



# The Pilgrim

*“All the trumpets sounded for him on the other side”*

—PILGRIM’S PROGRESS

O. P. Kretzmann

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*The Pastors’ Pastor*

February, 1967

A few words to preachers and all who know preachers. They have a tough row to hoe these apocalyptic days and we should stand by them.

The key man in our “hierarchical” structure ought to be the circuit counselor. And I would add that the chief function of the counselor should be that of a pastors’ pastor. The good counselor must, therefore, be constantly aware of the fact that the difficulties of a brother are all spiritual and theological. There are many reasons for this. Our theology of the Church is too vacillating. There is a constant swinging of the pendulum between emphasis on (a) the *Una Sancta Ecclesia*, (b) Christendom, and (c) our denomination. It is difficult to find any consistency even in Luther and the fathers of our own denomination on this particular question. Perhaps the best approach is the clear statement in Article VIII of the Augsburg Confession.

As a result of this lack of clarity in our theology of the Church, we have an unclear theology of the ministry. It is based on (a) a mixture of selected Scripture passages, particularly in the Pauline epistles; (b) the democratic idea (confined largely to America); and (c) an extension of the doctrine of the universal priesthood.

The divine mandate to the ministry is the Gospel — “*Doctrina, gratia, et justitia fidei.*” The call to the public service of the Church is based on the dominical command, “Go ye.” The pastor is not primarily a servant of the Church, much less of the congregation, but of the Word. His task and dignity come from the Word, to which and to Whom he must be obedient. This is basically the Lutheran understanding of the holy ministry. Every Sunday morning my brethren say: “I, as a called and ordained servant of the Word” — and not of anything else in the world.

We have no clear theology of obedience. We know that we are bound in obedience to the Word, but we are often at a loss as to how this obedience is to be worked out in the human situation. Luther says: “Four things

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which guarantee order in the Church — doctrine, discipline, sacraments, and useful ceremonies.” (Note the word “discipline.”) Calvin fully agrees, basing his approach on Ephesians 4:11-13.

Why all this emphasis on a theology of obedience? It is perfectly clear that our loss of this virtue in the holy ministry makes the counselor’s job exceedingly difficult. We have given undue attention to a dubious emphasis on freedom and some form of democracy. This we have absorbed by osmosis from the atmosphere which surrounds us. It is therefore necessary for us to find a solid theological undergirding for the problems and opportunities of the modern ministry if we are to cope with the two great problems of the modern world: loneliness — the sudden recognition of being children of the “diaspora” — and preaching the Word to a hostile culture.

Often the pastor is torn by existential tensions between the inherent value of human pursuits, on the one hand, and their apparent ultimate insignificance, on the other. I suspect that it is because of this tension that so many pastors today show an increased interest in eschatology. More than anyone else in time and space, the pastor is *in* the world, but not *of* it. The ultimate mark of dead orthodoxy is always “denying with our lives what we would not think of denying with our lips.” And this is our problem.

My observations of the ministry incline me to the view that the dangerous years are between the ages of thirty and forty-five. Somewhere during these years the cold, chilling realization dawns that we have not lived up to our early dreams at the seminary — and that we probably never will. We begin to know that we are not Jeremiahs come to judgment.

It is at this particular point that the counselor ought to enter the life of a brother with spiritual consolation and theological strength. He can do much to salvage the years that remain of his brother’s ministry on this earth and make them vital, challenging and happy.

So much of this he can do simply by reminding them of what they already know: that their fathers in God were Isaiah and Jeremiah, Peter and Paul, Irenaeus and Polycarp and Augustine and Luther. He can reassure them that their labors are indeed not in vain in the Lord because it is only for the sake of the Gospel which He has given them to proclaim that the world continue to stand. He can comfort them with the certainty that, despite all the anxieties and evil in the world, the flames on our altars will not gutter out, and the lights in the sanctuaries will not be quenched by flood

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or storm. With such a reminder, such a reassurance, and such comfort our sad and disappointed brother can live, and gladly work, in the reflected glory of the Master whose free and happy slave he is.

