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O.P. Kretzmann
Valparaiso University

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Dear Brother:

It was hard to get started this time. I wanted to say something light-hearted . . . how Betty had enjoyed her first Indiana winter, especially the great snow that swept over the west to the east at the turn of the year . . . the continual cloud cover that frustrated even the dream of seeing the comet . . . the history that spun for eighty-four days under the Skylab . . . the brief days of a tempest in a teapot which had grown into Watergate. Perhaps, too, I had heard an echo of the laughter of God. It was in Psalm 2. It was the reflection of what God sees . . . kings and rulers of the earth, counting on their elections, constitutions, armies . . . taking counsel together against the Lord and against His anointed . . . He who sits in the heavens laughs, but the important thing is that he calls it “derision,” mockery, ridicule. The comforting feature lies not in the laughter but in the “scene,” the King who still rules on God’s holy hill, the Son crucified, risen, glorified, the call to “kiss” him and none other. Strange how the little threatened minority in Acts 4:23-31 discovered that Psalm again!

By a piety of long standing, Missourians view themselves as “the church of the pure doctrine.” That self-consciousness, axiomatic and uncriticized, captures what is uniquely “Missouri” within Lutheranism. By it Missourians know, before any discussion has occurred anywhere on any matter, that the position of the Missouri Synod will be the true and definitive one. “Happy inconsistencies” are to be found in other churches, and in Missourians who waver. But the real Missouri, by the grace of God, possesses theological completeness and purity in perfect internal harmony. That is the unique treasure which she is called to share with the world.

It follows that Missouri’s “pure doctrine” must be cherished at all costs. In gratitude to God who gave it, and to fathers who fought to preserve it for us, we must receive, defend, and transmit that same pure doctrine unblemished to our children. We are the church of the true doctrine. That is how Missourians understand their Constitution, their commitment to the Holy Scriptures, and their subscription to the Lutheran Confessions.

That explains why Missourians, in a situation of prolonged confusion and anxiety, rallied with relief and spell-bound dedication to the slogan, “Synod’s doctrinal position of 125 years,” raised before them like a banner. Christ and Gospel, Scripture and Confessions, everything they treasured, was subsumed in that cry. “Synod’s doctrinal position” — that means firmness and truth, the measure of everything, measured by nothing. To harbor a doubt about any aspect of “Synod’s doctrinal position” could only mean defection in the direction of impurity and unbelief, thus disloyalty to the fathers and to God Himself.

Therefore, if any brother suggests that there may be a problem with “Synod’s doctrinal position,” he has to be wrong — immediately, arrogantly, unquestionably wrong! Does he view “Synod’s doctrinal position” as a treasured tradition and piety, yet subject to testing by the “rule and norm” of Scripture and Confessions? No true Missourian can tolerate such a distinction! Such a brother “wants to change Synod’s doctrinal position.” His doubt, his questioning is already compromise, betrayal, a threat to the very foundations! Before he has uttered a single word we know that he is wrong! We leap to discover and expose fragments of his wrongness, measure him by our measure, and consider him refuted. The discussion is over. If he will not hear, he is arrogant, stubborn, hard of heart. If he persists in wanting the church to see what he sees, he becomes guilty of crimes — undermining “Synod’s doctrinal position,” disturbing the church, sowing weeds among the wheat, despising the Word of God.

It is all transparently clear. Any layman in the church can see it and judge for himself. There is no need to understand what such a brother has seen or is trying to show on the basis of Scripture and Confessions. He is out of step with “Synod’s doctrinal position.” If he has his way, our “doctrine” will “change.” That is enough to prove him wrong, and to make labels like “liberal,” “rationalist,” “intellectual” altogether persuasive. “Synod’s doctrinal position,” that is “purity” itself. Let the laity rally to the banner, and to those who vigorously raise it.

Beyond that, let the laity trust doctrinal matters to their leaders, and rejoice in decisive refutations handed down from high authority. It is comforting and reassuring to hear leaders say, “Don’t disturb the laity with your questions, bring them to us,” or “These so-called ‘new’ questions are really the same old ones,” or “These false brethren are only trying to divert the church from ‘the real issue’,” or “Don’t be taken in when they speak of Christ and the Gospel, or claim loyalty to Scripture and the Confessions. They are ‘Gospel Reductionists.’ Measure them by ‘Synod’s doctrinal position of 125 years,’ and you can see they are lying.”

Such confidence on the part of the “true Missourians” is a great help to the leaders. From this point on it is not necessary that theological refutations convince the laity (who are already convinced), or even the errorist. All that is
needed is to turn "Synod's doctrinal position" against what conflicts with it. True Missourians will ask no questions, for they have been preserved from the need to listen, search, or be troubled. But if the refuted brother is dissatisfied, who is there to hear him? He is merely being recalcitrant, sadly unappreciative of the efforts the church has made on his behalf.

And so an orchestra like that described in Daniel 3:5 played its music in New Orleans last summer. Synod "spoke definitely" as it had been summoned to do. It commanded not only its own dissenters, but "all peoples, nations, and languages" on mission frontiers to "fall down and worship the golden image" called "Synod's doctrinal position of 125 years," now raised so high. Missouri reconfirmed herself by majority vote as "the church of the pure doctrine." A slogan given content in an untested document which simply crystalized prevailing fears and piety was made the measure and norm of everything.

There were those, of course, who like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego "paid no heed" and would not "serve" that golden image. Accusers were watching, and quickly reported it. Synod became very angry. It threatened the rebels, asserted its great authority, and heated the furnace of discipline seven times hotter. This, Synod declared, was the way of "unity," of "peace," of "pure doctrine," of "childlike faith."

Thus the image stands among us, in its great might and frightening brightness (Dan. 2:31). But it has clay feet. A single stone, cut by no human hand; will shatter it when God's moment comes. "I am the Lord — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to graven images." (Is. 42:8)

Meanwhile, let Synod look into its fire. A fourth figure, "whose appearance is like the Son of God," takes His place there with the others — not for their own righteousness' sake, of course, but because "The Lord knows those who are His." "Four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt."

Consider who those "three men" are, who walk loose, with a free and joyful conscience, in the midst of the fire. Shadrach: the remarkable young student body at the Seminary, men who could not be brainwashed, manipulated, threatened, treated like children. They wanted to know specifically who their false teachers were. They were the first, even before the faculty, to say NO to the Board of Control.

Meshach: the majority faculty and staff, who chose to be evicted from homes and jobs rather than bow the knee to Missouri's illusion of doctrinal integrity and perfection, who would serve Christ only, who carry on in exile.

Abednego: the mission executives at synodical headquarters who refused to accept a destructive substitute for Synod's "Mission Affirmations," or to consent to the dismissal of a gifted colleague, Mayer — and with them sixty-seven out of the ninety at 500 N. Broadway who gave the first One Hundred Dollars out of their February paychecks to support the Seminary in exile.

These are the men who walk free, with a joyful conscience and hearts full of faith and hope these days. Two or three, gathered in Christ's name, and He in the midst of them!

But there is no joyful conscience anywhere else. When the choice is to bow to the image or to walk in the fire, third options like neutrality and fence-straddling have been excluded. It is a great day for the church.

They have walked in the fire, and they were not hurt!

The document of "Formal Charges" drawn up by two pastors against Dr. Tietjen is public. Let it be read and ask whether it reveals any serious awareness whatsoever of Synod's Constitution, Article II, that "The written Word of God" is to be "the only rule and norm of faith and of practice." When Biblical texts are cited, they are but simply used as a club, according to the tradition, piety, and disposition of the accusers. The operative "rule and norm" is Synod's tradition.

Under Handbook 6.79d, the Board of Control has submitted this document of charges to the Commission on Theology and Church Relations "for an advisory theological opinion." The CTCR meets March 25-27. If the Commission should find for Dr. Tietjen, the whole situation in Synod could change. Pray for these brethren. They bear an awesome responsibility. They have come to the kingdom for such a time as this.

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I look westward from my window, as the evening sun declines. The prolonged cloud cover is gone, the skies have been clear. Each night the sun intersects the horizon just a little further north. About March 21 it will set due west. Around Easter I shall watch it drop behind the Chapel.

I think about how our fathers in Biblical times comprehended that wonder ... the sun spending the night in the tent God prepared for it ... getting up vigorously in the morning "like a bridegroom leaving his chamber" ... embracing the whole of the earth in a single day's work. (Ps. 19:4-6)

And so it is night. We cry to the Lord "out of the depths" (Ps. 130), wondering whether the bottom can possibly be any lower than it is now. The marvel is that the Lord's ear should pay attention to us at all, when we have listened to
Him so little. “If thou, O LORD, shouldst mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.”

That brings peace. “Fear God” and let His hand put it all together and fulfill what He is doing. We are still his “glorious Church.” By that kind of promise we can still hope, as we wait for the morning. PEACE! And that “PEACE,” long as it may be in coming, reminds me of the beginnings of our problem. Stand fast, therefore, and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery.

I was reminded of the days — happy and not so far away — when I wrote about Concordia Seminary in a better, finer day: As I write this, a tentative moon rests on ivy that rustles reminiscently on the wall across the quadrangle... Notes from the chapel organ quiver on the moon’s beams... Mullioned windows... For the rest, a deep quiet as that of forgotten dreams... Weeks of emptiness have banished from the nooks and corners of the quad the last echoes of hurrying feet... What is it that lives on in places like this when every living, breathing thing has taken leave?... We can usually whip up a little temporary Alma Mater enthusiasm for class reunions and alumni days... But it must be whipped up notwithstanding... The trouble is that it can never be the same when once we have gone out... We come back, not as we left, but as the world has made us... And the world always comes along... To sit down at midnight where it has no business... And to look over our shoulder at something it does not understand... For the things we dreamed and talked of when we belonged were anti-world... It was not a question of what the world had done to us — than which there is no more common topic at class reunions — but what we were going to do to the world... And tarnished principles never make good pillows... (But not bad mirrors)....

But come along on a night like this... If you listen gently, the disembodied voices of the stones will come to you... They whisper of high courage in a world of compromise... Strains of the DeProfundis mingle with the Trisagion... Even a few sentences of a Latin lecture trickle from yonder medieval rainspout... And get tangled up with a Gaudeamus Igitur... Perhaps the voices will make you sad... Perhaps they will make you jittery... But they must make you think... In places like this men dare to hew to the line... and don’t even watch the chips... Without variation they sing their songs in high degree... Despite the consciousness that the world will rewrite them in a lower key... Matthew Arnold once said that a place like this was the home of lost causes... That broken and bruised dreams come here to rest... But these are the only causes that are finally not lost... Their warp is of the eternal... their woof of the infinite....

On a night like this you may make some irrelevant observations, too... There is no wind in the quadrangle, but the little breezes chase each other up and down the vaulted arches of the entrances... Afraid to come in... You notice how the students walk... No grass grows in the angles of the footpaths... The philosophers of Athens lost something when they ceased being peripatetic... What is the relation between walking and thinking, anyway?... A subject for the deep essay, there....

Places like this have a curious and charming way of perpetuating customs of the past even though the peculiar circumstances which gave rise to the customs no longer exist... They say that in Christ Church, Oxford, there were at one time, long ago, one hundred and one students, and promptly at nine o’clock the bell in the tower would ring up the entire student body with a stroke for each... The bell still rings one hundred and one times every night... and at nine o’clock... But the nine o’clock curfew is history, and the student body now numbers far more than one hundred and one....

But we have almost lost our way in the mazes and moonlight of the quadrangle... This one happens to belong to a school that stands for a towering religion... And we suspect that the voices of the night, but barely audible now, are only the faint echoes of the voices of men who have gone out into the highways and bypaths of all the continents... Crying out to men to come and buy without money and without price... They walk the valleys of the world with the reflection of Judea’s hilltops in their eyes... Theirs is a cause that is never lost....

Someone has come down the street, and the light from the lamp on the corner makes each step a little pool of shadow... By this line of shadow I know that a man has passed here, hurrying to shelter against the cold... Before morning, however, the slow drifting of the snow will have covered his steps, and there will be only a faint mark to show that once a man had come this way... By a trick of association or conflict, I remember that a man came into the office this afternoon, angry and bitter, to tell me about one of the quarrels which have a way of appearing in moments of stress when spirits are low and nerves are raw from the steady grind of a long winter... This quarrel, my friend informed me, would never end... There was no chance for a reconciliation... “I will not speak to him again”... As I looked at his flushed face and trembling hands, I wondered, as I wonder now, if he was not talking only about
footsteps in the snow . . . The momentary pools of shadow . . . The hurt which will not matter in the morning . . . The hole in life which will be covered by the drift of the years as surely as the footsteps beyond my window will disappear during the night . . .

There is little religion in this, unless it be religious to use the common sense with which the Creator has endowed us. Increasingly, during the past decade, I have been bewildered by the feverish, neurotic concern of men and women with the immediate, the momentary, and the little . . . Almost every emotional problem which has crossed my path could have been solved with a truthful answer to the question: “What will it matter ten years from now?” or better yet, “What will it matter when the drifting of the years has ended and there is only the light at the last corner?” . . . “He insulted me” . . . “He ignored my authority” . . . “He has maligned me” . . . “He laughs at me” . . . What will it matter when nothing matters but that, though our sins be as scarlet, they shall be as snow? . . . The only lasting mark made on the world, no matter how great or how important we consider our little footsteps, is the straight mark behind them made by a dragging Cross . . .

Here my meditation ends. It is the “Hosanna” in the whirlwind around me. The time of quiet has now come. It is a day of doing nothing. Surely everyone who lives in these troubled years must face, at times, a sharp want of this silent time, the need for permanence and peace and the turning of the mind and heart to the record and remembrance of things lasting and eternal. The tumult and the shouting dies and we remember only that it is from a high and quiet place that one can put things in their proper order.

Day after day we see God striking into history in the judgment of events, but the rustle of His garments as He sweeps through the immensities of time is lost in the dull murmur of the immediate and the trivial. Only on nights like these when the lights fall warm on the sacred page can one forget the welter of words and steel and the voices of those who see life only in terms of charges and counter-charges of discordant voices. In hours such as these we turn like a prisoner released to the closing chapters of St. John. Everything we need is here – from the eternal answer to all the Kyrie Eleisons of the world. “Let not your heart be troubled” to the eternal Hallelujah, “I have overcome the world.” We need nothing beyond that. His candles fill the night in the smallest room. The company of cherubim stand by. In the smallest church something lost returns and there is now strength for all the unbearable things which the Lord of the Church has decreed that our generation must bear.

O God, from whom all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed, give unto Thy servants that peace which the world cannot give, that our hearts may be set to obey Thy commandments, and also that we, being defended by Thee from the fear of our enemies, may pass our time in rest and quietness; through the merits of Jesus Christ, our Savior, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. AMEN.

Sincerely yours,

O.P. Kretzmann