

2-1969

## February 1969

O.P. Kretzmann  
*Valparaiso University*

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# campus commentary



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February, 1969

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Dear Brother :

I am really worried about Theophilus these days. Something has gone wrong. When he wanders into my new office — with soft chairs, wall to wall carpeting, and three windows which the maintenance staff does not yet have on its cleaning list — he slumps into the nearest chair, forgets to take off his hat, and stares moodily out of the windows at the slum of the campus. His weariness extends even to my campaign to be president of Synod. Only yesterday he said: "Why don't you withdraw in favor of Paul VI? He would have a better chance."

His pessimism extends to everything. After years of peace he is feuding with an A.L.C. brother three blocks away who is building a new church with the help of some lodge members, "Who" Theophilus says bitterly, "he stole right from under my nose." Even ten years ago he would have welcomed some discussion with the brother, clothed in the open, congenial spirit of Lutheran charity. Today he just sits and sulks, or, worse, he goes to the Winkel-Konferenz and gripes about all synodical officials, the godlessness of the A.L.C., and his young people. Although his soul-saving average is good — 1.71 — almost three times as much as the national average of .62 — he has no sense of achievement. He is lonely, frustrated and bitter.

I would not be telling you all this if Theophilus were alone in this, a single isolated case. There are others, but I love this guy, and I hate to see his ministry end before the Lord Himself says: "Come over on the other side." There is something wrong here. Six months ago I decided to investigate.

Theophilus is now, or should be, in his best years. He was graduated from the Sem in the forties. After a quick succession of encouraging calls he landed in his present parish — fairly large, fairly average, fairly Christian. He has been fairly successful. The congregation has met its budget every year, twice by courageous borrowing. Theophilus is a fairly good preacher; at least his people say that they "enjoy" his sermons. And he can write.

But these are also the dangerous years. The power and fire which Theophilus had when he graduated have flickered and almost died. "You know," he said to me a few months ago, "when I left the Sem I had the adventurous glory of 'Go ye into all the World.' Now, after twenty years, I find myself sitting with Sauerbraten as he goes through his annual bout with the well-deserved gout. And you call that a valid, significant, successful ministry?"

I, who have reached the lean and barren harvest of my own years, sympathize with all my heart. I think I can understand his mood. There comes a time when the Sem is far away and the echo of the calm voices of half-remembered professors become the last dying murmur of an impossible dream. I discover that I was not born to be a Paul, an Augustine, a Luther — not even a Walther, Pieper or Fuerbringer. I was destined to be a name on a little plaque in a sidestreet church and my whole life (as Theophilus himself has said) a dash between two dates: 1920-1985 — and if the dash is a little longer it is still weariness and loneliness and the ashes of forgotten fires.

Yes, I can understand Theophilus and his fiery trial. For that is what it is — only not fiery. It is cold, chilling and deadly — much harder, I believe than Stephen's or Joan of Arc's. It is closer to "My God, Why?"

What can I say to Theophilus? I must not preach to him. I must not wax homiletical. I must not help him to escape by offering him more beer.

Nor can he be content with the shrugging, cynical answer of some of his contemporaries:

**In my youth I set my goal  
Farther than my eye could see  
I can see it clearer now  
I have moved it nearer me**

The telephone rings and a colleague tells me that a brother, of the same age as Theophilus, has committed suicide. That was his answer — defiant, defeated and fearfully wrong. I remember that Theophilus had occasionally admitted such thoughts.

So — what shall I say? I believe that Theophilus can pass through this high noon of heat and burning, glaring sun to an afternoon of reflection, stillness, and good hope. Perhaps I must become homiletical — but only in a very personal, intimate way. The bells must start chiming again.

I got just this far in my pondering when the door flew open and Theophilus appeared. As he headed for his usual chair, I managed to shove these notes under a pile of unanswered letters about the "Dangers of Denver." I decided to hold off my admonitions and exhortations. Very casually I said: "Theophilus, you look confused. Have those confirmation kids been asking you questions that you can't answer again?"

"Yeah, but I'm used to that, so it doesn't bother me too much. **What's bugging me right now is the way things are shaping up for Denver.**"

"Oh?" I said. "What do you mean?"

"Well," Theophilus said. "First of all, I think you ought to drop this nonsense about running for President of Synod. Politics is fun and ordinarily I would be glad to be in on the fun and games. But we are playing for bigger stakes than office this year. **Maybe I'm taking this whole thing too seriously, but I'm beginning to think that before we settle this question of fellowship with the ALC all of us are going to be forced to lay our understanding of our ministry on the line.**"

"That's a pretty sweeping statement," I said. "Tell me more."

"OK," Theophilus replied. "I know that I am a clergyman of the Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod. I have the documents to prove it. **But it takes more than documents to validate my calling as a minister of Jesus Christ.** I'm serious, O.P. There isn't an anti-organization bone in my body. I'm as Missourian as you can get and I see red when people sneer at the institutional church. **But when I pronounce the absolution or preach a sermon or administer the Sacraments, I do so as 'a called and ordained servant of the Word.'** I'm not up there in the chancel as the authorized representative of a church but as a minister of The Church."

"Nobody's going to argue with you about that," I said. "So what does all that have to do with this fellowship business?"

"Just this," Theophilus replied. "I know enough church history to recognize that there can be times when you simply have to tell another man, 'Look, you are not a shepherd but a wolf, and I am not about to throw my sheep to the wolves.' That, it seems to me, is the point at which I would **have** to refuse pulpit and altar fellowship with another man who claims to be a minister of Jesus Christ. That's not much of a problem. There's another point at which I have to say, 'Brother, you've got the Gospel kind of screwed up and mixed in with a lot of do-it-yourself religion and I can't in good conscience let you peddle this stuff to my people because I am under a vow to give them the Word, the whole Word, and nothing but the Word.' But I don't see how you can make a judgment like that just on the grounds that the man belongs to a different organization than you do. If being screwed up is grounds for denial of fellowship, there are a couple of guys in my circuit that I shouldn't be in fellowship with, and there is an ALC man down the street whom I ought to be glad to swap pulpits with."

"I don't think you would get a whole lot of argument about that, either, Theophilus," I said. "But without making too much of a thing about this business of decency and order, don't you think that as long as there are denominations within Christendom there ought to be some sort of internal discipline so that everybody doesn't go shooting off on his own? What I mean is, if there is any justification for maintaining our separate denominational identities, don't we have to be willing, in a general way, to go along with the judgments of our brethren within the denomination? After all, they take their responsibilities as servants of the Word pretty seriously too and their collective wisdom may be considerably greater than yours or mine. Or, at least, if you are going to work with any group of people you have to be willing to give up a little of your personal freedom if only so that you can enjoy the greater freedom that you get from cooperative action."

"Now wait a minute," Theophilus replied. "I'm no anarchist. I'd be the last man in Synod to deny the necessity of polity. **But when the denomination to which I belong publicly admits that sufficient grounds exist for pulpit and altar fellowship with another denomination; when my own experience convinces me that to deny it is to sanction division where unity actually exists; when questions of pastoral strategy in matters like, say, the lodge question are raised to the level of toleration of idols; when I am required to withhold fellowship with my fellow pastors of another Lutheran denomination because some of their brethren are pushing an understanding of the Word which is no different from what some of my brethren are pushing, I can't help wondering whether my involvement in the whole thing is that of a minister of Jesus Christ or a member of some sectarian establishment. Who says I can't practice pulpit and altar fellowship with an orthodox brother of the ALC—my Lord or the biennial convention of a church body?"**

"Well," I said, "so far your church body has certainly said it and I guess you are going to have to make up your own mind on whether our Lord has said it. As you know, I come out where you do on the practical question; **I think it is a scandal that we do not shout Hallelujah over the unity which, I believe, already exists between us and the ALC.** But maybe because I am older than you are I am more inclined to be a little more patient with our brothers in Missouri who still have their doubts about the reality of that unity. Remember that a lot of them have never actually met an ALC pastor and remember, too, that a lot of scare propaganda has been circulating around the Church. And meanwhile don't let this thing upset you with doubts about the validity of your own ministry. It seems to me that that is quite a separate issue."

"Is it?" Theophilus said. "I wish I could be sure that you are right."

And with that he left, looking even more troubled.

And yet I must say — **I was more happy about Theophilus than I had been.** Granted he is troubled, **but he is theologically troubled** — like the Ethiopian with whom Philip hitch-hiked many years ago. If out of such theological troubling there emerges at the Denver convention of the LC-MS a resolution and high resolve, troubled only by our warm desire to do the will of God, to reach out to our fellow Lutherans, and to demonstrate a godly love in a godless world, the troubling of Theophilus and the rest of us will have been greatly worthwhile. **There will be headlines after Denver, and I must try to read them as God surely will.** If our resolution takes away just a little of our separation and hate and loneliness, our suspicion of each other and our distrust of tomorrow — if there is just a tiny mending of the rents in His garments, we shall have done what God surely wants us to do in our small season.

**SET THE RECORD STRAIGHT SECTION:** Here is a letter which arrived a few days ago. You are entitled to guess who wrote it. I am interested in the establishment of the facts, which I can verify from my own contacts with the sainted Dr. Walter A. Maier. I can only add that the writer of the letter is a man who has been a loyal, brilliant servant of the Church for more than fifty years. He writes:

"No doubt you have observed, as I have, that efforts are being made in certain quarters to perform rather drastic plastic surgery on the image of our old friend WAM. They are trying to transform him into an ecclesiastical isolationist and assert that he, if he were still living today, would most certainly be opposed to fellowship with the American Lutheran Church.

"In my opinion, nothing could be farther from the truth. As you know, WAM and I sat through many meetings together over a period of years. Moreover, I often saw him in action in the pulpit and on the rostrum. My impression is that few men of his generation in our Synod were as intent upon fellowship with the A.L.C. as he was and that even fewer have the ecumenical sympathies and the ecumenical vision which were his.

"Having said this, my thoughts immediately turn back to the 1938 convention of our Synod in St. Louis. Under the leadership of an excellent committee on Lutheran Union, of which your father was a member, and the historic floor committee No. 16 on Doctrinal and Intersynodical Matters, our Synod at that convention adopted "the doctrinal basis for future church fellowship between the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church." WAM was on the floor committee and took an active part in shaping its report. More than that, when the opposition began to assert itself on the floor of the convention, he arose and delivered an eloquent and impassioned appeal, urging the convention to adopt the committee's recommendations. When he sat down, the babble was over. The recommendations were adopted.

"WAM was also of the opinion that our Synod should join the National Lutheran Council. In 1947, at our Centennial Convention in Chicago, this matter was on the agenda for an afternoon. During the noon hour, 10 or 12 of us held a little rump session for the purpose of deciding whether we should make an effort to persuade the convention to vote in the affirmative. WAM, who knew of our meeting, sent us word that if we wanted to go ahead, he would support us with a speech on the floor of the convention. After mature deliberation, we came to the conclusion that the time was ripe for aggressive action.

"WAM's ecumenical interests were also apparent in his Lutheran Hour sermons. On the one hand, he took a firm and uncompromising stand on the great fundamental truths of our Christian faith; but on the other, he was always very careful not to say anything that might offend good Christians in other denominations.

"Only a few years before his death, WAM preached at a highly successful Lutheran Hour Rally, from which hundreds of people were turned away because there was no room for them. After the Rally, I rode with him to his hotel. To my great surprise, I discovered that instead of being jubilant about his success, he was very much depressed. With tears in his eyes, he told me that he had just about made up his mind to withdraw from the Lutheran Hour. And why? Because he was being continually attacked on account of his views and activities, and these attacks had just about gotten him down to the point where he was ready to quit.

"What do you think, O.P.? Would WAM really be opposed to fellowship between our Synod and the American Lutheran Church if he were still with us today?

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You may remember vaguely that in a reference to President Harms' continual "cool" under strange and massive attacks, I said that he had not accepted a call to the deaf-mute missions. Several brethren promptly wrote — pen in hand and tongue in cheek — that this was an implication that our ministry to the deaf-mute was an easy ministry. Nothing could be farther from the truth. I have known many of the brethren who have worked in this field for many years. Never has there been a more loyal and consecrated ministry. All I was trying to say was that a congregation of deaf-mutes would not take part in the noise, the alarms and excursions to which the president of Synod is subjected. **Deaf-mutes are innocent of the sins of the tongue — at least in its current form.**

I was reminded of all this when I received the brochure from the Board of Missions to the Deaf calling our attention to the fact that Oculi Sunday, March 9, had been designated by Synod's Board of Directors for the observance of the seventy-fifth anniversary of our mission work among the deaf. In his accompanying letter President Harms points out that we now have more than 5,000 deaf members and more than 10,000 attend the services we conduct for them. Our missions to the deaf have a remarkable record. Especially in this day the world of silence seems to speak more loudly than the world of sound.

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**LETTER FROM LUKE:** I have acquired a new correspondent. He wants to be known as Luke the Least — and so it will be. I should add that he is an older brother of Theophilus, and he is a layman with a mind, bless him, of his own. That means only that he has not sat through long, lonely Seminary days: he picked up his theology in strange byways — the office, stock market sessions, long days and nights in business conferences. Just be assured that he is authentic and very real. I have asked him to write a letter now and then because he is living proof that your preaching is not in vain. It brings strange fruit in strange places. L.L., as he will be known, writes as follows — looking back on 1968:

"Blood, sweat and tears; joys, despair and fears lie intermingled and spilled upon the soil of fate-in-the-making: They engraved a hesitant and irregular course towards a future unknown, yet irrevocably

constrained by our words, judgments, decisions and deeds. Had we the power which was granted to Joshua whereby we could have commanded the sun, 'Stand still!' how many times and occasions would we have invoked that command.

"But there was the sweet savor of Prayer. The Light of Faith — though beset by ebbing and storming cross-winds — was not snuffed out. And the Indwelling and Pervading Spirit of Him to Whom we belong — though we wrestled with Him and witnessed with sinking heart His withdrawal from our presumptuous vision — nevertheless did not forsake. Thus we weathered the deltas and have passed out into the open, if untried, seas.

**Lesson of 1968:** God reveals Himself in and through His whole creation. One, our little Schnauzer female puppy. She taught me the secret of "the forgiveness of sins." She had our love "from the start." And the homily that came with her exhorted us, "Remember, your puppy wants to please." This she confirmed to us — then she is tempted, like as we; many times beyond resistance. But she remembers something, too: That we loved her "from the start." And, remembering, she does not hide, or crouch in terror but comes, sometimes from afar, running and contrite at our feet. So we speak kindly sounds of encouragement, even praise, because she returned . . . we remembering, she wants to please, to obey. Thus, if in word and deed, I sincerely want to please God; when I stray, forget, disobey, I remember and run to Him, I am assured of His Pardon; then His welcome and His joy at my contrition awaits me — because He "loved me from the start." Doctrinaires and theologians may shake their heads and wring their hands over this. I don't care. It does it for me.

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**Have you noticed** that our local Lutheran newspapers (Chicago, St. Louis, Detroit, Kansas City, Wisconsin) are beginning to produce some columnists who think hard and write well? One of the best is Bill Eggers in the Badger Lutheran. He has a sure touch and a Lutheran confidence which is refreshing in our depressing days. Recently he writes — and I think this is the final answer to some of our worries: "No one can deny that historical theology, as Dr. Sasse uses the term, is an intellectual reality on the American scene. No one who believes the great biblical truths can be in the least faint hearted about the certainty of working out a full and biblical response to this new reality. Nor can anyone deny that Lutherans need today in their seminaries men who have mastered the historical approach and brought it into subjection to God's Scriptures." I like that.

In the same issue of the Badger Lutheran there is a paragraph which reports on a custom which our neighbors and we have followed for a number of years. It is a very fine and inspiring closing of the season of Christmas: "While flames towered and crackled from the dry boughs in a bonfire of discarded Christmas trees, about sixty members of the Lutheran Church of the Prince of Peace in Menominee Falls stood around the glow to sing carols for a final time this season and to observe Twelfth Night, the Feast of the Epiphany." This is an excellent idea. It is much better than having the Christmas season close with the cleaning lady tearing down the trees and muttering about the needles on the floor.

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**Three astringent TV and radio vignettes from the Christmas season of 1969:**

**First:** A Christmas party for children in California. An announcer with a microphone walks through the crowd asking each youngster: "What do you like best about Christmas?" The usual answers came — gifts, toys, tree, giving something to Mommie. Finally he arrived at a seven year old: "And what do you like best about Christmas?" The answer was a brave credo and an equally brave indictment of our world: "I like best that our Savior Jesus Christ was born to save us — but we never talk about it in school. It is against the State law."

**Second:** A dark, rainy, melancholy day forty-eight hours after Christmas — I was idly listening to the usual traffic report from Chicago at 4:30 p.m. The comments of the cops in the helicopter were as gloomy as the day: rain, accidents, fog, traffic as slow as children going to bed. Suddenly one officer said to the other: "Give a look, Bill, there are three guys on camels on the Kennedy Expressway."

Officer No. 2: "Are these the guys who are holding things up?"

Officer No. 1: "Yeah. What'll we do?"

Officer No. 2: "What direction are they going?"

Officer No. 1: "They are heading south toward Chicago."

Officer No. 2: "Holy cow! Call a patrol car. They are going in the wrong direction."

**Third:** An astronaut reading a prayer for peace at a point about two hundred thousand miles from Bethlehem. No man had ever heard a prayer from so far from the manger. It seemed that the universe was beginning to speak, and — curiously, now with the accent of God.

Will some thoughtful brother please arrange these three vignettes in a single pattern? They might explain our age. Perhaps he could start his meditation with Isaiah 55, 8-9.

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**SALUTE TO THE CAKE COMMITTEE:** Quite often these days I am sitting at my lonely desk staring out the window at the gathering snow, thinking profound thoughts about God, education, the twentieth century, and what we will have for lunch, — when the phone rings insistently. More often than not a kind voice at the other end says: "This is Cathy Jones of the Guild Cake Committee. Is Mrs. K. there?" I reroute the call to the kitchen and return to my heavy thinking.

But not quite — I cannot remove “the Guild Cake Committee” from my mind. This refers to members of the University Guild — a remarkable grouping of remarkable saints — whose project it is to bring a cake to a student on his birthday. All the parents have to do is send in a notice that their son John has a birthday on March 15; “the Cake Committee” bakes a cake and delivers it to John on the appointed day. Small stuff? — When you lay it down beside Pentecost, the Revelation of St. John, and Luther at Worms?

Once I thought so, but I am no longer sure. There is something here which our world has forgotten — a faint echo of the cup of cold water and the wedding at Canaan. Further, while students and faculty and I deride the idea that the University stands “in loco parentis”, the “Cake Committee” finally proves that they do stand “in loco parentis.” There is the cake — it has nothing to do with curriculum, student power, or faculty salaries. It is just a cake (usually chocolate, at least for the boys), brought by a professor’s wife who persuaded her husband to walk to the campus this morning so that she could have the car to deliver a cake for a kid far from home.

What has all this to do with Christian education? Perhaps not much; but as I return to my profound thoughts I remember that in all the sermons I have heard on Mary and Martha, Martha never got a fair shake. Bless her heart! She would have been on the “Cake Committee.”

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A few words for still Lenten evenings:

### LITANY FOR GOOD FRIDAY

Lord, have mercy.  
Christ, have mercy.  
Lord, have mercy.  
Christ, hear us.  
Christ, graciously hear us.  
God the Father in heaven,  
Have mercy on us.  
God the Son, Redeemer of the world,  
Have mercy on us.  
God the Holy Ghost,  
Have mercy on us.  
Holy Trinity, one God,  
Have mercy on us.

By Thy Suffering and Death —  
By the hurt of Judas’ treachery  
By the pain of Peter’s denial  
By the sweat of blood  
By the agony of soul  
By the robe of purple and the crown of thorn  
By the bite of the whip and the lash of the scourge  
By the Way of the Cross  
By the nails and thirst  
By the blood that stained the Holy Rood  
By the travail of Thy soul  
By the riven vine and the trodden winepress  
By Thy triumph in death  
O dying Redeemer, hear us.

From the hardness of heart and darkness of soul —  
From coldness of mind  
From trampling Thy blood on the way of sin  
From driving the nails again  
From crucifying Thee anew  
From forgetfulness of Thy great sorrow  
From the loneliness of life without Thee  
From greed and ambition  
From lust of the eye and the pride of life  
From the burden of remembered sin  
From the cunning of men  
From the confusion of ignorance  
From hate  
From a jealous heart  
From the last sin of unbelief  
O living Redeemer, deliver us.

For the heart of man today, afraid —  
For the sick of body to ease their pain  
For the sick of mind to lighten their gloom  
For the sick of soul to bring them forgiveness  
For them who weep alone  
For Thy Life in every broken heart  
For the soul that knows not Thee  
For all who make known Thy way upon earth  
For all who love Thy Holy Name  
For all Thy Church in all the world —

Thou King of Principalities and Powers, of Thrones and Dominions  
Thou Lord of Cherubim and Seraphim, of angels and archangels  
Thou Prince of Peace and Glory, of Kingdoms and Empires  
O dying and living Redeemer, hear us.

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**KYRIE ELEISON:** A few lines for your Holy Week meditation. They are taken from a commentary on the "Mass in B Minor" written long ago:

Only the opening lines of the "Crucifixus" exceed in majesty the first four bars of the Kyrie Eleison in the **Mass in B minor**. . . . Massive and solemn. . . . The reluctant, spirit-driven march of the soul to the dwelling place of eternal grace and mercy! This is the way our faith must be approached. . . . Not easily and lightly, but with the deep consciousness that here is the Holy of Holies in life. . . . And the march must begin with the "Kyrie Eleison". . . . Always and forever! . . . There is no other way for man to approach God except through "Lord, have mercy". . . . I remember an old legend that this section of the Ordinary of the Mass was brought to the Western Liturgy by Etheria, a young woman of Galicia, who visited the Holy Land at the end of the fourth century and heard the "Kyrie Eleison" sung at Jerusalem in the Church of the Resurrection by little children whose voices were "innumerable". . . . This was at the evening Office, when countless candles shed a bright light over the Holy Sepulcher. . . . When she returned, she introduced it to her home in the West. . . . The legend may not be true, but there is a singular validity in the thought that the "Kyrie Eleison" may have originated in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. . . .

Back to Bach. . . . I have often noted that the "Christe Eleison" is more joyful in spirit than the opening movement. . . . How mysteriously right that man in Leipzig could be. . . . We ask for the mercy of God in Christ. . . . He is our Priest, our Mediator, our only reason for mercy. . . .

### GLORIA

With the angelic song over the fields in Bethlehem, music came into its birthright. . . . For the first time it was able to pour out its melody in the consciousness of a full and accomplished redemption. . . . No wonder that the "Gloria" is an essential part of the liturgy of the Church. . . . I played the eight movements of the "Gloria" of the **Mass** several times this afternoon. . . . Up and down the ladder of gratitude they climb. . . . And then suddenly we hear the poignant realization of unworthiness in the "Qui Tollis". . . . Somehow I like this passage better than the "Crucifixus". . . . There is a tenderness about it, a warmth of love, both human and divine. . . . A touch of our Lord's tender "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do". . . . A few moments ago I noticed again the recurring undertones of the sadness of sin throughout the "Gloria". This is our first and hardest fact — God exiled from the soul of men. . . . Fearful as they are, the physical and visible catastrophes that befall men are only the outward symbols of the invisible and infinite tragedy enacted in the depths of man's soul. . . . Alone he cannot join in the music of the "Gloria" which God gave him at Bethlehem. . . . In fact, he cannot even enjoy life. . . . In a world in which God is an exile, man must be a stranger. . . . He can understand himself and his highest glory only in and through God. . . . Life becomes his possession only when he has surrendered it to Him who bought it on Calvary. . . . That is why the "Qui Tollis" is at the heart of the "Gloria". . . . Finally the only source of glory is in the Cross. . . . The glory of His love and our Redemption. . . .

From the Cross, Bach moves upward on a note of conquest. . . . The sound of lost trumpets for the world and for the souls of men. . . . The rising and swelling choir of glory, the great company of all the sentinels of praise before the Cross, the psalmists and the prophets, the heralds of heaven, the evangelists and the saints — all the poor in spirit, all the meek and lowly of heart, all whose knees have been hurt by the hard dust of Calvary, all the antiphonal choirs on earth, singing the responses for the choir unheard and unseen these 1900 years. . . . They sing the "Gloria". . . . The glory of a world into which He came, the glory of a history which reached its summit when He came, the glory of a life which reflected, once and forever, our future glory. . . .

Have a happy Holy Week and a challenging Easter.

O. P. Kretzmann