

8-1-1945

Keeping the Doctrine Pure

J. H. Fritz

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm>



Part of the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Fritz, J. H. (1945) "Keeping the Doctrine Pure," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 16 , Article 51.
Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol16/iss1/51>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Print Publications at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Concordia Theological Monthly by an authorized editor of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact seitzw@csl.edu.

wins the hearts of men unites those that have been won by the bond of a common faith and hope.

This inward unity will always manifest itself; not perfectly, to be sure, in this present evil world. Christians will never be united in one *visible* body; nor is this necessary. But the day will come when we shall be united with all the saints in perfect, unmarred, unbroken communion before our God, to hymn forever with our angel brothers the honor and wisdom, the power and mercy of Him who bought us to be His own and to live with Him in His heavenly kingdom. Oh, that we were there!

Milwaukee, Wis.

C. A. HARDT

Keeping the Doctrine Pure

I

In the year 1924 a book was published entitled *Great Preachers As Seen by a Journalist*. In closing the last chapter of the book the author said, "I believe that the creeds within Protestantism are more shell-like and fragile than appears on the surface. Some of these ministers I have written about in this book were born in one creed and preach now in another. Ask me at the end of my work what conclusion stands out in my mind, and I must say, 'I have found plenty of signs that the Protestant Churches of America will one day be one great Church. The uselessness and the pity of today's schisms and doctrinal conflicts will, of themselves, bring about a great consolidation, which our children, if not we ourselves, shall see.'"

Such an expression of doctrinal indifferentism is characteristic of our age; but not of our age only, it has always been so, differing in degree only. Doctrinal indifferentism came into the world with the fall of man. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him," 1 Cor. 2:14. This "foolishness" is still found in the old Adam of the Christian. As "no man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost," 1 Cor. 12:3, even so only the Holy Spirit can guide men into all truth, John 16:13. Those who let their own sinful reason guide them cannot come to a full knowledge of the truth.

As we scan the pages of Holy Scripture, we find that opposition to the revealed truth of God and apostasy have been the outstanding sin of man. In the Book of Deuteronomy we read, "And it came to pass, when Moses had made an end of writing the words of this Law in a book, until they were finished, that Moses commanded the Levites, which bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord, saying, Take this book of the Law, and put it in the side of

the ark of the covenant of the Lord, your God, that it may be there for a witness against thee. For I know thy rebellion and thy stiff neck; behold, while I am yet alive with you this day, ye have been rebellious against the Lord; and how much more after my death? Gather unto me all the elders of your tribes and your officers, that I may speak these words in their ears and call heaven and earth to record against them. For I know that after my death ye will utterly corrupt yourselves and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days; because ye will do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger through the work of your hands," Deut. 31:24-29. Turning to the Prophets, we find such words as these, "Behold, I am against the prophets, saith the Lord, that use their tongues and say, He saith. Behold, I am against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the Lord, and do tell them and cause My people to err by their lies and by their lightness; yet I sent them not nor commanded them; therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the Lord," Jer. 23:31, 32. In the New Testament, Paul speaks of those "which corrupt the Word of God," 2 Cor. 2:17; of "some that trouble you and would pervert the Gospel of Christ," Gal. 1:7; of such as "will not endure sound doctrine," 2 Tim. 4:3. There have always been many who were attracted by those who denied the truth; in fact, many delight in falsehood and even demand that the truth be not told them. In the Book of Isaiah we read, "This is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the Law of the Lord; which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits; get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us," Is. 30:9-11. Paul speaks of those "having itching ears," turning their ears away from the truth and turning them unto fables, and after their own lusts heaping unto themselves teachers, 2 Tim. 4:3, 4.

When we examine this indifferentism toward doctrinal purity, we find certain characteristic features. The indifferentist loves to parade in Christian livery, uses Biblical terms, puts on an air of piety. "Such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works," 2 Cor. 11:13-15. The indifferentist demands tolerance, but he himself is most intolerant; he demands tolerance for the teaching of his error, while he denies others the right to teach the truth. The Modernists insist that they must be given the opportunity to

send out their false teachings over the air waves, but they are altogether displeased when the orthodox and the conservatives desire to make use of the same opportunity for the proclamation of the truth. The sectarian churches do not hesitate to give expression to their laxity in doctrine and practice, but are offended when we Lutherans do not sanction that flexibility of doctrine so characteristic of the Reformed churches, but insist upon strict adherence to the Word of God. The Pharisees and scribes and elders among the Jews freely and openly taught their false doctrines, but Christ, who taught the divine truth, they crucified, and His Apostles and other Christian messengers they persecuted and even killed. "Am I therefore become your enemy," writes Paul to the Galatians, "because I tell you the truth?" Gal. 4:16. The indifferentist had adopted the slogan: "Not creeds, but deeds." He emphasizes life, not doctrine, forgetting that life that is right must have doctrine as its source. If a man does not know or believe the true doctrine of salvation, he cannot have that faith in the Savior which alone can produce good works. If a man has that faith, he can only do what is pleasing to the Lord to the extent that he knows what according to the will of God he should do. The Christian fails to know and apply the correct principles of Christian living to the extent to which he fails to know the divine truth or the divine doctrine which must give him the directive for a Christian life.

II

A Church which does not keep the doctrine pure is not faithful to the Lord. It is in the very nature of the case that if man is to know God, God must reveal Himself. "For what man knoweth the things of a man save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man but the Spirit of God," 1 Cor. 2:11. God has revealed Himself by means of His written Word. Again, it is in the very nature of the case that God, having revealed Himself to man, expects that man accept His revelation and abide by it. Therefore the Lord says that man should neither add to nor subtract from the revealed Word of God. To Joshua the Lord said, "Be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the Law, which Moses My servant commanded thee; turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. This Book of the Law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein; for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success," Josh. 1:7, 8. To Jeremiah the Lord said, "Stand in the court of the Lord's house, and speak unto all the cities of Judah, which come to

worship in the Lord's house, all the words that I command thee to speak unto them; diminish not a word," Jer. 26:2. Through Isaiah the Lord spoke these words, "To the Law and to the Testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them," Is. 8:20. In the Book of Proverbs we read, "Every word of God is pure; He is a Shield unto them that put their trust in Him. Add thou not unto His words, lest He reprove thee, and thou be found a liar," Prov. 30:5, 6. Concerning the entire Old Testament, Paul said, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness," 2 Tim. 3:16. The Savior Himself gave His endorsement to the Old Testament when He said, "The Scripture cannot be broken," John 10:35. Concerning His own words recorded in the New Testament, plus the Old Testament which He endorsed and plus the words of the Apostles whom He sent out as inspired teachers, the Savior said, "If ye continue in My word, then are ye My disciples indeed, and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free," John 8:31, 32. Paul was so sure of his divine inspiration that he boldly wrote to the Galatians, "Though we or an angel from heaven preach any other Gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other Gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. . . . But I certify you, brethren, that the Gospel which was preached of me is not after man, for I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ," Gal. 1:8, 9, 11, 12. Of his own preaching Peter said, "The Word of the Lord endureth forever. And this is the word which by the Gospel is preached unto you," 1 Pet. 1:25. Likewise John, "Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him Godspeed, for he that biddeth him Godspeed is partaker of his evil deeds," 2 John 9-11. Even when Paul speaks of such things which do not belong to God's plan of salvation, as, for instance, the place of woman in the church, he says that he is writing "the Commandments of the Lord," 1 Cor. 14:37.

The Scriptures being the revealed Word of God, God desires that the Church abide by it, adding nothing, and subtracting nothing. Against the evil men and seducers, deceiving and being deceived, the Apostle warns Timothy, saying, "Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them," 2 Tim. 3:14. Jesus

warns against the false prophets that come in sheep's clothing, Matt. 7:15. Paul admonishes Timothy "to preach the Word" and reminds him that he is accountable to the Lord for so doing, 2 Tim. 4:1, 2. Concerning a bishop, Paul says that he should "hold fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake," Tit. 1:9-11. The Christians at Ephesus are told to "be no more children tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive," Eph. 4:14. When false teachers entered among the Galatians, Paul wrote to them, "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?" Gal. 3:1. How seriously the Lord takes it when people reject His Word, whatever that word might be, we learn from the case of Saul, to whom the Lord said through Samuel, "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king," 1 Sam. 15:22, 23.

III

A Church that does not keep the doctrine pure deteriorates and faces the danger of losing even whatever pure doctrine it still has. It is a most common experience in life that we lose what we fail to appreciate. A man who does not take care of his health will lose it. The finest palace with the most beautiful surroundings will in the course of time lose its beauty and usefulness if the occupants fail to give it the proper care. We Americans pride ourselves on the Constitution of our country—and rightly so—but if we sit idly by while wily politicians violate its principles and are depriving us of the rights which it gives to the people, we shall lose what we have. "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty." Likewise, if a Church fails to appreciate its great Charter of Redemption and of Liberty, the Word of God, it will in the end lose it with all its blessings. Both Scriptures and experience teach us this lesson. Says the Savior, "Take heed what ye hear; with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you; and unto you that hear shall more be given, for he that hath, to him shall be given, and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that

which he hath," Mark 4:24, 25. To those who despised Him and His Word, the Savior said, "Did ye never read in the Scriptures, The Stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the Head of the corner; this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, The Kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof," Matt. 21:42, 43. To the Jews who despised the Word of God, "Paul and Barnabas waxed bold and said, It was necessary that the Word of God should first have been spoken to you; but seeing ye put it from you and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles," Acts 13:46.

In a sermon on the Gospel of the Twentieth Sunday after Trinity, Luther says, "Most of them are altogether indifferent, nor is anyone troubled in his conscience for putting so low an estimate upon the precious Word. This is not the case as it regards other sins, such as murder, adultery, and theft. These will be followed, sooner or later, by regret for having committed such a sin; and nobody will consider it to be right. But for being careless in hearing the Word, yea, for despising and persecuting it, no one feels remorse. Therefore it is such a terrible sin on account of which people and countries must at last be destroyed. Because this sin is not acknowledged, no repentance and amendment of life can follow. This has been experienced by the city of Jerusalem and other kingdoms. The turn will also come for Germany; the voice of this sin crieth always toward heaven and will move God to become angry and to say: I have given you My dear Son, My highest and dearest Treasure; I endeavored to speak to you and to teach and instruct you for eternal life; but I have none who will listen to Me. Therefore I am compelled to punish. As the Lord Himself testifies, John 3: 'This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.' That is as much as to say: I would gladly overlook all other sins, but here is the condemnation which causes the ruin of the world. I have sent My Word, but they do not care for it; this displeases Me above all. They are very sinful, and I would gladly cleanse them from all sins by My Word, but they will not. Yet, if they will not hear My Word, but hear the word of the devil, I cannot help it; but they must take the consequences. This has been the experience of the Christians in the East, in the large and beautiful countries which are now subdued by the Turks. Hungary has almost met the same fate. Neither are we Germans and other nations willing to hear the Gospel or to suffer it. Therefore we must hear and endure the sects of the devil, the Anabaptists and abusers of the Sacraments. This is inevitable when the Word of God is despised and not observed, which

is the principal and greatest of all sins and which therefore deserves the severest and greatest punishment. Our Lord God would desire that we should fall down on our knees on account of it, to write it in golden letters, not merely in books, but into the hearts. This the children of the world do not like; they can hardly suffer it to be written in books or have it proclaimed in the pulpit. They prefer the devil in the heart, who also governs them to their satisfaction. Be warned therefore. God has sufficient reason to be angry and to punish on account of other sins. But the sin of despising His Word and of abusing those who invite us to the heavenly marriage feast exceeds all other sins. Let him therefore who commits this sin learn to be convinced that he is not involved in a trifling sin, but in the most heinous and greatest of all sins, which God can suffer the least and which He has to punish most severely." (XIII:929—931.)

What Luther said we can well apply to conditions in the Church and in the world today. Modernism in many churches of our own country is a direct result of their failure to safeguard the truth which they still had. Let us also bear in mind that in a compromise of truth, truth always loses out. "When error is admitted into the Church, it will be found that the stages of its progress are always three. It begins by asking *toleration*. Its friends say to the majority: You need not be afraid of us; we are few and weak; only let us alone; we shall not disturb the faith of others. The Church has her standards of doctrine; of course, we shall never interfere with them; we only ask for ourselves to be spared interference with our private opinions. Indulged in this for a time, error goes on to assert *equal rights*. Truth and error are two balancing forces. The Church shall do nothing which looks like deciding between them; that would be partiality. It is bigotry to assert any superior right for the truth. We are to agree to differ, and any favoring of the truth, because it is truth, is partisanship. What the friends of truth and error hold in common is fundamental. Anything on which they differ is *ipso facto* non-essential. Anybody who makes account of such a thing is a disturber of the peace of the Church. Truth and error are two co-ordinate powers, and the great secret of church statesmanship is to preserve the balance between them. From this point error soon goes on to its natural end, which is to assert *supremacy*. Truth started with *tolerating*; it comes to be merely tolerated, and that only for a time. Error claims a preference for its judgments on all disputed points. It puts men into positions, not as at first in spite of their departure from the Church's faith, but in consequence of it. Their recommendation is that they repudiate

that faith, and position is given them to teach others to repudiate it and to make them skillful in combating it." Krauth, *The Conservative Reformation*, p. 195 f.

IV

A Church that would keep its doctrine pure must have teachers that are sound in doctrine and that will indoctrinate the people entrusted to their spiritual care. Deterioration in doctrine has always been from the top down. When the fountain is polluted, it cannot send forth a clear stream. The Jewish people in the days of Christ no longer believed the Word of God, because their spiritual leaders had corrupted it. Of the Pharisees Jesus said, "Let them alone; they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch," Matt. 15:14. Therefore Jesus warned His disciples, saying, "Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees. . . . Then understood they how that He bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees," Matt. 16:6, 12. Already in the Old Testament the Lord put the responsibility of keeping the doctrine pure upon the priests. "The priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the Law at his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of Hosts. But ye are departed out of the way; ye have caused many to stumble at the Law; ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi, saith the Lord of Hosts," Mal. 2:7, 8. Every student of history knows that when the Church was corrupted, it was corrupted by spiritual leaders who corrupted the Word of God.

In order to make sure that we have teachers in our Church that are sound in doctrine, we pledge the instructors at our synodical schools and the pastors of our congregations to our Lutheran Confessions—*quia not quatenus*—because these Confessions are a clear exposition of the great truths of the Word of God. Speaking of the purpose of a creed or a confession, Krauth has well said, "The object of a creed is not to find out what God teaches (we go to the Bible for that), but to show *what we believe*." When creeds or confessions are wrong or too limited or are being misinterpreted, additional doctrinal documents become necessary. At the time when our Lutheran Confessions were written, the doctrine of verbal inspiration was taken for granted, and therefore we find no special article on it in the Confessions. Since this doctrine has now become a matter of controversy, the doctrine of the verbal inspiration must be clearly set forth in doctrinal statements. Truth should always be stated in unmistakable terms. Error loves ambiguities. When we are ridiculed because we insist upon minute and correct doctrinal statements, "precept upon pre-

cept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little and there a little," we are reminded that the objectors to the Word of the Lord in the day of Isaiah did likewise, Is. 28:10-13. "They revolted at a teaching that seemed to them narrow, childish, wearisome."

The strength of a Church is not to be found in the number of its adherents nor in its organization nor in its outward glory or material wealth. Throughout history that Church has been spiritually strong which was strong in the true doctrine. Therefore the members of our churches should be indoctrinated. In our Lutheran Church we indoctrinate our people by means of the sermon, the Christian day school, the catechetical instructions, the Sunday school, and the church papers. But in spite of it all, are our people as well indoctrinated as they ought to be? Is the preaching of doctrine perhaps being somewhat neglected? Is religion in the Christian day school in some instances perhaps being taught too mechanically? Is instruction given to children in their confirmation classes always thorough enough? Are adults received into church membership by the short-cut method of instruction? Is one of the reasons why we experience much difficulty in increasing the membership of our adult Bibles classes to be found in the fact that many of our members think they have graduated from religious instruction at the time of their confirmation? Is the lack of indoctrination the reason why many are not only indifferent to doctrine, but also to the strictly Christian way of life? At a time when the religious atmosphere in which we are living is heavily surcharged with religious indifferentism, we must look well to the indoctrination of our church members in order that the doctrine be kept pure and the life be a Christian life. This can be done only when, first of all, the spiritual leaders in our churches know well the doctrine of the Word of God, realize their responsibility to contend for the faith once delivered unto the saints, and have the courage of their convictions. We need both a well-indoctrinated clergy and laity in order to withstand the onrushing tide of doctrinal indifferentism.

Men who are indifferent toward doctrinal purity may make for themselves a name and have a large following, but they are never the men who build up a strong Church; and when their indifferentism turns into rejection of the fundamental truths of Christianity—that is a natural course which indifferentism often takes—they do not build up the Church at all, but rather tear it down.

J. H. C. FRITZ