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Campus Commentary

VOLUME 1

JANUARY - FEBRUARY, 1951

No. 4

Dear Brother:

These notes will probably reach you during the Lenten season. Undoubtedly this is the worst time of the church year to place anything additional on a preacher's desk. On the other hand, there are a few matters which I wanted to write about at this time — even though I am haunted by the picture of the brethren busy with their Lenten sermons and the wastebaskets ready to receive everything which does not fit in with the purposes and work of the moment.

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This is the greatest season of the year for the Lutheran pulpit. Christmas has been commercialized, Easter has been sentimentalized, and some of the other seasons of the church year have almost been forgotten in the rush and roar of modern life. Lent, however, still remains comparatively untouched; and there is probably more thoughtful preaching and listening at this season than at any other time of the year. It is my hope and prayer that our crucified Savior and Redeemer will be with you whenever you step into your pulpit in this great hour.

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I was surprised a few months ago over the number of brethren who wrote to say something about their interest in eschatology. Some of the letters are worth reprinting, and perhaps I should devote some space to them in one of the future issues of the "Commentary." Apparently there is some good and quiet thinking going on in clerical studies which does not reach the publicity of pastoral conferences or the pages of our church journals. This, of course, is all to the good although I do hope that there will be more discussion of some of these basic problems in theology in the years that lie immediately before us.

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As you can probably imagine, the last two or three months have been among the most distressing in the experience of college administrators. The universal unrest among the members of the younger generation and their uncertainty about the immediate future has cast a pall over many of our activities. I am sure that you have noticed it also among your own young men and women. In many ways the present situation is harder on the younger generation than all-out-war would be. If a hot shooting war would begin, we would at least know what to face. Under the present circumstances we only know that we are confronted with a long period of anxiety, uncertainty, and heavy mobilization — whatever that may mean.

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The years ahead are, humanly speaking, more dark and uncertain than ever before. It is evident, therefore, that the problems of the younger generation must be met with a profound understanding and sympathy for the situation in which they find themselves. A great part of their youth will now be given to a life for which they had never planned and for which they are not responsible. By the way, since we now have quite a large group of men and women on our campus who have been trained in counseling and guidance, we have been considering the possibility of publishing a little pamphlet, particularly for our pastors and teachers, on this entire subject. I think all of us will recognize the fact that the very best techniques, built upon a sound theological foundation, must now be employed in order to give the younger generation whatever help we can possibly give them in these trying times.

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Several of the brethren have asked us about the immediate future of our Lutheran University. It is evident, of course, that no matter what manpower plan is finally adopted by the powers that be in Washington there will be a sharp reduction in the male enrollment on all American campuses during the next two or three years. This makes it all the more important that we receive the names of every girl and boy in your parish who are considering going to college. In addition, I should like to point out again that we are now definitely introducing training in elementary education on our campus beginning in September, 1951. We would be most grateful if you would call attention to this development and try to interest young women who wish to teach in public schools to come to our Lutheran University. Perhaps it should be said again that we must make a sharp distinction between the work we are doing here in training some of our young women for public schools and the professional training for our parochial schools which is offered by our Synodical teachers colleges and some of our preparatory schools. Our University will not enter the field of training of parochial school teachers. We feel very definitely that this is a part of Synod's work at our teachers colleges and should remain there. There is, however, as you will readily see, a tremendous field beyond the parochial school. The introduction of good Lutheran men and women into our public school system could over a longer period of time have a very definite effect upon the work done on the elementary level in the public schools. Although

there are real and severe limitations on religious activity in public schools, as there must be, the realization that much teaching is done by example will be a measure of the importance of having teachers with a sound religious background in the classrooms of our American public schools. I hope, therefore, that you will call the attention of the young women in your parish to the advantages of training for this work at our Lutheran University.

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Obviously we must look to our girls in the Lutheran church for additional students during the next few years. It may interest some of you to know that there has been an expression of interest in engineering for women. We already have several girls in this field; and since it is one of the professions which will be in great demand during the coming decade, we hope that there may be some girls in the Lutheran church who will be interested in our College of Engineering. In addition, of course, there are also such courses as Home Economics, Social Service, the one and two year courses in our Department of Business, Music, Drama, and so forth. Our entire curriculum is being adjusted to meet the needs of women more definitely and completely than ever before. If you can help us by sending in the names of prospective women students, we shall be most grateful.

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During the past two months I have had some contact with psychiatrists. (Lest some of the brethren reach for a post card and write "it's about time", I hasten to add that it was necessary to consult the psychiatrists because we had a few emotionally disturbed students.) I should say that those whom we consulted had a good religious background and therefore were not typical of the entire profession. On the other hand, they readily admitted that most men and women who are operating in this new and still uncertain field ordinarily have no use for religion. I am certain that many of the brethren have already noticed this too. The reason for it, of course, is obvious. They see only the failures of religion. They never have any contact with the people for whom religious faith has had a tremendous therapeutic value. We know, of course, that therapy is not the purpose of faith but is a by-product. It is, however, a by-product which comparatively few psychiatrists have ever seen, and for that reason their somewhat blind and naive hostility to religion is quite understandable. Several times brethren have told me that they are working with people in this field in the hope of making it clear to them that the fusion of certain psychiatric techniques with a profound understanding of the value of religious faith can often work wonders in the human soul and mind. I am sure that almost all of us have seen something like that in our experience.

* * *

I have been thinking a great deal about our ministry during the past few months. This is probably due to the fact that more brethren have either written in or stopped in to say that they are more spiritually exhausted today than they have ever been. I can readily understand that. Constant preaching and teaching are a spiritually exhausting task. More and more we have forgotten that the refilling of our spiritual reservoirs can be done only in the hours of prayer and solitude and study of the Word. As the world, and sometimes the church, take more and more of our time for other matters, we face the very real danger of something like spiritual exhaustion. In fact, the more faithful a pastor is in the performance of his duties, the more imminent such a danger can become. It is impossible for us not to be touched with the infirmities and troubles of our flock, and they in turn take something out of us which can be replaced only by an intimate and warm communion with Him from whom all our strength comes. One of the brethren called a few days ago to say that between now and Easter Monday he would have approximately 40 sermons to prepare. This is, of course, utterly impossible. Even if he preaches only half of them, he will have great difficulty in coming to Easter Sunday with the depth and power which our message requires.

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We never say to one another, "I hope you will have a happy Lenten season," and yet that is probably the best wish that one can have today for a brother in the ministry. This can be the happiest season of the year. The warm shadow of the Cross, the nearness of Calvary, and the magnificent privilege of preaching about the very heart and center of our faith can make us happy servants of Him who died that we might be able by His power to tell others, even at this late hour, about Good Friday and Easter. For that reason it is my sincere hope that you will have a happy Lenten season.

Very cordially and sincerely yours,

O. P. Kretzmann
President

P. S. A mundane afterthought: Our university relations department has asked me to remind your congregational officers of the advantage accruing to all concerned by authorizing the inclusion of the Valparaiso Sunday collection envelope in the cartons for your members, when you place your 1952 order. All of the approximately 700 congregations now following this plan report favorably on the arrangement. If you authorized us to place our envelopes in the cartons last year we will repeat the order unless you notify us to the contrary by March 15.

O.P.K.