11-1959

November-December 1959

O.P. Kretzmann
Valparaiso University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholar.valpo.edu/campus_commentary

Recommended Citation
https://scholar.valpo.edu/campus_commentary/24

This Newsletter is brought to you for free and open access by the University Archives & Special Collections at ValpoScholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Campus Commentary by an authorized administrator of ValpoScholar. For more information, please contact a ValpoScholar staff member at scholar@valpo.edu.
Dear Brother:

It has been a long time since these random notes landed on your desk. Have you noticed that the days and months and years of our ministry now fly by faster than ever and that there seems to be less time to meditate, to talk quietly and to read, than ever before? At least this is what I hear from the occasional wandering brother who drops in at the campus on his way to some other place. He is usually the man in a hurry — his wife is waiting outside — in the Missouri Synod tradition she modestly and patiently sits beyond the gates — while her lord and master discusses important problems with an equally bewildered brother.

Well, so Theophilus dropped in one rainy, cold evening. It was almost two months ago, and he was still excited about the San Francisco convention. As he came in, I knew that I was in for a monologue and became mute and attentive. He began:

"Did you know I was in San Francisco? I wasn’t a delegate, but I wangled one of those blue badges that say you’re an adviser. I understand that you have been wearing one of them for thirty years. Well, I had one, and it got me on the floor of the convention with the right to speak but not to vote. By the way, have you ever noticed that out in the halls the guys with blue badges (advisers) are forever talking to guys with red badges? That would show that they are really doing what they are supposed to do — advising. Only some of them ought to carry guns.

"Well, anyway there I was at my fourth Synodical convention. Let me start at the beginning. The opening service, as usual, was thrilling. I may get old and cynical some of these days, but there is still nothing like the opening service of a Synodical convention — not even the quadrennial conclave of the Republicans or Democrats. There is the great, solemn “Come Holy Ghost” sung by several thousand male voices. Then there is a sermon — reflecting the Missouri Synod at its best — clear, fundamental, beyond misunderstanding. This year it came from the youngest VP — a good man in my book. Then there was a communion this year at six altars. About three thousand communed, and there was a touch of the Church universal and holy and one in the air. I saw my brother Timothy from a small parish in the Middle West march up to the altar. It must have been a great moment for him; suddenly he was far and everlastingly removed from Deacon Souerbraten and Janitor Himmelhoch. This was a faint, far touch of the communion of saints, the cloud of witnesses, the one thing that Timothy would need on a snowy night come January when the deacons would decide not to insulate the parsonage. Well, what I am trying to say — it was a great and solemn opening service."

I sat silent. The fire was low in the fireplace, and there was a grieving wind from the north. "What happened after that?" I asked.

Theophilus answered: "Listen, you were there yourself. But I did notice that you were out in the hall most of the time shaking hands with Timothy and Barnabas and even Priscilla in the hope that you would get a few more bucks for Valpo. I went back into the sessions because I knew that you would want a report on what was cooking. Well, first of all, there were the usual greetings from city officials and separated, partially separated and unseparated brethren. They were all very nice — about evenly divided between people who told us that they hoped we would continue to be what we are and those who said we should be what we can be. President Behnken handled it very well. He thanked them all.

"Theophilus drew a deep breath: "After that I am not so sure as to what happened. The lights went down, and on a mammoth high-up screen we saw pictures and graphs of our Synodical educational problems. Frankly, they left me unimpressed. I know very well that by 1965 or 1970 this will be a changed world. Any predictions made at 210 North Broadway, St. Louis, Missouri, are only educated guesses. I think there is more in the future of the Missouri Synod than any statistical reports can possibly project. We may become just another growing denomination or we may, please God, become a dynamic, aggressive factor in the building of the Church Militant on the earth. That seems to be our choice, and unless my time is cut short, I hope to be around when the bell tolls one way or the other."

I roused myself and put another log on the fire. "Theophilus," I said, "you interest me. What happened after the first day?"

Theophilus sighed, a deep from the heart sigh. "Well," he said, "you have read the convention bulletins. It’s all there. I just wanted to give you some of the background. For my poor uneducated taste there were too many guys up in front marshaling facts to fit certain pre-conceived notions. There was also too much discussion of machinery and organizational details. It seems to me that some of
this stuff could be left for our Boards and committees. When a thousand men sit in one auditorium, it is
difficult to arouse a great deal of interest in organizational details.”

And so Theophilus talked long and softly that evening. “What,” he asked, “do you hear about
all this politicking at Synodical conventions? Sometimes I hear that it is a vast network of intrigue, of
cloakroom deals, or political maneuvering and so forth.”

“Theophilus,” I said, “much of this is sheer nonsense. I have missed only two conventions since
1923, and I have usually hung around the edges of the floor or in the press room where the dirt would
normally accumulate. I can honestly say that I have seen surprisingly little of it. Oh, there are always
a few characters around who have an axe to grind and usually you hear the sound of the grinding
long before the convention begins. Reports come to the desk that Brother Gernegross is being groomed
for VP or that Brother Prediger is headed for the ash-heap. At the actual convention I find that these
would-be king-makers are surprisingly futile. For one thing there are no identifiable parties in
Synod. For another, the voting delegates are always different, and they are hard to read. About the
only way you can promote a candidate is to get him up before the microphone just as early in the
sessions as possible, but even that does not always work. I honestly feel that we have about as good
and clean a democracy as is possible this side of the democracy of heaven.”

Theophilus and I talked about many other things. We agreed that Bretscher’s essay each morning
was in the great tradition — sharp, clear and significant for what it said and for what it did not say.
This was not an address at a Southern Baptist convention. This was good, sound, evangelical Luther-
anism.

Probably the best story to come out of the convention was the tale of the brother who finally
found some postcards picturing Alcatraz. He bought eight of them and sent them to his deacons with
a gracious little note: “Wish you were here.”

As usual there was much talk about money — perhaps too much. On the other hand, we must al-
ways remember that in the twentieth century gold and silver are necessary for the building of the
Kingdom. The national economy is now about five hundred billion dollars. That means that we in the
Missouri Synod have an income of approximately five billion. Surely the millions that are needed for
the work of Synod will not cut too deeply into our cars, our lunch boxes, and our vacations. Synod’s
needs over the next six years, I am told, will be approximately one hundred forty-four million dollars.
I think we can do it.

Personal footnote: To my great joy I found two or three brethren who read these jottings with
some degree of critical attention. One of them said, “Please lay off the deacons. There is a new
brand around, at least in my congregation. Many of them are young, intelligent, active fellows who
cooperate 100% and who make my lot cheerful and happy. There are also new winds blowing in
Ladies’ Aid societies. If you think they are merely gossip conferences, you ought to hear some of fheir
topic discussions. They are really good.” There goes one of my favorite subjects.

Several brethren asked me why there was no formal presentation of Valpo’s needs and opportuni-
ties on the convention floor. Perhaps there should have been, but I have a deep sympathy for the dele-
gates who have to listen to all types of traveling salesmen as a part of their convention experience. I
think I would prefer to take this way of presenting some of our problems rather than trying to push
into a program which is already crowded to the gunwales. At any rate, this is the reason why none of
us made any effort to say anything about Valpo on the floor of the Synodical convention.

University matters: By this time you have undoubtedly received the letter from the President of
Synod concerning the offering for the University scheduled for February 7, 1960. By agreement with
the Board of Directors of Synod this first Sunday in February has now been quite definitely set as the
permanent Sunday on which we can appeal to our congregations for support. Last year approxi-
mately twenty-seven hundred congregations took part. Unhappily, however, I must report that the
general results of the collection were somewhat disappointing. Apparently many of the brethren are
just taking up a door collection or using some similar device which does not bring in sufficient funds
to take care of our current operations. This, is, therefore, a warm and earnest appeal to you to ask
your congregation to give the collection an extra boost this year. Like everyone else we are caught in
the inflationary spiral and it is necessary for us to increase our income in order to pay adequate
salaries and to maintain the University on its present high level. It should never be forgotten that the
University has now become the largest single institution in the history of the Lutheran church in
America. While this is a cause for gratitude to the Lord of the Church, it also creates unprecedented
problems which we must face honestly as the program of the University develops. It is, therefore, my
hope that our friends everywhere will rally this year for an increase in the congregational offering.

Still with University matters: Lately I have received several letters of inquiry concerning our fra-
ternities and sororities. Perhaps a word or two would be in order. In the first place, these organiza-
tions, properly handled on any campus, make a distinctive and valuable contribution to the corporate
life of an academic community. Most of the fraternities and sororities on our campus are well man-
aged and have excellent leadership. They provide smaller groups for closer friendships and a type of
community living which is entirely desirable. On the other hand, I must confess that there are still some features about some of the fraternities which I regard with grave misgivings. One of them is that a few of the organizations have rituals which are either echoes of the dark ages or of lodgery in its most idiotic form. I can only report to you that we are now discussing these strange aberrations with some of the national officers of the fraternities in the hope that we can find a way of eliminating them as soon as possible. I should report also that they are not taken seriously by the members of our fraternities who have been trained in the Lutheran tradition. They furnish, however, a valid subject for discussion with the national officers.

Still at the University: My mail also includes a number of inquiries concerning the admission of prospective students. As you know, our enrollment this year is the highest in our history, coming very close to twenty-five hundred students on campus. In addition we have full-time nursing students in St. Louis, Cleveland and Fort Wayne. Perhaps it should also be said again that the standards for admission are not exclusively intellectual. In fact, we are always looking for students who have demonstrated qualities of leadership, personality and character which would make them desirable campus citizens. We realize that this is one of the ways in which we can serve the Church. Any time, therefore, that you have a student who has shown some real interest in the life of the Church but does not want to become a pastor or a teacher I hope you will get in touch with us so that we can persuade him to come to our Lutheran University.

Paragraphs that bring trouble: During the past year I have had several opportunities to witness the process of calling a new pastor to a given parish. In each case a good congregation was involved, the calling process was well organized, there was a strong representative committee, and there was a full, free discussion of the needs and opportunities of the parish. In short, everything was done as well as it possibly could be done. And yet I felt, even at a distance, that there were all sorts of irrelevant considerations, personal prejudices and special interests which cast grave doubt on the efficacy of the entire process. Does the Holy Spirit really have a chance to work in such a maze of human foibles and weaknesses?

Perhaps we should look again to our theology of the ministry. It is now exactly thirty-five years since the seminary gave me a diploma with an audible sigh of relief. For three and a half decades I have watched our ministry in a world of dismay and fear, in an age of demonic forces abroad in the world. As an observer I have watched them go about their daily work. I have met with them in hours of sorrow and joy. I have watched several of them go through the thin veil between the Church Militant and the Church Triumphant. As a result I have a deep abiding pride and affection for the holy ministry. The men in our pulpits really carry the heat and burden of our day of winnowing and burning. I have watched them reflect the theandric action of God in their ministry. I have seen them move again and again with singular persistence and power from the world of creation to the world of redemption, breathing into the face of the world a new life and thus becoming in the very highest and most mysterious sense partners and co-laborers of the living God in Christ. Certainly the great majority of our pastors are workmen who are not ashamed to stand in His presence, seeking Him and seeking means to bring men into the presence of God either at Sinai or at Calvary. Perhaps it is just because of the greatness of this continuing task that it is necessary for us again and again to look at the deep, profound, undergirding principles which make the ministry what it is and what it can be even in the modern world.

Random notes: The following memorandum from a brother over in Illinois is reprinted without any comment:

"The Reds are taking over Valpo. Christians will be given one-way tickets to Siberia.

Mr. Tinhorn, a member of our congregation, sounded the alarm last week. He would not trouble me with the details. He would present his facts to the Board of Elders. He did this Sunday afternoon. He came prepared, armed with a copy of the Lutheran Witness, a piece of literature from Valpo, The Drover's Journal of November 25, 1958, a copy of a Chicago paper with a big spread about Valpo, and two copies of "The American Way" (1955) by Frank Kirkpatrick, a former commentator on a Milwaukee radio station. One of these contained a reprint from the Congressional Record.

"From these he proved that: 'Hutchins, former Chancellor of Chicago U., is deep pink, almost red. And Clement Attlee, a left-wing Britisher, has communistic ideas. Both are on Valpo's Centennial program. Speakers there must be carefully screened. But since they are already on the program it is too late. But he will not support their communist views. He will not support Valpo, which has invited such communists to speak there. And he knows that all his relatives from Bangor to Zanzibar are of the same opinion. They will not support a Christian University which permits Communist speakers to spread their poison in the minds of the students. It is plain to see, the Reds are taking over Valpo. His protest is already too late. But it is his Christian duty to protest when such things happen.'"

"And so he left the matter in the hands of the Board of Elders."

A quiet weekend is devoted to the reading of two books. The first is The Riddle of Roman Catholicism by Jaroslav Pelikan. This is probably one of the most significant contributions made by a mem-

Page Three
ber of the Missouri Synod to the thinking of Christendom for a long time. One may not agree with all of Pelikan’s judgments, but this is certainly the most thoughtful, thorough and scholarly approach to Roman Catholicism which Protestantism has produced for a hundred years. It is well worth reading. The other book which interested me this past weekend was *God In the Space Age* by Martin Heinecken. This is a remarkable effort to reconcile the findings of scientists with revealed religion. The first two chapters on science and religion are probably the best summary of the entire subject which I have seen for a long time. Again one may not agree with all the conclusions which Heinecken presents, but the book would provide an excellent basis for a series of topic studies in one of your organizations.

A few thoughts for Advent and Christmas: One of the fascinating things about Christmas is that it is such a study in contrasts. It is full of paradoxes and mysteries which are unique in time and history. Perhaps this was to be expected. When all is said and done, Christmas is the world’s one strange, golden moment of eternity. We have, therefore, the paradox of the angels and the shepherds, the virgin and the Child, the wise men and a carpenter, the sheep and the heavenly host. What has been called “the incredible interruption that broke the backbone of history” was certainly a topsy-turvy night. God was moving into action in the way in which He always does — so completely unpredictable and so completely right.

The greatest contrast and the ultimate mystery lies, however, in the fact that God is to be found in a stable. Of course, the word “stable” is not used — only the word “manger.” Like most Judean stables it was, a cave in the rocky hillside, safe from the prowlers of the night. The Child was, therefore, literally born under the floor of the world, as lowly and as humbly as anyone in these thousands of years of birth and life and death in history. Certainly lowlier than any of us in the twentieth century.

Unfortunately, these hundreds of years, we have romanticized and sentimentalized the stable and the manger. We have seen them through the warm glow of our comfortable homes and well-fed bodies. We have never quite dared to face up to the fact that a stable is no easy place to have a child and a manger is not a good place to have a baby begin life. It was cold, ugly, dirty and mean in Bethlehem that night. It was far, far away, as far as one can get, from the golden streets, the pearly gates and the chanting of cherubim and seraphim — all the things that make heaven heaven.

We of all generations must, therefore, ask the question: “Why the stable?” “Why not at least Nazareth or the inn or some higher house?” The answer is very clear. In order to do what He came to do He had to come under the worst and the lowest and the lowestest. He had to be born like an outcast in order to show once and for all that before God there are no outcasts. There are sinners, but they can become saints. There are bad people, but they can become good. There are poor people who can become rich. There are shepherds who can talk to the princes of heaven. And all of this because He went down lower than any of them, so low and so lowly that no one need ever be afraid of the manger and the Baby in it.

This is because He who lay in the manger is true God. How easily we say that, and how calmly we hear it! God was in the stable! Do we really know this as Christmas comes again — with the knowledge of love and wisdom and faith and worship? Who was the Baby? We say it regularly: “God of God. Light of Lights, Very God of Very God, begotten, not made.” If we had come to the stable under the world that midnight with seeing eyes, we would have to repeat some words written a thousand years before the Baby was born: “Of old Thou hast laid the foundations of the earth and the heavens are the work of Thy hands. They shall perish but Thou shalt endure; yea all of them shall wax old like a garment, as a vesture shalt Thou change them and they shall be changed. But Thou art the same, and Thy years shall have no end.” The Child of Bethlehem, the Lord of the outstretched universe, will live forever! At Christmas midnight the clock of the universe holds its hands upright in worship and in adoration, for the valleys of time are exalted and the mountains and hills are made low, and the rough places plain — because God was in the stable. He loved us, the proud and disobedient children of paradise lost, with a holy, consuming and everlasting love.

This is Christmas! It is the “mysterium tremendum!” Before its mystery we ought to tremble, not in fear, but in awe and wonder as something uniquely and marvelously great. The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight!

It will not be easy for some of us to enter the stable to worship this year. In fact, only two kinds of people go to the manger easily. There are the wise men who know that there are greater things than the scientific or the mathematical. There are the lowly, humble shepherds who have not been blinded by the glare and dust of the world. Both recognize the Baby for what He is and has been since the foundation of the world. The rest of us, however, neither wise men nor shepherds, must try very hard by the grace of the Child to become like the wise men and the shepherds, humble, believing, and surrendered. Then we, too, may stumble into the open door to stand with all the prodigals of the world at this last home of the human soul.

*God give you and your people such a Christmas!*  

Sincerely yours,  
O. P. Kretzmann, President