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O.P. Kretzmann

Valparaiso University

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Dear Brother:

Several weeks ago I met Brother Theophilus at the railroad station in St. Louis. After the usual greetings the following conversation ensued:

Theophilus: "Where has the Campus Commentary been the last six months?"

I: "I didn't think you read anything except the Concordia Pulpit between May and November, but I am really glad you missed it."

Theophilus: "I surely did. There are certain hours of the day, especially after a voters' meeting, or a special conference of the officers of the Ladies' Aid, when I must read something that requires absolutely no thought. Even the sports pages are too heavy for me. That's where your stuff comes in handy."

I: "O.K. I certainly would not want you to have a nervous breakdown. The Campus Commentary will appear shortly."

Theophilus: "By the way, what are you doing in St. Louis? I bet the boys at 210 North Broadway locked up all the cash boxes when they heard you were in town."

I: "We had a joint meeting of our Board of Trustees with the Board of Directors of Synod and the vice presidents."

Theophilus: "What's cooking? I'm getting suspicious."

I: "Stop being like that. As you know, we are now moving into our Centennial year. We were making our annual report on the state of the University to the Board of Directors of The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod. In addition we presented a detailed program of our entire Centennial year. Naturally we devoted a good deal of time to the immediate and long-term financial needs of the University."

Theophilus: "I knew it!"

I: "Well, I should tell you that our Synodical leaders were very helpful and showed a very intelligent concern for the needs of the University and the possible expansion of our services during our Centennial year and at the beginning of our second century. All present agreed that our Centennial year should help us to increase the day-by-day income of the University. In order to do that the Board of Directors and our Board of Trustees agreed that the date for the annual offering for Valpo should be shifted from January 25 to May 10, 1959."

Theophilus: "Why that?"

I: "January is not a very good month for many of our congregations because they are busy with other things. In addition it was felt that we needed the extra time between January and May to present our cause to the brethren in our congregations more effectively."

Theophilus: "What seems to be your greatest trouble right now?"

I: "Our greatest problem is still the current support needed for the day-by-day running of the University. Buildings can wait until money from individuals is available, but Professor Weisheit and his family have to eat. We really hope that during our Centennial year the brethren will help us lift the level of our congregational support so that we can enter the second century without the nagging worry over deficits in current operations. One of the things that was discussed at our joint meeting was the marked number of brethren who have not yet given their congregations an opportunity to join in the annual Valpo offering. This is a very difficult situation, but we hope to make a special appeal to them for our Centennial year. Perhaps I should say that millions are not needed — just the steady, devoted support of all our congregations. With an appreciable increase this year we are sure that we will be able to continue this year after year. Our Synodical leaders definitely agreed with this approach."

Theophilus: "It sounds like a good idea. What do you boys want from me and my people — and please remember that I am trying to build a new church?"

I: "Just a good collection on May 10. Could you make it a dollar per communicant this year? That would be a real help in taking care of our current operations. We could then begin our second century on a higher level of service to everybody."

Theophilus: "When do I get more information?"

I: "Pretty soon. You probably will have a letter from the President of Synod very shortly, and we shall keep you informed about our plans. We really feel that this may well be an important step forward in the history of the University."

There the conversation ended. Theophilus disappeared into the night and I looked after him with real gratitude. He'll come along.
Now the melancholy days of late fall, rain and mid-term exams are upon us. There is nothing to be said or done about the rain, but I would like, at a convenient time, to say something about exams and, more sadly, about the varying degrees of unreadiness with which our freshmen come to this academic equivalent of the Day of Judgment. Our deans, counselors and directors of residence halls are still agreed, hotly and unanimously, that our American high schools are not doing a very good job, particularly in the matter of study habits and discipline. Many of them have not been trained in the hard discipline involved in systematic study. They come to examination time with enormous fear and trembling. One of them knocked on my door at midnight a few days ago. When I led him into the messy closet which is called my study, I saw that the tears were streaming down his cheeks: "By Monday I must know what Luther said about John 4, and I just can't concentrate. He doesn't seem to make much sense to me." A little inquiry unveiled the fact that he had just never learned to study systematically and calmly. Face to face with the demands and responsibilities of independence he was lost. He wanted to go home.

By the way, it appears that by and large our Lutheran high school products seem to do better. Apparently there is in our own schools some emphasis on discipline, hard work and more hard work which is so lamentably missing in many public high schools. Over against the shoddy permissiveness of the educational progressive there seems to be a remembrance of the educational implications of the Fourth Commandment. No wonder that I shudder when now and then I see evidences of the blind, thoughtless appropriation of the jargon and methods of "progressive education" in some of our own literature. Brethren, this ought not so to be.

CAMPUS NOTES: The big thing on campus right now is the program of our Centennial in 1959. With the help of a generous grant from the Aid Association for Lutherans we shall be able to present an imposing array of preachers and lecturers. The program will consist of two separate parallel parts. The first will be a series of ecclesiastical observances which will bring to the chapel pulpit a number of preachers from The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod. The second part will be a series of academic convocations which will feature such men as: Earl Atlee, Arthur H. Compton, Robert Hutchins, Roscoe Pound, H. Richard Niebuhr, Christian A. Herter, Hanss Lilje, John W. Gassner, Etiene Gilson.

If you are interested in any one of these lecturers and can get to the campus, I shall be happy to send you the date and to have you as our guest. We always have a few beds available in case you want to stay overnight. Just a postcard will do it.

I am happy to report to you that Pastor O. W. Toelke, for eight years pastor of Immanuel Church, Valparaiso, has consented to become a vice-president of the University in charge of development. In this capacity he will be directly responsible for all our relationships to the church and to our constituency in general. Pastor Toelke had a very successful pastorate at Immanuel, and we are sorry to lose him in that capacity. He was a first-rate preacher and an excellent pastor. On the other hand, he has very distinctive gifts for his new task, and I am very happy that he has joined the staff of the University. I am sure you will wish to join me in extending to him our good wishes for a rich measure of divine benediction in his important work.

BOOK NOTES: One of the most interesting volumes to come to the desk in the last month has been A Handbook of Christian Theology published by Meridian Books. Have you ever wondered, as I have, what Brother Schriftgelehrter is talking about at the Winkelkonferenz when he uses such terms as: existential, finitude, I-Thou, demythologizing, neo-orthodoxy, and so forth? Here are brief "definition essays" in one volume written by leading theologians explaining such terms and many others. Almost all of these essays are sharp and clear. The "Handbook" is a very handy little theological dictionary which will be a valuable reference volume on your desk. It is not exhaustive, but the bibliographies at the end of each essay will be helpful if you want to dive deeper. Naturally you will not always agree with what is said, but you will know with what you are disagreeing.

HERE AND THERE: Have you been getting some "Questionnaires on Preachers" lately? I have been receiving these forms at the rate of one a week. They always follow the same pattern. First, there is a nice letter which says something like this: "St. Vitus is about to call a new pastor. We need a good one for a change. Pastor Bassgeige has been nominated. Your name has been given as reference. Will you please fill out the enclosed questionnaire and return it to Deacon Langnase by next Tuesday?" Then follows the questionnaire — a formidable, dismaying document. I should say something about Bassgeige's preaching ability, his ability to get along with people, his wife, his children, his personality, his handling of young people and so forth. Usually the answers are to be checked in squares marked "Excellent, Good, Fair, Average, Poor." A strange business!
May I say that I view this comparatively new phenomenon in our church with a fishy eye and that I will either answer "excellent" to all questions or throw the whole thing in the wastebasket? My misgivings are two-fold: First, why should I suddenly be called upon to act as an uncalled, unappointed assistant to the Holy Spirit? If they want information about Brother Bassgeige, they should go to the visitor or the district president. That's what we elected them for. In the second place, how can you rate Brother Bassgeige? At times I have felt like answering one of these questionnaires very honestly. For example, "Preaching Ability"? Answer: "I really don't know. Like all of us he has his ups and downs. I have heard him when he is very good. I have also heard him when he was tired or had a stomach ache or Deacon Sauerbraten had crossed his path, or he had used the Concordia Pulpit too slavishly." Or, "Ability to Get Along With People"? Answer: "That depends. I have seen him do a tremendous job at a sick bed. He seems to like many people. On the other hand, I know that he has a deep, permanent dislike for Deacon Gernegross who lectures on every topic at every congregational meeting. He doesn't get along with him at all." And so on. I think we ought to have a synodical resolution banning these questionnaires from the church militant.

Have you ever given thoughtful attention to the enormous and tragic problems presented to us in America by the rest of the world, especially by the teeming millions of Asia? Here are a few facts and figures which I dug up somewhere recently and which you might use in your next sermon on foreign missions. Of the 900,000,000 children in the world under 16 years of age, more than 50% live and die in need. Most have never in their lives drunk milk or seen medicine. Twenty-four hours after you read these words, there will be 115,000 more mouths to feed in the world. To make matters worse, the greatest increase will take place in Asia and Latin America, the most severely distressed areas. Asia shows a yearly increase in population of 24,000,000. China alone increases each year by 16,000,000, a gain roughly equivalent to the entire population of Canada. In 2000 A.D. the world's population is expected to reach 5,000,000,000. It is estimated that the food wasted in an American city of one million would nourish a European city of the same size, and that the waste of this city in turn would nourish an Asiatic city of the same size. Certainly here is some real food for thought!

As far as the church is concerned, in some of these areas the picture is very dark. Here are some figures which I found in a Catholic publication recently. In South America there are 32,656 priests for 156 million Catholics — one priest to 4,777 members. In south Chile with a population of 175,000 there are ten dioceses, ten secular priests and 19 religious priests. On the average Sunday 5.7% of the people attend mass, 48% do not attend church at all. Fourteen percent of the children are unbaptized. Let me repeat that this comes from a Roman Catholic publication. Certainly this is an appalling situation which requires the thoughtful attention of everyone who is interested in the progress of the Kingdom.

Now and then I hear some criticism of the program of pastoral conferences. Some of the brethren seem to feel that they are far too banal and that they seem to be unable to rise above the traditional and obvious. I am inclined to agree. On the other hand, brother, they are very good compared with some of the educational conferences which I must attend in the course of my regular duties. Consider, for example, the brilliance and profundity of the following statements: "Good books are needed in libraries." Now there is a real, original, startling thought! "The bright student should go beyond the traditional offering." — "A student's experience in life should become continually wider." Really profound stuff! Of course, these educational conferences have one thing which we do not have in our pastoral conferences. They have some new terms and some of them are real humdingers. For example, we have been discussing "questing characteristics." We have been told about "insightful counselors," "conceptual approaches," and "counter-criticism." Frankly I do not know what any of these things mean, but they have been used in very learned lectures by educationists.

Still talking about education: The Jesuit weekly, America, several months ago printed a long letter from a Mrs. James R. Cronin concerning some of the strange doings in Catholic parochial schools. While many of her criticisms do not apply to us, I like some of the things she said since they point to one of the basic weaknesses in the Roman approach to the techniques of education. Mrs. Cronin writes: "Speaking of matters monetary, what's with the missions? They must be perking it all the lower grades are as busy in their behalf as ours. There are penny parades, raffles, candy-cookie sales, statues and holy cards and rosaries to buy; you name it, sister thought of it last week. As I understand the parade, the children march around the room, dropping pennies in the mission bag until they run out of funds, the object being, of course, to stay on their feet. For the upper grades, the approach is more subtle. You forgot your tie? Put a quarter in the bank or stay after school. And this is really ingenious: Sister sells the desks to the class by way of an auction. If you want a certain seat, you bid dimes and quarters against your classmates. The winner gets the desired seat, missions get the money, parents end up screaming." I understand that Mrs. Cronin got quite a rise out of some of the sisters.
WOMAN'S CORNER: Unhappily I must report that I have no particular words of wisdom for the feminine readers of these random notes. I hope that a few of the parsonage ladies will reach for a postcard and suggest some topics for our discussion. I would like to keep this intelligent part of my potential audience. All I have at the present moment is a question from the wife of a good brother who asks if I have noticed that there is an increasing number of professional club women in our Ladies' Aid societies. She points out that the president of the Ladies' Aid these days is no longer good old Mother Himmelhoch, but very probably Mrs. Hochstool from Riverside Drive who is busy with a lot of other things beyond the work of the church. This is certainly a new development, but I must confess that I have paid very little attention to it. If it is really happening, it may mean a major revolution in the life of the church. Certainly it should be examined very carefully.

FOOTNOTES FOR ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS: This year, as in all the years since Christmas first came, there will undoubtedly be three kinds of people in your community and possibly also in your church. They will all be hearing the strange, mysterious story of the birth of the Child for whom there never was much room in the world, and for whom there is less room this year than ever before. First, there will be the sophisticated people as far away as Caesar from the Child, touched by the world's slow stain, men and women who know the price of everything and the value of nothing. Even for them, however, Christmas, if they are worth anything at all, will be like a tearing pain. They will catch a brief, haunting, wistful glimpse of a world which is not for them. They will see again the faith of their childhood when the world was full of wonder and alive with faith. Secondly, there will be those — and they probably will be the great majority — for whom Christmas has now become a custom and a tradition. When they come to your church on Christmas Day, they will have passed through the commercial prelude with which we of the twentieth century prepare for the coming of the Child. They will have counted the gifts they have given, hope no one has been forgotten, and sit back, bathed momentarily in a sentimental glow of goodness, with no room left for the high and hard reality of the Nativity. Third, there will be those — and I am sure you will have some of them in your congregation on Christmas Eve — who will know that in Christmas they have come again as close as they shall ever come on this side of eternity to heaven, to the ultimate meaning of all of life and all of death. These men and women, and these alone, know that this is the world's moment of heaven, a day not of sentimental memory, but of a living hope and an undying joy, a great decisive either — or.

It will be your task and your joy to tell them again that Christmas says a number of things, but one thing always comes first. It says that we, the children of men, were and are so bad, so utterly evil that God had to take the last and most desperate step to save us from ourselves. There had been the crying of prophets, the long weary night, the voices of saints, but that was not enough. There had to be God Himself! There had to be a Child, small and helpless, coming as we came into the world, everyone of us. It had to happen because there was a divine, logical, historical necessity behind it. We are and were so bad that Christmas had to come. There was no other way.

And that is why comparatively few men and women will catch the real meaning of Christmas in 1958. The world has not changed. If we do not feel that we need the Child, everything that He is, then we shall not get very close to the manger at all this Christmas-time. There will be the tinsel and the music, haunting and far away, but nothing more. And on January 2, 1959, the holidays over, we will come back again to the things we should have dropped at the manger — our sins, our little malices and jealousies, our gossips and our hates, the mean and dirty things no one knows about but we ourselves.

And so, it will be your task and your joy to tell your people to make Christmas their humblest hour, to come to the manger in humility and lowliness of heart. Then you can tell them, too, that it will suddenly become their greatest hour. It will be the greatest they can know on this side of heaven, because it cuts off the past and permits them to start all over again, free, forgiven, unafraid and unashamed. The manger is small, but it is large enough to hold everything they want to forget, large enough for the whole world that is now and forever, loved with the love of a Child, a love which leaves nothing outside, a love for which nothing is too small, too poor, too weak or too full of sin.

And perhaps during Advent you can tell them also that the journey to the manger this year will be hard and long, especially for those who have been far away from it these many years. The world being what it is and we what we are, it will take a great deal of courage, honesty and humility to see the manger from the long darkness of our souls. But you can also tell anyone within range of your voice that it will be enormously worthwhile — for time and for eternity.

My Good Wishes,

O. P. Kretzmann, President