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VOLUME 4

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No. 2

Dear Brother:

When these notes reach your desk, the climax of the "Building for Christ" offering will be very near. At the moment all reports indicate that the effort will be a success. By midnight on March 20 we shall know pretty well how things will turn out. There are many prayers for it here at Valparaiso. The success of the offering will mean lifted burdens on this campus, financial stability, great hope for greater opportunities.

By the way, have you ever cast a discerning eye on the tremendous efficiency and know-how with which The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod conducts its financial efforts? A few days ago I saw all the literature for the BFC laid out on a table. No professional organization in the entire country could have done better. Every channel had been used, every avenue of approach had been explored, every group in the local congregation had been remembered. There can be no doubt that our organizational efficiency is without parallel in modern Christendom. Should we not pray daily that it will always be overshadowed by our spiritual strength, our love of God in Christ, our devotion to His Cause — greater than all other causes?

I am sure that all of us think about these things now and then. Where is the "point of no return" at which a church body can be too successful, exalting material means and gains, worshipping statistics — and slowly, tragically failing to hear the still, small voice of the living God turning our temporal values upside-down and exalting all things which the world considers of low degree? Surely this generation deserves our honest, searching thought as the shadows of time lengthen and the hour grows late.

* * *

Now to some other matters. After thirty years in the ministry I am still amazed over the astonishing ability of the human race to see the things it wants to see and to hear the things it wants to hear. The strength of our prejudices and the tenacity of our habitual assumptions is one of the most dismaying characteristics of our fallen human nature. I am sure that every preacher who has been in the holy ministry more than three years knows a good deal about this problem. I was reminded of it several days ago when I read a few paragraphs from an article in the *Saturday Review* by Herbert Brucker, the editor of the *Hartford Courant*, one of the best newspapers in the country. Haven't you experienced something like that after a sermon, a speech, or an article? Editor Brucker writes:

"During a recent campaign for Governor in Connecticut two letters came to *The Courant*. The first letter said:

'It is certainly fortunate there are out-of-town newspapers for sale mornings in Hartford. *The Courant* — unlike its more cosmopolitan neighbors in New York City — conveniently withholds any news in any way detrimental to the Republican cause.

'The situation is deplorable and dangerous, when a newspaper, steeped in biased provincialism, deliberately withholds news of importance from the public.'

I filed this letter in the same folder with an unsigned postcard (the reference is to Chester Bowles, then the incumbent Democratic Governor):

'Somebody in your paper is getting paid to do Bowles publicity on your front page. Every time I get the paper our Chester is there grabbing headlines with speeches and statements and trips to Washington and other phony emergencies. And you're supposed to be a Republican paper. You had better wise up to what's going on in your office.'

Here, then, are two people reading the same words and coming up with diametrically opposed meanings. How often has the same thing happened to sermons, books, and even the Word of God itself!

Unfinished business. Reluctantly — and yet gladly — I must retrace my steps to several matters which I mentioned in the last issue of these notes. You may recall that I talked about the place of the so-called "University Congregation" in the life of our church and expressed the conviction that at our Lutheran university, students should worship in the framework of a local congregation on Sunday morning. It is now perfectly evident to me that my words were not as clear as they ought to be. Several brethren promptly wrote in, thoughtfully and intelligently, that my doubts did not apply to their work on secular campuses. For many reasons it is not only desirable, but necessary for them to have a congregation which is composed almost exclusively of students. Much of the congregational work is conducted by students and members of the faculty. Sermons that must, at least to a very large extent, be centered on the life and thought of the students and made relevant to their problems on a modern campus. To all this I fully and warmly agree. I should have made it very clear that the situation on our campus with perhaps 90% of the on-campus students Lutheran is totally different from the problem confronting our student pastors. Their work is difficult enough without any brother in the ministry casting any doubt upon the methods and procedures with which they make their very significant contribution to the future of our Synod. If I have been misunderstood, I wish to make these few sentences a sincere word of apology. The situation is well summarized in a few paragraphs from Pastor Alvin J. Norden, shepherd of students at the University of Nebraska.

He writes:

"Our concern does not end with the regular worship service, as some people seem to think, and which, it seems to me, is so easily the case in practice when students worship in the regular congregation with 'Johann Schmidt' or 'Mrs. Holzapfel.' We do not think of our setup — and its operation proves it — simply as a 'preaching station,' nor only in terms of 'conversation.' Conservation is important and necessarily involved in our total program, but it is not a matter of conservation, period. The big objective is that our 'boys' and 'girls,' conserved by Word and Sacrament, regularly applied and administered, be trained and led into the total realm of Christian stewardship or churchmanship, under the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit, so that they use their great talents, time, and treasure, both now and later, in the service of their Lord and Savior.

"In a situation such as ours, students do have the opportunity to function 'in a congregational pattern and framework,' even though they may not sit next to 'Schmidt' and 'Holzapfel.' How much do those students who sit with 'Schmidt' and 'Holzapfel' really 'work' side by side with 'Schmidt' and 'Holzapfel' in the realm of Kingdom work? Having them sit next to these good Lutherans and being told to put their talents, etc. to work and yet not being given real opportunity to do so until after they have completed their college work is, in my opinion, not the best procedure. My point is not that they have no opportunity in a regular 'congregational pattern and framework,' but that they can do or have the opportunity to do so vastly more and can so much the more 'learn by doing' in the 'University' congregation."

* * *

Still more unfinished business. Several brethren take time out to write a few lines concerning my remarks on "pulpitese." You may remember that by "pulpitese" I meant the use of language in the pulpit which we would not use in ordinary speech. I was particularly interested in the use of artificial and falsely rhetorical phrases. One brother comments, "Do you feel that this happens because sometimes we do not mean what we say or say what we mean?" I looked at that question for a long time. After all, we in the ministry should be honest with ourselves. However, there can be no doubt that the answer to the question is a resounding "no." It should be said, of course, that after twenty-five or thirty years of stony ground and thorns and thistles it is difficult to maintain the note of authority and urgency which is always a mark of all great preaching. On the other hand, I believe it is sounded far more often than the wayward critics of the Church and the pulpit in our time would have us believe.

In this connection I should like to commend to your attention James S. Stewart's latest book "Heralds of God." Stewart is the famous preacher at Morningside Church in Edinburgh, Scotland. Somehow the Scottish preachers seem to be able to maintain a level of preaching which their American counterparts in the Reformed churches have lost. I have found Dr. Stewart's book really stimulating and exciting. Note, for example, what he says concerning doctrinal preaching: "How foolish the clamor for non-doctrinal preaching! And how desperately you will impoverish your ministry if you yield to that demand! The underlying assumption is, of course, that doctrine is dull: a perfectly absurd misapprehension. It is indeed lamentably true that the sublimest doctrine can be treated in a way that will reduce the average congregation to leaden apathy and boredom. 'Buy a theological barrel-organ, brethren,' growled Spurgeon scathingly, 'with five tunes accurately adjusted!' John Keats com-

plained that 'Philosophy will clip an angel's wings, unweave a rainbow'; and he might have added that there is a formal type of preaching which also successfully clips the wings of wonder and unweaves the rainbow arch of the salvation of God. But to maintain that doctrine, as such, is necessarily a dull affair, is simply a confession of ignorance or downright spiritual deficiency. Only a crass blindness could fail to see that such a truth as that presented in the sentence 'The Word was made flesh' is overpoweringly dramatic in itself and utterly revolutionary in its consequences. 'If this is dull,' exclaims Dorothy Sayers, 'then what, in Heaven's name, is worthy to be called exciting?'

That is perhaps our greatest trouble. In the dull and deadening murmur of the year it is easy to lose the sense of wonder, the awe before the *mysterium Christi* which must surround all truly Lutheran preaching. What we have to say to the hearts of men is impossible to say without the strengthening and purifying presence of the Spirit of God. God, Christ, sin, grace, faith, hope, love — these great monosyllables demand that we clothe and surround them with the best we know. "Pulpitese" is not the best.

* * *

Valpo notes . . . As this is written, our student applications for September, 1955, are about 30% higher than they were at the same time last year. Apparently more and more of our good Lutheran people are aware of the distinctive nature of the type of education which we offer at our Lutheran university. It is interesting to note that the percentage of Lutheran students is steadily rising year after year

At the present moment two key positions on the campus are vacant. We are looking for a head for the Department of Religion and a Dean of the School of Law. Particularly the head of the Department of Religion, should, of course, be a sound theologian and a good teacher. The Department of Religion must ever be the very center of our curriculum

Within a few weeks you will receive our annual request for the names of your confirmation class. I hope that you will be able to find someone to type the names and addresses and send them to us at the earliest possible moment. More and more we are discovering that the high school years are the most difficult and delicate period of the entire educational process and that many youngsters make up their minds about their college career long before they reach the senior class. For that reason we would like to keep in touch with the boys and girls you are confirming this year.

Apparently the surest way to persuade some of the brethren to start talking, either orally or on a typewriter, is to hark back to seminary days when life was young and fair and there were giants on Missouri's campuses. A few days ago all the theologically trained men on our faculty (a goodly array) gathered for a "gemutlicher Abend," most of which was devoted to tall tales of student days. In many years of such solemn conferences I have noted two things. First, the stories grow taller and wilder as the hair of the teller turns grayer; secondly, tales which were once attached to Walther and Stoeckhardt, C. C. Schmidt, and Mezger now are pinned on younger men who must remain anonymous here since they are still in the Church Militant. (By the way, you are suddenly old when your younger brethren begin telling stories about classmates of yours. At that moment you can feel the hoarfrost of legend gathering around your head.) At such a story-telling conference one really wishes that someone would have the time and patience to gather the best of these Missourian folk tales and preserve them for an incredulous posterity. They are an essential part of our genius and are often more significant than a ponderous, learned conference essay.

But this is not what I had set out to say. With Lent coming over the hill my mind turned back this year to our Lenten days at St. Louis. They are as clear and near as if they were only yesterday. There was, first of all, the strange, almost unique, quality of spring in South St. Louis, which usually arrived about the same time as Ash Wednesday. One felt instinctively that the northern boundary of Dixie was Cherokee Street. There was a curious balminess in the air, a mellowness, a sweetness composed of early flowers, Lembke's brewery, and Beltz's Slaughter House. All the windows in the vast mausoleum at 3600 South Jefferson were open to the coming spring, and the occupants had gone their various and mysterious ways. Some who had a nodding acquaintance with a member of the fairer sex (anything more than that was forbidden by Rule 86 in the "Handbuch") saw to it that they got an invitation to dinner before they went to Lenten services on Wednesday evening. The rest of us wandered over to Holy Cross to hear C. C. Schmidt or to Redeemer to listen to Buchheimer, two famous preachers of their time and generation. What we heard, as I remember, was always good. One of the by-products of these Wednesday evening Lenten services was that often we were able to sit quite close to members of the faculty — Pieper, Mezger, Pardieck, Bente, Graebner, Krauss, Fuerbringer — from whom a tremendous social distance separated us most of the time. It was good to be sitting in the same pew with these men whose stature looked so great and forbidding from a distance.

I was reminded of all this several weeks ago when a kind old lady from Indianapolis sent some books for our library. By mistake the box landed at my house, and I spent a happy half hour looking

over some things which I had not seen in many years. At the bottom of the box was C. C. Schmidt's "Glaube and Liebe," probably his best and best-known book, a series of sermons on the Gospels for every Sunday of the church year. They still make good and instructive reading. As I paged around in the volume, I noted that four things are perfectly evident about the sermons we produced fifty years ago:

- a) They are based on hard study of the text.
- b) They were written out word for word.
- c) They were memorized.
- d) They were delivered without much "oratory." The language reflects that. It is eloquent but not oratorical.

* * *

And so Lent comes again to a world that needs it just as badly as it needed it in 33 A.D. Between Ash Wednesday and Pentecost you will be able to tell men everything they must know about God, about Christ, about the Church, about life and time and history in the view of heaven.

Somewhere during the past ten days I again saw Swinburne's famous, devastating line in which he describes a religious teacher of his day: "For their tender minds he served up half a Christ." By "tender minds" Swinburne did not mean the true, understandable, tenderness of childhood and early youth which is a part of God's plan for life. He was referring to the other kind of "tender mind" which is far more prevalent in the modern world and in some sections of the Church than we like to think — the mind which sees in Jesus Christ a good man with some advanced social ideas, slightly ineffectual, but still an attractive figure — or the "tender mind" which likes to play with low and ugly things because they are easier to handle than the hard, great things of God — or the "tender mind" which tries to get away from the ultimate realities by denying their existence. To all these modern "tender minds" it is the task of the Lutheran pulpit to come with the message of the *totus Christus*, the complete Christ suffering, forgiving, triumphant, victorious, bearing the keys of hell and of death, Christ the Judge, Christ the last power in life and in history — *Christus Victor*.

This is the ultimate message of Good Friday, Easter and Pentecost — in terms of life it appeals to us to give up our tiny, fearful, feverish selves to the triumphant, complete and victorious Christ. To practice the immortality which He has given us here and now! To live unto Him, His Name, and His Kingdom and His Will — because now and forever the kingdom, the power and the glory belong to Him. I hope that God will give you much grace and strength to say that again in the year of our Lord 1955.

Very sincerely yours,

O. P. Kretzmann