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campus commentary

Volume 10

MAY, 1961

No. 2

Dear Brother:

You were probably busy at 9:00 a.m. on Easter Sunday morning when the television set brought a beautiful choir concert from the Roman Catholic Cathedral of the Holy Cross at Boston, Massachusetts. The high point of the program undoubtedly was the Bach setting of "Christ lag in Todesbanden." It was sung with precision, spirit, understanding and profound reverence. Suddenly I remembered that about ten years ago I had written somewhere: "Confronted by Bach the twentieth century man must be bewildered. The gap between the *Rhapsody in Blue* and the *Mass in B Minor* is too great. But even more tragic is the amazement of the modern mind when it is confronted by Bach, the man of faith.

What shall the new pagan do with a man who so magnificently fused high art and high religion? Or how can many modern Christians accustomed to shoddiness, emotionalism and subjectivity in their religious life understand a man who humbly accepts the great objective truths of Christianity and pours them into music which makes them live and breathe and march into the souls of men? That sort of thing is beyond us. We cannot love the music of Bach because often we do not share the faith of Bach. In the truest sense of the word his approach was sacramental. He used the mechanics of music — the arduous task of composition, the limited but honest resources of the 18th century organ, the oboe and the harpsichord — as means to an end. Under his heart and hands, they became vehicles of a faith that used them to their highest potentiality. They now spoke of God, of life, of death, of faith, of hope, of atonement and forgiveness in terms so sure and magnificent that our anxious and questioning age hears only faint and far trumpets from a forgotten country."

Now, strangely enough, some years later I was listening to a Roman Catholic choir in a Roman Catholic cathedral singing Bach with sensitive understanding. Their interpretation was much better than their handling of the "Hallelujah Chorus" and some Gregorian chant. Was I wrong ten years ago when I said that only those who share Bach's faith can sing his music? I gave the matter much thought as the Easter sun rose higher in the sky. I finally decided that all this was just another reflection of the universality of the Lutheran faith — and that my Easter singers in the Boston Cathedral were really separated Lutherans. For this I thanked God and went about my business.

Somewhere around here lies an important lesson. We rightly emphasize the distinctiveness, the separateness, and the uniqueness of the Lutheran faith. Too often, however, I suspect, we forget that there is an

other side of the coin — that the Lutheran approach to the Gospel has a profound universality which is shared far beyond the borders of the church as an organization. What happens, of course, is what Dr. Pieper used to call "Glückliche Inkonzsequenz" — which can best be translated as the "happy absence of logic." In other words, people do not easily transfer their heresies into the field of music. Apparently what man sings is more Christian than what he says.

A few days later Theophilus burst into the office in the middle of the spring's last snowstorm. Brushing the flakes off his 1952 overcoat he announced: "I feel lousy. I am tired from the work of Lent, and I have a Voters' meeting tonight. We are far behind in our budget; Sauerbraten is on the warpath. I am sure that he will make a motion to cut down our contributions to Synod — and just when I was hoping to be elected Visitor — pardon me, Counselor — at the district convention. I stopped in to see you in the hope that you might be even unhappier than I am. This would be a great encouragement to me. Tell me. How are things with you — bad, I hope?"

"Theophilus," I answered, "your friendship slays me. I regret to tell you that I am no unhappier than usual. I have budget problems, too. By the way, I checked our books the other day, and I find that you helped us last year to the extent of a measly \$100. How come?"

Theophilus: "I knew you would holler sooner or later. I hate to hide behind anybody — but it is really Sauerbraten again. He has no kids of his own, sees no reason why he should help other people's kids get a college education. What do you do with a guy like that? You see, the way I figure it, he won't have any grandchildren either."
I: "I don't know."

Theophilus: "Thanks for the help. Forget my troubles for a moment. I would be happy to hear about yours. Are you still cooking without gas?"

I: "I guess that's our trouble. You see, there are still too many people who do not realize that no college student in America pays the full cost of his education. You would really think that by now everybody would know that somebody has to dig down, somewhere, sometime, to help him get that degree. But we still get letters telling us that we must be in good financial shape with so many students on campus. Actually each additional student costs us about \$400."

Theophilus: "It seems to me you fellows ought to get wise and cut down your enrollment. Every student who doesn't come will save you four hundred bucks."

I: Do you pounce on every member of your congregation who does not carry his share of the total budget?"

Theophilus: "Say, maybe that's an idea. When I get home, I'm going to check on some of my boys, beginning with Sauerbraten."

I: We really have a problem. We have many congregations who have three or four students on campus and put us in their budget for \$100. Net loss: \$1500. What can we do?"

Theophilus: "Why don't you send them a bill? You know — one of those formal ones like from a doctor. For services rendered to your congregation' . . . Item \$1600."

I: "Very good. Remind me never to offer you a job in our public relations department."

At this point the conversation turned to Synodical matters and Theophilus looked even unhappier. Finally he sighed and went away.

CORRESPONDENCE SECTION: The response to the last collection of these random notes was most comforting. Even during the Christmas holidays a considerable number of the brethren took typewriter in hand to discuss various matters. Here, for example, comes a brother who did not expect to break into print. You may remember that I took a passing crack at high school counseling and apparently he felt that there was another side to the question. He writes: "These high school counselors are frequently doing a job which we pastors are not even attempting to do: Reaching and helping the adolescents who do not have a nice Christian home with all the blessings! My heart goes out and my hat comes off to many a high school counselor! Note for ourselves: Are we called only to make the blessed Gospel available and convenient to confirmed Lutherans?"

"I share your dim view regarding the misuse of the title 'pastor'. Much more could be added to this criticism. Why do we have to borrow from others? Why are we not students and scholars and researchers sufficiently qualified to do a bit of leading, initiating and pioneering? We ape expressions most adroitly from other disciplines . . . 'Get ready for an evangelism clinic' is the latest dish being offered here. That brings me back to the counselor. You want to know what I would call him? (At this point my good wife, looking over my shoulder, taps warningly.) I restrain myself. Before I tell you what I would call him, let me say that my experience with so-called counselors is limited to a half dozen in this area. Sadly they are part of our organizational set-up, and the rest of the officers often show the same pattern, too. Well, to get back to the visitors — turned — counselors. I would call them yes-organization-men. (Yes-men and organization-men in the same breath.) Perhaps that is not at all what they want to be, but it appears that is what they are supposed to be." All letters from synodical counselors will be forwarded to the brother. If you write them on asbestos, the mailing will be easier.

Here comes an academic brother. You may recall that I had commented that the religious ques-

tion in the last national election should be reduced to the basic question: "How far and how much do you trust the American hierarchy?" Comes now this brother and writes: "This question seems to assume the impotence of the President, the Congress, and the quadrennial elections. Should the hierarchy try to influence unduly the political process? Or, to put it another way, it assumes that the desires of the hierarchy are self-implementing. One may grant that the influence of American Catholicism on the American process is likely to be greater than say that of Bishop Homer Tomlinson of the Church of God. One may also grant the existence of political preferences among the hierarchy (as one does with reference to Baptists or Methodists who line up ten deep outside the City Hall to protest additional beer licenses; or with reference to Lutherans who maintain a staff in Washington though not officially registered as lobbyists). The basic question is: "What is the nature of the political process in the United States? Are there countervailing forces to frustrate the power of any one group? The answer happily is that there are such forces not the least of which is the attitude — and political competence — of John Kennedy." This ought to bring some postcards from Republicans. I understand that we have a few in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

Comes a note from a humble brother who says that he is a nonentity on the Synodical scene but not in the Kingdom of God. After reviewing his life and work in a very difficult part of our ecclesiastical frontiers, he adds: "One of my pet concerns is that with the coming of 'bigness' in Synod we are in danger of developing a 'spoon-fed' ministry through the multitude of 'prefabricated' programs as good as they often are . . ." This note is beginning to interest me since it appears in the mail more and more frequently. Apparently there is something here which deserves the careful attention of all of us who are interested in the future of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. The brethren are beginning to ask questions.

UNIVERSITY NOTE: By this time you have probably heard that the University has assumed at least partial control of the properties in the Pocono mountains known as Pocono Crest or Lutherland. One of the reasons for taking these properties over was the fact that we were the largest bondholder among all the owners. In addition, we felt that this resort could very well be used in the service of the Church. We are now in the process of trying to discover what the brethren in the East think about the proposition. We hope that there will be some way in which this beautiful place in the Pocono mountains may be preserved for service to the Church.

Meanwhile, we are presenting some summer programs which we hope will attract many Lutherans. On August 14-18, 1961, we are offering a series of lectures by Dr. Otto A. Piper, famous New Testament scholar of Princeton Theological Seminary, under the general title, "Human Life in Biblical Sight." Some of us who are older recall that Dr. Piper lectured before the general Visitors Conference some years ago and made a profound impression upon those who heard him.

Then there will also be a workshop for parish choir members and directors from August 21-25. This may attract your choirmaster or organist.

The third institute will be a "Get Ready for College" workshop intended for high school seniors and graduates who are going on to college. It will be a high-powered orientation course to get ready for the differences between the college and the high school. This institute runs from August 14-25.

If you or any members of your congregation should be interested in these institutes, please send us a postcard at the University. Further information will be sent to you immediately.

HERE AND THERE. I wonder how many of you are subscribers to the Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly. Through the years this publication has become increasingly lively until today it provides a great deal of sound information and entertainment in every issue. Recently, for example, there was an anonymous article entitled "A Missouri Synod Church in the Gay Nineties." Anyone of us who is above fifty will read these reminiscences with a great deal of nostalgia. Examples: "At the end of every stanza of the hymn the organist played a rather elaborate *Zwischenspiel*. There were books of these things, issued by Concordia. One of the teachers was able to play the most beautiful interludes without the use of the interlude book. We considered him a marvelous musician until somebody discovered that he was merely playing the hymn tune backward. It works perfectly: try it and you will be convinced."

"The congregation sang the hymns *forte* and a hundred or so grown people and forty school children really could be heard all over the neighborhood. Hymns were sung in unison, of course, and any attempt at singing the bass or tenor of a hymn brought looks of disapproval from all sides. This was considered a sectarian innovation, and moreover, since very few could have read the musical score even though it existed, the man who sang bass merely growled the soprano part two octaves below the women's and children's voices. Of the rare attempts at tenor we prefer not to speak. The voices of the women of those days had a reedy quality that one associates with old country folks. One never hears it nowadays except in Russian and Polish churches. But in the 1890's it was quite the rule in our circles." This is the kind of thing which forms a delightful addition to our Missouriiana.

You may recall that one of the features of the inauguration of John F. Kennedy as President of the United States were some prayers spoken by a Roman Catholic, a Protestant, a Greek Orthodox and a Jew. I regret to say that all of them were pretty bad although the Protestant and the Orthodox bishop were better than the others. The rabbi seized the chance to utter some sonorous Hebrew, and the cardinal from Boston sounded like an Irish train announcer telling God what to do. He probably did his church more harm in ten minutes than anything else that has happened for some time.

The entire business again raises the question of the propriety of these prayers. While one may doubt if there is a theological principle involved, there can be little question that there seems to be an almost

inevitable shadow of bad taste. The "prayers" usually turn the "prayer" into a strange little homily telling God what is going on, informing Him about what we are trying to do, and asking Him to be on our side.

At the inauguration I noticed that the politicians in the row just behind the "prayer" clasped their hands behind their backs and looked unnaturally pious. Only their shifting eyes betrayed the fact that they were embarrassed by this strange intrusion of the Divine into their plans. The whole business is so artificial that one should really question its value.

. . . Footnote: At the inauguration one of the strange things was that President Kennedy crossed himself at the end of the rabbi's prayer. It seemed to be a curious gesture, either the reflection of long habit, or possibly a conscious effort to Christianize what he had just heard. At any rate it was a strange situation — a hearer demonstrating a belief in a faith which had just been denied by the speaker. I wondered, too, how the Orthodox brother got into the act. Do they have enough votes to interest the Democratic party? The election was close but not that close.

. . . Somehow I have developed a deep affection for the brother who in the middle of a long discussion at a pastoral conference rose to say: "I did not come here to expose myself to persuasion. I come to see that my prejudices are enacted into law." Is there a brother like that in your Winkel Konferenz?

. . . A remarkable statement from a book review in The Christian Century: "If a sermon is to be thought of as a rhetorical masterpiece dramatically introduced and concluded, with each point clearly and cleverly stated, with a content made interesting by striking illustrations and apt literary quotations, and made easily understandable because it serves what the natural man already knows apart from Christ, and because it has a simple and immediately practical application to life, then these sermons hardly achieve the level of excellence. However, if a sermon is a word from God, based on honest listening to the Scriptures, whose content may seem strange because it speaks from eternity to time, whose full meaning it may take a good deal of living and suffering and believing fully to appreciate, and whose relevance to life lies precisely in the fact that it comes from beyond and above this life, glimmering with the strange life of the world of the resurrection of Jesus and throbbing with the certainties of 'the Kingdom that cannot be shaken', then these sermons are among the best."

. . . Somewhere I saw a story about the famous Canon Spooner, the Warden of New College. The Canon was asked to preach in the chapel of the college on the subject of Plato and St. Paul. Everything seemed to go well enough; the Canon delivered his sermon, left the pulpit and resumed his seat. Once there, however, he considered the matter carefully for a few moments, then rose and said thoughtfully to the congregation: "In my sermon whenever I said St. Paul I meant Plato and when I said Plato I meant St. Paul."

. . . How have your church banquets been lately? My impression is that the food is slowly improving but that there are still many to which the following

editorial in *Sports Illustrated* applies: "There is the pastel fruitcup apparently confected of shiny celluloid, a tepid, overboiled distillation masquerading as a soup, a mouse-colored sliver of cholesterol called beef, and sicklied o'er with viscid gravy composed of equal parts of paraffin and vaseline. Embellishing the main course are two or three balls of alleged potatoes encrusted in petrified brown grease and something green which tastes like soaked-blotting paper and may well be. Finally comes the frosty liquid which once was ice cream, the equally chilly liquid misnamed coffee, and a stale cigar, obviously woven of raffia."

. . . *Monthly crack at the educationists: "At Teachers College, Columbia, a doctoral dissertation is being prepared on the subject 'A Suggested Methodology to Formulate a Composite Ideal Image of the Professional Nurse.' Michigan State University announces a thesis on 'A Study of the Personality Differences Between a Group of Women Who Have Participated in Sewing Classes in An-Adult Education Program and a Group of Their Friends and Neighbors Who Had Not Participated in Any Adult Education Activities.'"*

RANDOM NOTES FOR ASCENSION DAY: Many of us, I am sure, deplore the fact that Ascension Day has practically dropped out of the Christian calendar. It should be observed again as it was many years ago. It can well be a starting point for a thorough discussion of the worship life of the Church. It all began on Ascension Day.

The life of the Church is alternating in character — there is the movement outward from God, the love of God streaming forth in redemptive power and grace, the work of the Paraclete. There is also the outward and upward movement of the individual child of God or the Church Militant to its Lord, the oblation of prayer, of praise and of thanksgiving. The home of man is in God, and worship is the return of man by the grace of God, however stumbling and falling, to his home. The character of worship is always oblation. By His grace we desire to give something of ourselves to God. Unhappily in our day worship is often corrupted because the worshiper asks "What have I gained?" rather than "What have I given?" This must be the purpose of all our worship — that our spirit, conditioned as it is by the changes and chances of this fleeting world, looks beyond the shadows to the unchanging and, finding peace, is stirred to offer itself evermore fully to the will of God.

There can be no doubt that the Church of the twentieth century stands in great need of a recovery of the quality of stillness, a contemplation of the wonder of her being, of quiet adoration, of time for the whole range of worship from the *De Profundis* to the *Gloria*. It is time for the Church to find again its rest and its peace in God and with God.

This whole matter is intimately bound up with Ascension Day. On that afternoon the world saw the beginning of the worship of faith which was to continue until the end of time. There were two reasons for the ascension of our Lord — one for this life and one for the life to come. The first is a great paradox — He went away in order to remain here with us. He could not remain locally and physically; so He

remained in a much higher and eternal sense. The Incarnation was by its very nature limited in time and space. But the experience of the ascended Christ is universal, eternal, perpetual and unlimited. There is no hour when He is not here. There is no place where He is not. There is nothing beyond His reach. There is nothing beyond the universal power of Him who went away from Galilee in order to remain with the world. At this moment He became the invisible Christ, and there was no longer any limitation to our communion with Him. Believers separated by the ends of the earth, by time, by language, by race, by color — all were and are with Him forever. With angels and archangels and all the glorious company of heaven they can now worship Him who by reason of His ascension is as near as the whisper of a friend in a quiet room.

He went away with the words on His lips: "I go to prepare a place for you." This was really done on the Cross, so that now through all the long centuries He is waiting for us who are a part of His worshiping Church — waiting as He has waited since that afternoon in Galilee. And so in our worship we tie time together into the eternal Now of Ascension Day. We worship the suffering Christ, the risen Christ, the conquering Christ of the past; but we worship also the waiting and mediating Christ of the present and the future, the Christ who now in the majestic stillness of eternity waits for history to accomplish His last purposes, sends the Comforter perpetually, hears our prayers and our praises and waits for us to reach the end of our journey and come home to His home in our own evening time.

And so with Ascension Day the life of the Church Militant and worshiping has become an interlude of preaching, petition and thanksgiving — an interlude whose great and triumphant diapason is the word "Meanwhile."

And that's about all for this time. In a few hours I am leaving for Europe. If I learn anything I shall let you know. Meanwhile, please accept my good wishes for a restful and peaceful summer.

Sincerely yours,

O.P. Kretzmann

OPK:drh

P.S. I almost forgot to mention the fact that we are conducting an effort for a new Law School building on our campus. The need for this addition to our facilities has undoubtedly been explained to you. We are the only Lutheran law school in the country, and with the full cooperation of our synodical leaders we are trying to set it up in such a way that we can be proud of it for many years to come. This effort will also loosen up our general classroom situation so that we may be able to accommodate more of our Lutheran students.

I would, therefore, earnestly bespeak your support of this effort when the announcements come to your desk. The sum required is not very great considering the size of Synod, but it will mean very, very much to the development of the University.

O. P. K.