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O.P. Kretzmann

Valparaiso University

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Dear Brother:

This may surprise you, but after much thought and consultation with the local chapter of the Lutheran Mafia I have decided to run for the presidency of Synod. (The brother in the rear who is laughing will please leave the room.) You can readily understand that with so many brethren running sub rosa and in various disguises, there ought to be one honest candidate who announces that he is in the race. Theophilus had his doubts about the decision but consented to become my campaign manager when I promised him a synodical trip around the world to organize Ladies Aid Societies in Tahiti. Sauerbraten came around when I hinted that we knew that his last trip to Chicago was not entirely on business. He will be a loyal supporter as long as Mrs. Sauerbraten retains her hearing.

I hope that you will approve my platform. It is very simple:

1. I am against everything — more than twice as much as anyone else.
2. I will not pray with a brother who tries to save a lodge member. That goes for the ALC too.
3. All synodal memos pesturing the Pension Fund will be under the direct control of the President of Synod. These funds are entirely too large to be entrusted to a committee.
4. All seminaries will be closed. They are hot beds of heresy. Professors will be sent to open missions in Siberia. They will be supported by the SOC.
5. Pastors will be chosen from the ranks of teenage Walther Leaguers. I have been told that youth must be served. At the age of thirty they will be shot.
6. All editors of independent journals will be unionized in the AHT (Aspirants to the Holy Trinity). All brethren who too have become infallible will become associate members.
7. There will be no Board of Directors. Discussions in a thousand Winkelkonferenzen have shown that we know what to do much better than they.
8. Every financial report of Synod will be preceded by a three-fold “Kyrie eleison.” The treasurers and finance committees will add a double “mea culpa.”
9. Brethren east of the Alleghenies will become associate members of Synod. Editors of papers published in Missouri (outside of St. Louis) will enjoy the same status.
10. The four vice presidents will be assigned respectively to the black, red, brown and yellow races to show that we are not racists, at least not entirely.
11. All women will be entitled to vote — as in marriage, one woman two votes. They may vote in all elections involving janitors, professors of propaedeutics, and vicars with more than four children.

You can see, brother, that this is an honest platform. It takes care of everything. Theophilus thought that there should be a plank concerning “one brother — one wife” but considering our clerical salaries I thought that the possibility of polygamy in Synod was somewhat remote.

We are now looking for appropriate campaign slogans. Several brethren have suggested some but I am opposed to profanity in a slogan, especially in the church. Theophilus thinks that we will get some suggestions from the Buddhist News, but their platform is so far behind ours that I can expect little help from that source.

As usual I consulted Theophilus. His reaction was unusual — not only the normal one letter, but two. Since he is my campaign manager, you should know how and what he thinks.

Letter Number 1 from campaign manager Theophilus:

Before proceeding with your plans to throw your hat in the ring, you should by all means let the doctors at the Menninger Clinic check you out. I have had cases of men in my own parish who, in their late sixties, developed strange ideas. In fact, I have one right now who thinks he has figured out a way to pay off the national debt and keeps pestering the President to appoint him Secretary of the Treasury. His doctor tells me that the trouble is arteriosclerosis. When was the last time you had your arteries checked?

If the Menninger people give you the go-ahead, I will be glad to do whatever I can to help you make it, although this sort of thing is hardly up my alley. The last time I did anything at all in politics was back in 1936 when I wrote a couple of speeches for Alf Landon. I still have a note from FDR thanking me for my contribution to his re-election.

I have to tack a couple of qualifications on my acceptance, though. If Dr. Harms goes for another term, all bets are off. I’m with him. There is precious little evangelical sanity left in the church these days and still fewer gentlemen, so don’t expect me to have any part of a “dump Harms” movement. And frankly I don’t think you should either.
The second qualification is that, if I am going to manage your campaign, it's got to be done right. As a starter, I want nothing in print about any twelve-point program. In politics they hang people from the planks of platforms. What you want to do is play to the vague feeling of unease that afflicts the church just at this moment, always being careful not to offer any specific diagnosis of the malady or any specific course of treatment. Take, for instance, this crazy idea you have for closing the seminaries. If you can lace your comments with just the hint of a suggestion that certain people who have gone to pot and how you would certainly want to take a very close look at them if you became president. If you can lace your comments with just the hint of a suggestion that certain people who are in would be out and certain people who are out would be in, so much the better. (You can ignore the fact that the most of the men in all of our terminal schools are on tenure and you couldn't do anything about them anyway, short of mounting a heresy trial — which would be lousy public relations.)

Finally — and there is no way to avoid coming to terms with this problem — we shall have to do something about your image. Your options, as I see them, are two: you can offer yourself as a Great Stabilizing Force, in which case we ignore the heresies of the Right and of the Left and appeal to “the great heart of Missouri,” or you can come riding onto the scene as the Great Dragon Slayer, in which case we magnify every difference that exists among us and appeal to the German Lutheran's built-in contentiousness. Sentimentality or cruelty — these are the political choices, and we should not underestimate the skill of those who are now reaching for power in the church to weave the two together in such a way that any tertium datur can be dismissed either as lack of charity or lack of firmness.

I'll be in touch with you through these next few weeks and months. Meanwhile, no popping off on any of the real issues. We've got enough trouble without asking for more.

On to Victory,

Theophilus

Second letter from Theophilus:

Dear O. P.:

I am inclined to agree with you that the role of Great Dragon Slayer is the more promising one just at this time and I think that we should get immediately about the business of creating the dragons from which your election will, presumably, deliver the church.

We shall need some help. I therefore suggest that we bring together as many brethren as we can find who are known to be disturbed by what the psychiatrists call “floating anxieties.” It will necessarily be a motley crew, but so much the better. We can present it as a cross-section of the church. What I have in mind is a kind of grand coalition of Billy Sunday-type fundamentalists, technicians who are frightened by the new ideas and developments in the sciences, quasi-Birchers who remain unreconciled to the graduated income tax, ambitious men who have not received the preferment to which they believe they are entitled, the newly affluent who have escaped the city but can not be sure that the city will not reach out and engulf them, the nostalgic who do not like to hear old truths stated in new words, the weary for whom the world is moving too fast — you know what I mean, all of the uneasy folks who have this feeling that something is wrong but can’t say exactly what it is.

The next step, then, would be to get a newspaper going. Here's where the dragons come into the act. The thing is to take each one of these floating anxieties and incarnate it. We will tell them what the official press has conspired to keep from them: that their trouble is not in their heads or hearts but in the real world, indeed right in the middle of the church itself. We will show them the dragons, and give them stiff doses of their smoke. We will give the dragons names, familiar names straight off the clergy roster and the faculty registers. We will enlist writers with impressive academic credentials to vouch for the fact that the dragons are real and that they have already devastated a large part of the church.

As a necessary corollary to this, we shall have to make it clear that the leadership of the church can not be counted on to cope with these dragons. Here we shall have to tread a bit gingerly. We don’t want to diminish the prestige or authority of these men’s offices, because, after all, we hope to hold them one of these days. But, of course, the men themselves have to be gotten out of the way before we can get in. So it seems to me that the best strategy is not to portray these men as ignorant or irresponsible, but simply as weak and ineffectual. “Real Christians and fine gentlemen” we will admit, “But not Dragon-Slayers.” You think this cannot be done? I know of men in the clergy who thought that John W. Behnken was weak and vacillating. You can make a man whatever you want him to be if you have a lively gift for caricature.

I can almost hear you say, “Look, I can’t do this. It’s indecent.” I know. It bothers me, too. But remember, you can’t make an omelet without breaking a few eggs, which is just another way of saying that the Cause comes first, even if it necessitates destroying a few men whom, of course, no one of us would choose to destroy if we could help it. So let me know whether you are willing to go all the way, even at the expense of getting your hands pretty dirty, or whether you want out. After all, it’s your decision to make. I’m just your campaign manager.

Through to Victory,

Theophilus

So — the campaign is on. Our big problem, of course, is the ALC. This is really a bad outfit — the direct descendents of the Scribes and Pharisees with a few Gnostics thrown in. I know of one of their district presidents who told one of his brethren to go to the devil — and the brother stayed right where he was. He felt that he could consort with the devil most closely by staying in the ALC. Examples like this could be multiplied. We shall joyfully bring them to the attention of our readers.

SAME TOPIC — ONLY MORE SERIOUSLY: Several quiet mornings this past summer I devoted to the reports from district conventions of the ALC and the LCMS — most of it via the Lutheran Witness
and the Reporter. It was heartening to discover that the brethren really like to talk about fellowship. Somewhat of this discussion was enlightening; much was horribly depressing. For example, which one of us trained the layman who said on the floor of a certain convention: “The Missouri Synod will lose its quality by watering down the good with the bad.” The bad meant, of course, the two million Lutheran Christians of the American Lutheran Church. Just as I was reading this remarkable statement, I heard a noise behind me. I turned my chair around — it was a first-century Pharisee applauding like mad. Perhaps the most significant comment at this Pentecostal gathering came from a teenager: “I think that we ought to pray for the Holy Spirit to guide leaders and members of both Church bodies that they may see that our goal is not an institutional organization but to bring more people to the Lord Jesus Christ.” Again I heard a noise behind me. Again I turned around and there were two men applauding now — neither of them weaklings or unionists — St. Paul and Martin Luther.

The greatest part of this particular issue of the Lutheran Witness — Reporter was the news of a meeting at Cole Camp, Missouri, on June 16 of five hundred kings and priests of the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church. This was my first report of this kind of meeting, and I rejoiced with exceeding great joy. Just imagine — these deep weighty theological questions were being discussed by teenagers, members of the Ladies Aid, and farmers who can smell a city slicker a mile away. Perhaps the most significant comment at this Pentecostal gathering came from a teenager: “I think that we ought to pray for the Holy Spirit to guide leaders and members of both Church bodies that they may see that our goal is not an institutional organization but to bring more people to the Lord Jesus Christ.” Again I heard a noise behind me. Again I turned around and there were two men applauding now — neither of them weaklings or unionists — St. Paul and Martin Luther.

All this may be my febrile imagination, but I decided then and there that I, too, will organize a meeting before Denver — a consultation, conference, seminar, colloquium. I will invite my mother, now aged eighty-six, and close enough to heaven to wonder what all the shooting is about, the brother in Christ who cleans my office, and the widowed mother of Theophilus. Give his mother and my mother two brooms and they will clean the Lord’s house with eschatological fervor. Between us we will hammer out a statement on this matter which will be close, in spirit and in meaning, to John 3:16.

Unless you dump all your second and third class mail into the circular file beside your desk you must be aware of the fact that strange and mysterious things are going on in the corner of the Church Militant, called the Missouri Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod. It seems that a difference of opinion has developed concerning the question: “Shall we have or not have fellowship with a group of fellow Christians called The American Lutheran Church? Shall we or shall we not present a united Lutheran front to the black man in Biafra, the white heathen in Europe and the brown man in India?”

A few moments ago I finished another ponderous essay in which our situation was compared to another Armageddon just preceding the final one. It was frightening. An American Lutheran Church brother down the street is the open door to universalism, false doctrine, and all manner of sin and vice.

I turned my chair toward the window. A hundred yards up the hill giant roaring bulldozers were gouging out the earth where a new building will rise. It will be called “Christ College” and will train bright children of our time to bring their high gifts to the King.

Between me and the bulldozers there was a sparrow sitting on a bush watching the proceedings on the hill with a thoughtful eye. Perhaps he was beginning to realize that come winter his foraging ground would be severely reduced. Perhaps he thought, too, it would not matter very much. His time would be short. His destiny would not be bound to a single hill now torn by monsters not of his making.

I must have fallen asleep; at any rate, I dreamed I was an ecclesiastical sparrow at the end of the final road. Before me was the great Throne where even The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod must face the final judgment. I had become an ecclesiastical sparrow who now had to evaluate the situation in final eschatological terms. After all, this is what ultimately counts; only this is worthy of standing before the Throne.

I had flown there on wings that were not my own. The Throne was too far and high to fly up there by yourself. The only reason I was there was that something had happened on another hill far away and long ago.

The conversation I dreamed was painful:

The Lord: You were a member of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod?
I: Yes.

The Lord: Just a little review. What were you doing in 1969?
I: Oh, I remember that year. It was really a big one. We stood up for the truth. We refused to join hands with The American Lutheran Church, an outfit, as you know, which is a group riddled with false doctrine, strange practices.

The Lord: And that was all you did in 1969? Just in the year where I opened up the secrets of My universe? When the earth was only noise and pain and sorrow and forgetfulness of Me? When man was face to face with the population explosion, the knowledge explosion and the worldwide quaking revolution of rising expectations? When the world was turning black and yellow and brown? That was the time and the hour when you decided not to stand together against the surging tide of life without Me?

I: (Somewhat scared) Are there any members of the ALC here? Some of us figured they would never make it.

The Lord: Yes, they are all over the place.
I: Are they as near the throne as us Missourians? Surely we must be rewarded for what we did in 1969.

The Lord: Sure, they are as close as many Missourians. You were always a peculiar people—self-righteous, thinking organizationally, confusing weakness in a brother with arrogant evil. I had to widen the gates for some of you. By the way, how many souls did you gain in 1969?
I: Oh, we did pretty well. We gained .62% .62% of a soul is really good going in these days of a declining birthrate. We did not want to fight your providential wisdom. Can I go in now?
The Lord: You may as well. This place is for sinners, and even your error of 1969 can be forgiven. But none of your separatism up here!

My chair tilted forward and I woke up. Where the sparrow had been sitting there was now a burning bush. If there was anybody in it I could not see Him.

FOOTNOTE TO HISTORY:

I have at least one claim to a shadowy immortality — I was among those hapless souls who lived through the Spring of 1968 — assassination, riots, murder in the streets, rattling nuclear bombs all over the world, and so on. "Change and decay in all around I see" became the understatement of the year. This was clearly more than change and quiet decay. This was something apocalyptic, even eschatological.

After the first hysterical babbling following the Robert F. Kennedy assassination had subsided, calmer voices began to be heard. (By the way, have you ever preached about the fact that modern man becomes hysterical more quickly and easily than all his forbears? He has so little to fall back on — no faith, very little hope — a dead God, and however slight, leaves him hanging from a broken limb. No wonder his hysterical concern for whimpering death — for his society — his dreams— and his society is sick. Our world is sick. All news media and editorials agreed on that.

Our good people understand immediately that this does not help much. If a doctor comes to me and merely says: "You are sick" he does not help me. I knew I was sick. I could feel the pain. What I want to know: "Why am I sick? What made me sick? What is the nature of my sickness? How can I stop being sick?"

The answers to these questions in 1968 were either silent or some vague replies which were more sociological and psychological than — and here is the point — theological.

And then there came, slowly and hesitatingly at first, the little word "sin." It was still wrapped in all manner of psychological and philosophical bandages, but it was very clear. So, for example, a paragraph in Time magazine: "The seat of the evil in this world is not in the social and political institutions, and not even as a rule in the ill will or iniquities of statesmen, but simply in the weakness and imperfection of the human soul itself, and by that I mean literally every soul, including my own and that of the militant at the gates."

NOTES ON A FRAYED CUFF

Among the "independent" journals which I read regularly I am particularly happy about the Milwaukee Lutheran, edited by Ed Beyersdorf who has a way of picking up all sorts of strange things. In a recent issue is the following:

"Dr. Richard Jungkuntz, executive secretary of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod's Commission on Theology and Church Relations says 'Christian unity is a happening.' It is given by God to all believers, he said. But it's not a static, lifeless gift. It exists only dynamically, only in the actual process of being given and being received. The only holy Christian church, Dr. Jungkuntz said, is people — the whole number of believers in Jesus Christ. They can do more than pray and talk about Christian unity. In many important ways, they don't have to wait for church resolutions. They can live now in real relations with fellow Christians whose lives intersect theirs. The New Testament, he pointed out, provides ample guidance: 'Love, honor, welcome, restore, encourage, build-up, help, admonish, be patient, contribute . . . Practice hospitality . . . Bear one another's burdens . . . Don't be haughty . . . Don't pass judgment . . . Avoid stupid controversies, genealogies, discussions, and quarrels over law . . . ' Dr. Jungkuntz is a 1942 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, with a Ph.D. from Wisconsin University, and a former Concordia of Springfield professor."

"Walter Buescher, a member of Elm Grove Lutheran (Mo.) is a well-traveled (and well-storied) representative of Allis Chalmers who is never at a loss for a timely quip. At a recent voters' meeting in Elm Grove, the discussion was waxing long and warm concerning a package of proposed capital additions to the church when Walt rose to add his comments. He completed his statement with this story, which he attributed to a Pittsburgh congregation: It seems a rather elegant and pompous gentleman was trying to convince the voters to invest in a new, expensive pipe organ. He concluded his emotional appeal with the grandiloquent statement that he, personally, would match the first gift made to the organ fund. With that, a little old lady in the back of the room raised her hand and shyly smiled, 'Mister, you and me just bought an organ.'"

THE OPEN LETTER GIMMICK: From now until Denver — and from Denver to Judgment Day — we shall be subjected to what is called "Open Letters." Their method is very simple. Somebody is mad at somebody. They write him an "Open Letter" — with copies to a lot of people. You don't expect the addressee to answer; in fact the letter is often printed before the addressee has had time to answer. The screed is really "open" but it is not a "letter" in the same sense of the word.

I have received several "open letters" in my journey through this vale of tears, usually from disgruntled students who don't like the meals, the professors, the rules, the counselors, the deans, and above all — me. What I have liked about these is the youthful honesty with which they used the technique. I never received the letters. They went directly to a student publication — thus saving five cents in postage and enabling the editor to write another editorial on "The Decline and Fall of Valparaiso University."

What makes me slightly nauseated with this method is that it has occasionally been used by theologians — men who are the brethren of the hapless addressee and men whose Scriptural studies have not included John.

After many years of study I have finally arrived at a measure for evaluating the honesty and integrity of these "Open Letters." It, too, is very simple: To whom were the first copies of this "Letter" sent? To
the enemies of the "accused" or to his friends? If, as in almost all cases, it was sent first to his enemies, the issue becomes clear — it is an indirect, low and particularly mean way of "smearing" the brother.

A statistical study of the speed of the Missouri Synod grapevine shows that an accusation travels about two hundred miles a week; any answer that gets on the road at all travels only one-third as fast and never catches up.

So — that could be a small addition to the way you read these "Open Letters," who got it first — the addressee or a publication dedicated to the printing of "Open Letters?" As for me, I put my copy (printed) in the file "Ecclesiastical Sins" and return to my reading of the New Testament.

MINOR ANNIVERSARY: Forty-eight years ago, come Christmas, I, a callow youth from the ghettos of New York, went to Perry County, Missouri, to spend Christmas with Grandpa Hueschen, pastor of a parish twenty miles in each direction from the white church on the hill where he had served for forty years. Grandpa had not really invited me, but Perry County was nearer the Seminary than New York by 1100 miles and my total cash was what was left over from Dad's salary of One Hundred and Twenty-five Dollars a month (plus heat, light, one dollar for baptisms, two dollars for weddings, and for funerals whatever the survivors would shell out, hand-me-down clothes for a burgeoning number of kids, and an occasional nickel or dime from a penitent Vorsteher.) I had to go to Perry County or celebrate Christmas on South Jefferson Avenue in St. Louis. I always knew that the singing angels would never get that far.

So — there I was — a hick from New York and my first glimpse of what we call a "rural congregation". I shall never forget it — the short dark days of a Missouri winter — Grandpa putting on his boots to visit Deacon Schweinestall (who only had a cold but was trying to cure it with Missouri corn liquor which in turn was hard on his ulcers) — Grandpa at the desk near the stove writing his sermon for Christmas Eve — the annual meeting of the congregation on New Year's afternoon (a preview of Armageddon) — the slow cadence of life and death — "Grossmutter Himmelhoch kann nicht mehr lange leben — hoffentlich gibt's nicht Schnee."

From those days I have retained my respect and affection for the brother who has what we call a "rural congregation." The difference is not nearly so great now and there are cars and paved roads and — God help us — radio and television. Even today, however, I envy the brother whose white church is on a hill, whose parking lot is loose gravel, and whose Christmas Eve services are guarded by a white star whose course is no longer wandering over the grey hills of Bethlehem.

What interests me today, after all these years, so long ago and far away, was that Grandpa seemed to be uniquely aware of this nearness to ultimate things and final realities. When he came out of the sacristy on Christmas Eve (in a worn black robe and spotless Bäfchen) he would cast a special kindly look at the deacons who sat solemnly beside buckets of water militantly ready to douse the first candle that showed signs of collapsing or expiring. These — from the starry eyed kids to the Kirchendiener who was pumping the organ — were his people, his mysterious souls clothed in glory and honor, come to bend a willing knee to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords who had known the smell of the stable and the lowing of oxen calling for warmth from the cold of the night.

Perhaps I shall return there again — Grandpa at baptisms holding his new lambs with a steady hand — Grandpa in confirmation classes trying hard to translate the German theologians into acceptable English — Grandpa being thoroughly Lutheran, in act and thought, from his beautiful ecumenicity (he went to see Mike, the Irish drunk in the village, regularly for almost a year) to his great compassion for all the strange ways the hearts of men go crying down. Just now, I confess, all these memories are brought to life by an article in the Lutheran Standard that congregations and pastors like Grandpa are not yet gone: "The ALC has a particular stake in these areas. One district, S.W. Minnesota, reported in 1966 that it had 176 churches in open country or in towns under 500. It had an additional 77 churches in towns of 500-2499 population, 33 in the 2500-10,000 bracket, and only 10 churches in cities of 10,000 and over. The urban Illinois District reported 70 congregations in open country or in towns under 500; 37 in towns 500-2499, 32 in towns 2500-10,000, and 111 in cities of 10,000 or more (53 of these in cities 100,000 or more population.)"

So — a deep affectionate bow and a warm Ave to the brother whose church is on a high hill among the fields of corn and wheat growing to the glory of God. A sympathetic salute to the brother in an urban setting — with two secretaries, a social worker, and a youth ministry — a brother who deserves our desperate prayers — a brother who has become an executive (an administrator like me). But let there be now an equally warm Ave to Grandpa Hueschen's successors whose quiet understanding work will be known — gloriously known — in the final harvest. They are — bless them — closer to the great Amen to the anguished riddle of life.

COMPLINE: Mr. Hieronymus Smith called the meeting of the voters of St. Chrysostom's to order. As the buzzing subsided, he looked into the corner where the pastor sat... This was not going to be easy... He cleared his throat: "This meeting was called on account of the special request of some members who have something special to bring up... I will give the floor to Mr. Barnabas Harmon" —

Somehow he was even more tired than usual this evening... The strong coffee Mother had given him just before he left the house seemed to have no effect... He closed his eyes for a moment... Thirty years now... The day when he had come to St. Chrysostom's... The crowds... The good wishes... The little wooden church over on Elm Street... A long time ago now... This parish house — he had paid for it with his blood... His heart had never been the same since that breakdown... The church next door... Something of him lay buried there... He had watched every stone go into it... Perhaps God had really been good to him... The dreams of his youth — some of them had come true... He had not failed his Lord... If he could only keep going a few more years... Some things still had to be done at St. Chrysostom's... Not old yet, but tired... Better listen to Barnabas...
"We all know, Mr. Chairman, that things haven't been going so well here at St. Chrysostom's.... Maybe it's nothing serious, but only last week the Bowling League busted up again on account of some members do not like the way the pastor always comes around and asks them to come to church.... Only a couple weeks ago one of the young men in the church—a fine, up-and-coming young fellow, Mr. Chairman—says to me that the young people are beginning to go over to St. Elijah's.... It seems they have big dances over there, and their preacher, a young fellow from Styx College, is right in there with them.... And so a couple of us got together, Mr. Chairman,"

If he could only keep his eyes open now.... He peered over at Barnabas.... The boy had really turned out better than he had expected.... He remembered him in confirmation instructions, a good boy, only a little slower than the rest and always too sure that he was right.... A little jealous, too, of others who had more than he.... But he had prospered.... Assistant Manager of the Feltman Shoe Company now.... A little too fat for his age, but his well-made suit fitted him snugly.... Perhaps he had better talk to Barney one of these days.... Something worldly and smug about him.... After all, Barney was one of his boys.... His eyes closed again.... What had Mother said before he left the house?.... O yes, "If you get sleepy, pinch your wrists."... He smiled.... That was Mother, always worrying....

"And so, Mr. Chairman, a couple of us got together at my house, nothing official of course, and sorta talked things over.... We all know what our pastor has done for our church.... I don't haveta go into that.... But, our pastor, it seems to us, is getting along in years St. Chrysostom's is a big parish, and we got some very important people here"—

Important people.... How his mind was wandering tonight.... That word "important".... There were some in St. Chrysostom's, and Barney wouldn't know that most of them lived down by the railroad tracks.... Saints, some of them, like Mrs. Morton with her drunken husband and six children and her eyes bright with unshed tears.... Saints, down there.... Perhaps he had been spending too much time there lately.... He liked to sit in the broken rocker and listen to Grandpa Jepson.... He was blind, but he saw more things than anybody else.... Mother had scolded him for it.... She was right, too.... Of course, he had tried to find an excuse.... Wasn't it true, he had asked Mother, that every evening there was a meeting, and if he went out in the afternoon to visit the members on the street where Barnabas had built his new house, he always ran into bridge or cocktail parties, and everybody was embarrassed?.... Yes, it was easier to go to see Grandpa Jepson — and he had taken the easier way.... That was bad.... Mother was right.... More visits on Grace Boulevard after this....

"And so, Mr. Chairman, we think the Church Board ought to see the Pension Board and ask them to put our pastor on the retired list.... We have always paid our percentage, and they ought to be glad to help us out.... What we need here is a young fellow with lotsa pep and salesmanship who can give a sermon with punch and arrange affairs with zip in them to draw the people in this here community.... Of course, we don't want to be in a hurry about this.... Let's take two or three months to look around.... But, Mr. Chairman, something's gotta be done"—

So that was it.... It had come now, and somehow it did not hurt as much as he thought it would.... After all, he was getting old.... Over sixty.... When you get old, things look different.... Barney wasn't important, not really.... His soul was, but somebody else would have to see to that now.... Perhaps Mother and he could live on the edge of town in one of the little bungalows the Government was renting so cheap.... Then he could still go down to see Grandpa Jepson and Mrs. Morton and the redheaded Johnson boy, who would make a good minister some day.... But Mother.... How would be ever be able to explain it to her?.... Mother was so practical.... She would tell him right away that all they had was the furniture and that thousand-dollar insurance policy.... Oh well, that would be hers—and the way he felt tonight — soon enough.... Too bad, though, to go this way.... He looked around the room.... Hardly a man there whose hand he hadn't touched at the altar on thirty-one confirmation days.... He had baptized their children, seen their hopes crushed and rise again, stood with them at death swept over them.... They looked a little uneasy now.... Waiting for him to say something.... He really should.... Tell them they were doing the right thing.... That he was getting old, that their way was no longer his.... He would get up and tell them that and then go home to Mother.... But that strange mist over his eyes.... Almost as if they were covered with angel wings.... That roaring in his ears.... New sounds, not of earth....

He slumped forward in his chair.... They caught him before he fell.... There was a smile on his lips.... Mother would have the insurance now, and perhaps God would let him sit near the door and wait for Grandpa Jepson....

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God willing, I hope to see you about Christmas.

O. P. Kretzmann