

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

—PILGRIM’S PROGRESS

The Pilgrim

O. P. Kretzmann

OPK to jhs

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Many, many years ago some of us learned that the business of the Universe is done with memos... Even the telephone has not been able to eliminate entirely this ancient and modern way of communication between human souls... I am sure that when Rameses wanted to tell his Chief of Rivers and Sewers to keep a sharper eye on the bull-rushes along the Nile he had his secretary chisel out a memo... This was the beginning of all libraries — since the seventh day of creation we want things in writing... The telephone puts all our chips on the ear, obviously a most deceptive part of our communications with one another... Why is the blame for many of our post-modern troubles so often assigned to “a breakdown in communication” if it does not clearly point to the essential weakness of the telephone, the ar, and our sloppy enunciation?...

So — also in the lowly environs of the *Cresset* we have, for several decades, relied on the “Memo” for transmittal of orders, petitions, regrets and (rarely) ideas... In the immediate past these couriers of the mind were normally signed O.P.K. (O. P. Kretzmann) and jhs (John Henry Strietelmeier)... The latter’s insistence on using lower case letters was an ironic acknowledgement of his lowly estate... Even though he wrote almost all editorials, procured reasonably intelligent articles and ran the whole show, jhs’ innate modesty was evident in his “little” letters... There may have also been some dim reflection of the leadership of e. e. cummings and his tribe — though jhs was never one to follow anybody...

Now he has gone back to his beloved class room and I have retired to my rain-swept window... The long day of the flying memos has ended... and yet I could not bear its demise without a final word to and about jhs...

He was a good companion in the Way, sometimes ahead but usually alongside — never quite out of breath and never complaining... He often reminded me of Grossouw’s definition of a “friend”: “It is he, toward whom ‘in concrete’ I have a relation of friendship, not one whom I casually meet, but

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him with whom I can hold communication. My friend is the one whom I wish to encounter in the total concrete situation of my 'being-in-the world'."

jhs was and is a laymen of a kind comparatively new in the post-modern church... Intelligent, articulate (at times even reluctantly eloquent), widely read, he represents God on several frontiers, notably in literature and public affairs... I have been told that the day of the Renaissance man is done; the knowledge explosion has made him impossible... This may be true but I have seen in jhs a forerunner of a possible resurrection... What is needed is a reunion of all things in a charismatic obedience to God in Whom all divergent disciplines and ideas are met in a new oneness of life and thought...

jhs was — and is — always for the underdog... Born middle-class, middle-west, middle-Lutheran, he has always had a sympathetic eye, ear and heart for all those whom life has passed by, who lie, weary and heavy laden, at the feet of God and the door of the Church... Over the years, I must admit, I developed an interest in the upper-dog — but jhs always shied away from that... All administrators, boards, church officials, congressmen were quietly anathema... He didn't hate them; he just did not like them... The so-called "liberal" (in the best sense of that abused word) tone of the *Cresset* was often over my faint reluctant groan, but the light of the revealing years usually proved that he was right...

O.P.K. to jhs (final): Was it Goethe, Pascal or Shaw who said: "Life is a tragedy for those who feel and a comedy for those who think?"... Occasionally a human soul appears in whom this dichotomy is very evident, and you are one of them... This can be a very unhappy though fruitful condition, provided that you turn your partially destructive polarization into a creative tension... To a great extent you have been able to do this... And you must accept the fact that this warfare will be with and within you until the light of another world dawns... Meanwhile, you may have to go to gentle Cambridge again and again in order to find once more the creative tension to which you were born a second time, in the benediction of solitude...

Even then you may not like the way the angels sing and the heavens roll... But you will remember that God has hung within you heartstrings which must, always and finally, register His own melodies... He has not done this in the same degree for the rest of us... What more do you want?

