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My dear Brother:

These lines are being written in the opening hours of the year of our Lord 1956. If our faithful and devoted servants of the typewriter, the printing press and the mailing room hold out, this should reach your desk during the little lull between Epiphany and Ash Wednesday. Perhaps this is a good time to remember again that our entire lives as Christian preachers and pastors revolve around three great monosyllables: God—man—the Cross. Our continuing task, also in this new year, is to unify these into an integrated, driving philosophy of life, time and history. They embrace all the profound essentials of our life as teachers, preachers, pastors and shepherds.

As 1956 dawns, I realize that many of us—including the writer—are now across the hilltops of life. Our time is growing short. The day is far spent. Living as we do in troubled, anxious and forgetful times we may easily drift with the tides of men’s passions and confusions. At times we may succumb to a sense of futility. The world seems to be dominated by bombs and planes and guns. It is, therefore, desperately necessary that we live and work so that by the grace of God men will see in us, the servants of eternity, a majesty of power, an immovable conviction, a serene faith, a divine humility, a heart that scorns little ends and low aims, and a compelling devotion to Him whose own we are and shall be and in Whose hand is our strength today and our victory tomorrow. In this sense I would like to extend to you on behalf of the entire University family our good wishes for a blessed and happy New Year.

Now from the permanent to the immediate: Some of the brethren have told me that apparently my favorite Scripture passage is in the words of St. Paul: “Now, brethren, concerning the collection.” In fact, some observers have said that the most persistent beggars in the modern world are college presidents. Undoubtedly there is some truth in the statement. On the other hand, we cannot forget that the continuing welfare of two thousand students, representing about fifteen hundred congregations, and the continuing happiness of our faithful faculty, depend upon the adequate day-by-day support of our good Lutheran people throughout the nation.

Undoubtedly you have heard of the generous gifts which have come to the University from various sources during the past three months. From the Ford Foundation we received $332,000.00, the interest of which can be used for ten years for the purpose of increasing faculty salaries. The finest gift has come from Mrs. Henry F. Moellering of Fort Wayne, Indiana, who gave us $375,000 for the building of the Henry F. Moellering Memorial Library. I must say that this particular gift was the most moving and inspiring in our entire Lutheran history. The Moellering family has always been very close to the University, and this expression of confidence in our future meant even more to us than the intrinsic value of the gift and its importance for our academic development. Undoubtedly other gifts will come to the University as the years go on. On the other hand, I feel very definitely that the day-by-day support of the work of the University should come from the gifts of our congregations and our individual patrons. This will insure our future. It will also — at least humanly speaking — guarantee the fact that we will always remain close to the life and thought of our own Church. For that reason I hope you will be able to say a special word of commendation for our annual collection on January 28. Every cent of the money which comes to us from this annual offering, is used for the work of the University in its academic and spiritual program. Your help this year will, therefore, be a very important factor in undergirding the structure of our program and encouraging the entire University family.

From University life to University thought: Have you ever examined your “identification rate”? I ran across that phrase several months ago. It means the extent and depth with which you identify yourself with the problems, sorrows and difficulties of your people. It is evident that a good pastor must have a high “identification rate” so that he can bring to the sick bed and the funeral home not only a warm sympathy but also a close empathy — which is even more important. On the other hand, it is probably true that the “identification rate” cannot be too high. If it is, you will collapse under the weight of all the problems and sorrows which you meet in your daily ministry.

I thought of all this a few days ago when I was in the hospital for a routine check-up. As I came down the elevator from one floor to another, an orderly wheeled in a patient on a stretcher. She was covered with tubes, and her face was almost blue. Undoubtedly this was a normal post-operative phenomenon, but to me, an amateur observer, she became immediately a symbol of the pain and suffering all over the world at any given minute. I had to remember quickly that there was an angel who even then was touching her with his wings. By the way, have you ever thought how infinitely and omnipotently strong our Lord must be? He sees all of this — all of it — always — every moment, every hour, every day through all the centuries. He hears all the sighs and the groans and prayers of His suffering children — and He sees them in compassion and pity. This is part of the meaning of the great, mysterious passage: “For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities.” That last clause is tremendous. It ties heaven and earth together not only in a sharing of pain but also in a community of victory and power which no earthly sorrow can finally destroy.

All this is very practical. Last month we had a student on our campus who was assigned to some work at a mental hospital ten miles north of the campus. After a few weeks of work her counselors discovered that her “identification rate” was too high for this assignment. She began to identify herself with all the confusion and sorrow and tragedy which she saw around her. What interested me particularly about the case (which again demonstrates the value of a school like ours) is that she
was counselled not only academically, physically and psychologically but also spiritually. The distinctive value and purpose of a truly Christian education comes to the fore at every turn and problem in the life of an individual.

Correspondence section: The last issue of these random remarks must have reached some of the brethren when they had finished their Christmas sermons and were just waiting for the bells to ring. An astonishing number promptly reached for their pens and typewriters and reacted to one thing or another. For all of these my warm gratitude. No matter how long one puts little black words on white paper there is always a surge of appreciation for any answer and — I must confess — a touch of surprise that anybody is reading the stuff. A few excerpts from the letters: A brother in Texas comments on the predicament of our asthmatic boy. Apparently he has had some experience with this distressing affliction and his words of understanding and sympathy were relevant and real . . . From California comes an eloquent note concerning the rural ministry. This particular brother is in an area of 14,000 people in ten villages. He is also head of a state association and travels 270 miles one way for conferences. He notes that this undoubtedly would come under the heading of “comparative isolation”. Then he adds, “I love this rural work and hope that any future work the Lord has cut out for me will also be in places where a pastor can really learn to know his parishioners and be a “Seelsorger” rather than an impersonal executive.” . . . From Illinois a brother writes a long epistle which begins with the sentence, “Believe it or not, I am ready for Christmas.” In addition to a large city parish he serves a small country parish about twenty miles from his home. They have only thirty communicants. He describes the life of his little parish: “They have no elaborate bulletins — a small slip for church to start an elder goes back and rips the bell. Every collection time two elders leave their seats, go back and get the offering plate and receive the offering. For communion there is no usher cluttering the aisle or the chancel. The folks simply start coming to the altar starting at the front and working back — and they come by families. We have one voters’ meeting a year in January to elect new elders and a new treasurer, no other officers. The election is done in five minutes after a church service. A second five minutes goes to hearing the treasurer’s report and then everybody goes home happy and contented. These country folks have a directness of action and a plainness of speech that I love. They do not spend so much effort on machinery. Sometimes I wonder about the artificiality of cities and the artificiality between cities. Our cities are lonely. The bigger — the lonelier. The artificial is the result of their loneliness — or is it the other way round?” . . . Another note from a brother in Ohio. He recalls the footnote in the last Campus Commentary, “I cannot solve my problem because I am that problem.” He believes that this may come from Dwight L. Moody’s favorite remark, “I have had more trouble with myself than with any other person I know.” . . . And from Missouri comes a note which says that my report on the behavior of deacons in Perry County thirty years ago on the “dripper Weihnachtssteg” was incomplete. He says that I should have added the fact that there was an occasional hissing sound as one of the deacons expectedly gently on the warm stove under the pulpit. He may be right, but I must confess that the deacons I knew thirty years ago on the third day of Christmas were too tired to spit.

And so on . . . Again I note that an unusually high percentage of our brethren in The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod have preserved a saving sense of humor. One of these days I hope to return to a topic which has fascinated me for a long time — the intimate relationship between a strong faith and a good sense of humor.

Paragraph—that—brings—trouble: In each of these I feel that there should be at least one paragraph that arouses someone to violent speech. This time I wish to observe (in all honesty) that one of the great troubles of American education is that we have too many second and third rate minds in it, particularly on the elementary and secondary levels. To be even more specific, these second and third rate minds almost always become administrators. The teachers in our schools are not nearly as bad as the administrators. Perhaps I should add that this is not true of every college, college or liberal arts college, but the people who normally do not come from our liberal arts colleges. Our Departments of Education which are attached to liberal arts colleges, such as ours at Valparaiso University, emphasize content and depth far more than the large “normal” schools in which there is far too much emphasis on methodology.

What is a second-rate mind? Through the long years I have learned to recognize the inevitable and omnipresent marks no matter in what field they may appear. There are always three:

1. A second and third-rate mind insists on reducing everything to routine. Rules are much easier to handle than freedom. They tend to eliminate the free, creative, empirical and adventurous factors in education. It is much easier to make a rule than to embark into the unknown. The result is that most American education is marked by timidity, conformity and incredible dullness.

2. A second and third-rate mind always makes every problem infinitely more complex than it really is. At the drop of a hat there must be conferences, committees, surveys, studies, seminars and workshops to “examine the problem” and so forth. Lest I be misunderstood, let me say immediately that all these techniques and procedures have some value when the problem is complex and really complex. Often, however, all these massive procedures are applied by second-rate minds to situations which are simple and clear from the very beginning. In such cases all the machinery is the hocus-pocus of little fearful minds, designed to make them look very learned and very busy. Footnote: This phenomenon occasionally appears in ecclesiastical circles, too.

3. The third mark of these minds is to befog every issue with a cloud of jargon and a mist of verbiage. It always sounds profound and leaves the layman prostrate and dizzy but respectful. Example? Here are a few from recent literature: “It is demonstrable that within the limitations of present conditions [the] application of environmenal proper coloration and environmental effectiveness.” Which being interpreted means: “point the classroom a color the kids like and they will learn better.” Or, “optimal oxygenation elevates the attitudinal responsiveness of children.” That means, “the kids will do better if you give them some fresh air.” And so on. This is perhaps the most sinister mark of the second and third rate mind in any field. It muddies the waters, blocks the channels of communication and generally messes up the world. I hope that some of the brethren will send samples from the field of ecclesiastical administration, political science and any other which they may have run across in their travels through our confused and verbose world.
Have you been paying some attention to the increasingly loud and multiplying discussions concerning the "Peace of Mind" cult which is rapidly becoming a substitute for the Gospel? It seems to be one of those occasions when a part of the truth of Christianity is lifted into such prominence that it can easily become a heresy. It is true, of course, that our Lord said very calmly and quietly, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." There is the promise of peace and happiness in accepting Him and His salvation. On the other hand, some of our modern preachers of the new cult have forgotten that it is not peace as the world gives it, not happiness in an earthly sense. It is not the peace of the contented cow, but the peace of the victorious warrior. After the wars and the tumult of life, peace can and will come to the weary heart. You will recall His magnificent closing words at the end of the Sermon in the Upper Room, "In the world ye shall have tribulation, but fear not, I have overcome the world." Our Lord has promised us three things in life. As so often in time and eternity they are somewhat paradoxical. Perhaps this is a place where we must use that terrible and much abused word "dialectic." He has promised us trouble and peace and victory — all three. The Christian will always have them. He can be sure of ultimate victory but never without trouble. He can have peace in his heart but never without the sorrow over sin and all the other ills to which our brief mortality is subject.

In this section I was deeply impressed with a very thoughtful article in the most recent issue of The Christian Scholar by Robert E. Fitch, Professor of Christian Ethics at the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, California. Professor Fitch examines the various perspectives from which life can be viewed. In his section on the perspective of "Reason" he has this to say:

"The ultimate failure of this perspective is a failure in fruitfulness. The history of any specific rationalism is always the swing of a pendulum from the extreme of bold metaphysical speculations and systems, through the dead center of dogmatism, to the other extreme of skepticism and nihilism. One can see the whole movement in the development from the Hellenic to the Hellenistic period. The original faith is strong and purifying in Plato. In Aristotle its reason was degraded and corrupted by a great lord to a menial servant. It is a mere tool to the Stoic and to the Epicurean; it is something to be surpassed by the Neo-Platonist; and with the Skeptic it is consumed by a self-devouring impulse that soon annihilates it. Men then ceased to cultivate the inquiring mind, and cared only for peace of mind.

"There are abundant indications that we live in a Neo-Hellenistic Age. The great faith in autonomous reason that gave glory to the eighteenth century and the Enlightenment already are flickers and grows dim. It is being quenched by the cold touch of positivism. As its light spatters out into relativism, impressionism, and skepticism, men are persuaded that they no longer desire within to know the truth or to be free. They want what the Roman world wanted in its decline — ataraxia, apathia — tranquillity, indifference, the peace that by-passeth understanding."

The last phrase is a good topic for a thoughtful sermon, "The peace that by-passeth understanding." Recently Warren Weaver hit the same topic in an article in the Saturday Review. He writes:

"This 'How to be at Peace' gimmick seems to me part of a general lazy movement which we find urged on us from all sides. 'How to Know Literature' (without reading books); 'How to Speak Foreign Languages' (without studying); 'How to Grow Thin' (without dieting). The 'How to be Happy' ones seem to me particularly objectionable. When will someone put out a book entitled 'Twenty Sure-Fire Rules for Being Happy'? Rule One would be: 'Get busy doing something. Preferably something significant and useful — but something. Work at it.' Rule Two would be: 'Forget about your happiness, and forget about all the rest of the rules.' Rules Three to Twenty: ditto.

Not bad ... A faint far, secular echo of the famous and perennially relevant! "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you ..." That goes for peace and happiness, too . . . .

Some of the brethren have been inquiring about the progress of our plans for the new chapel-auditorium which was included in the "Building for Christ" effort. I am happy to say that an architect has been engaged and that the preliminary drawings look very interesting. We have already secured approximately 3,000 students. This is based on the realization that we can maintain a small, unified school atmosphere if we have one place where at least a great majority of our students can come together for the worship of God day after day. Building in the modern manner we hope to erect a structure which will really be one of the first multi-purpose college chapels in the entire country. It is definitely planned to serve the spiritual, cultural and academic needs of the entire University community. The inclusion of the chapel-auditorium in the "Building for Christ" effort is a special reason for gratitude to all the brethren who took part in the offering. It will do more than any other single factor in our physical development to re-emphasize the religious and educational purposes of the University. Its spiritual tone and atmospherere, I shall keep you informed as our plans develop. By the way, the chapel-auditorium is an excellent place for memorials. If you should have any members who might be interested in establishing a memorial on the campus in memory of some loved one, I shall be very happy to hear from you.

Book Section: Perhaps you are looking around for a little additional stimulation as you prepare your sermons for the Lenten season. I wonder if you have ever looked at Miss Dorothy Sayers’ little book, Creed or Chaos. I have read and reread it with much interest and appreciation. It is one of the finest, boldest and most intelligent apologies for various aspects of the Christian Gospel which I have seen in a long time. Her chapter on "Dogma" is particularly valuable. The last few books for Lent vary a great deal in value. One of the best, I believe, is Herbert Lindemann’s series of sermons for Lent and Easter under the title “Dead or Alive” (Concordia Publishing House). While Lindemann has his own individual style, as all good preachers must have, I am certain that you will be interested in the manner and content of his sermons. He has much to say, and he says it with vigor and power. I believe that it would be an excellent background volume for your own preaching during Lent. A sample of his style and approach: In a sermon on sin he has the following paragraph:

"Look, for example, at your home. If you are married, no doubt you are happily married, and you could not ask for a better spouse or finer children. But it is not ideal, is it? There are
frictions, aren't there? You — or somebody else in the household — becomes irritable, loses your temper, and what should be an atmosphere of love, joy and peace is spoiled. Well, brother, that is sin; for sin is the spoiling of the perfection which God intends should prevail.

In the home it is our failure to rise above the annoyances that are sure to develop, our failure to be completely unselfish, utterly understanding, and divinely patient. Our family life is not ideal simply because we are not big enough to make it so.

And when there is always one of my favorite German volumes, Ziehe's, Das Lamm Gottes. If you still handle the German with a reasonable degree of speed and accuracy, you will be warmed and inspired by Ziehe's eloquent approach to the great truths of Lent and Easter.

Footnotes: The quote of the month comes from Samuel Butler. It sums up the curious attitude of many modern minds over against the turns and circumstances of life: "As luck would have it, Providence was on my side." Perhaps you had better look at that again. There is a whole — and bad — philosophy of life in it.

Another footnote: Catherine of Siena: "All the way to heaven is heaven for He said, 'I am the Way.'"

Still another from an anonymous source: "A college president is the recipient of the ultimate buck." I looked at that twice and realized that that may also be true of a preacher. When all the buck-passing has been done, a problem usually and finally lands right back in the pastor's study.

Fourth footnote: Sometime ago a good and thoughtful friend sent me a copy of "Dialogue of Alfred North Whitehead" by Lucien Price, published some time ago by the Atlantic Press. It records conversations with the famous Harvard philosopher conducted over a period of twenty years. It is a curious book. There is much nonsense in it — some 18th century insights which still have limited though largely antiquated value — and occasional flashes of great and profound wisdom. It is the kind of book which should be kept at the bedside for occasional and sporadic reading. It interested me, by the way, that it came to me from a wife and mother who apparently read the volume between the normal tasks of an active household. One quote today which has some bearing on education: "I am profoundly suspicious of the A-man. He can say back what you want to hear in an examination, and since the examination is roughly a means of test, you must give him his A if he says it back; but the ability, not to say the willingness, to give you back what is expected of him argues a certain shallowness and superficiality. Your B-man may be a bit muddle-headed, but muddle-headedness is a condition precedent to independent thought. It may actually be independent, creative thought in its first stage." Some truth in that.

Comment on the state of the world: Occasionally I see some samples of the foreign press. Two years ago on a hurried trip to Europe I read only German and French newspapers for several weeks. By and large they are amazingly bad and inaccurate whenever they turn to life in America. There is either distorted, distorted, distorted, or astonishingly irresponsible. During a recent stay in a hospital one of the nurses gave me a copy of 'Der Stern,' an illustrated journal published in Hamburg. This particular sheet devoted a page to the Colorado air disaster on November I when, as you will recall, a young man named John Graham packed a time-bomb in the luggage of his mother. Flight #629 on United Air Lines left Denver for Seattle at 6:52 p.m. Eleven minutes later 44 people were plowed into eternity. Within a comparatively short time the FBI found the murderer, and he is now awaiting trial in Colorado. 'Der Stern' tells the story in text and pictures. About half the story is all wrong. What dismayed me particularly was the sentence under the title 'Im Gefängnis der Tod': 'Die Manner von Colorado bereuten sich vor das Gefängniss zu stürmen und ihn zu lynchen.' Now in all the stories of the entire grisly and gruesome episode there was not the slightest indication of any lynching process. This is again one of those glaring examples by which our friends throughout the world receive a totally distorted and tragically wrong picture of American life. One often wishes that something could be done about the sense of responsibility of foreign journalists.

And so, into 1956. Within a few weeks you will again be standing in your pulpit to proclaim the message of Lent. As I have noted before, this season of the year finds the Lutheran Church at its highest and best. We have never quite forgotten that the source of our ultimate power lies in two words: "In Christ." This does not mean in the first place in the historic Jesus or the Christ of the mountainside and the little children, but in the Christ of the Cross, the Lamb of the eternal sacrifice, the sin-burdened fashioner of our Atonement. This is the very heart of our faith. The silences of eternity, the councils of the Holy Trinity, the crying of prophets, the long night of waiting, the whimper of a Child in a Manger, Palm Sunday, Easter, Ascension and Pentecost — all point to the center of the world's history and the heart of the world's hope, the Cross of Jesus Christ.

Our Lutheran theology of the Cross is centered, of course, in the doctrine of the justification by faith. In the modern world, as always, this presupposes an overwhelming consciousness of sin, and a proclamation of sin in the one way in which the modern mind does not feel it — as the real reason for our broken world. We must again emphasize the fact that sin is cumulative in time and extent. There is no difference in kind between the little hates, jealousies, and malices in our hearts, and the roar of planes and bombs and guns. It is all of one piece. It is all sin. It is the crashing of our world into pieces because of sin.

Only when the modern mind has understood sin in this sense can we turn to the tremendous message of grace, the miracle of the Cross, the restoration of fellowship, and the return to our Father's house. In Him, and in Him alone, our brokenness is healed and our union with God and man has been restored. The bonds of sin are loosed, and we again have the freedoms beneath and beyond all human freedoms — the freedom from fear from sin, the freedom from want of God, the freedom of worship of God, and the freedom of speech to God. For the proclamation of that message in all its eternal power and glory I wish you much strength and joy.

Very sincerely yours,

O. P. Kretzmann
President.