Transformation. The center of life may shift from Him to ourselves. We may come to rely on ourselves, our achievements, our knowledge, our efficiency, our experience—and then we fail. The flames die, and the fires grow cold. Life becomes bitter and dark. As long as we are in this world, this will be a present danger, something that we must always guard against because it is not an outside decay, but the sign of decay of our work from within. The only sure guard is our knowledge that we do not belong to ourselves or to the world, but to Him. There must be a daily renewal of our surrender to Him. There must be a daily vision of the great fifty days; the glory of our mission, sent by Him who is the same yesterday, today and forever, and who by His own appointment has made us messengers of His power here and partakers of His glory there. "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you!"

And that's about all for this time. Please remember us on May 10. Meanwhile, please accept my good wishes for a peaceful and restful summer. At the moment my impression is that the entire Missouri Synod and its wives are descending on San Francisco for the Synodical convention in June. If you will be there, I hope that we shall be able to meet.

Very cordially yours,

O. P. Kretzmann, President

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