

“Take heed unto the doctrine.” Essays delivered at the 44th Regular
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By

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The terms “doctrine,” “teaching,” “pure doctrine,” “truth,” “false doctrine,” “error,” “corrupt teachings” and similar expressions are familiar to every informed church-going Christian. They appear in the liturgical parts of our divine services, particularly in prayers and hymns. In the “General Prayer” of the Order of Morning Service we praise and petition God:

We praise Thee especially that Thou hast preserved unto us in their purity Thy saving Word..And we beseech Thee, O Lord, to ...grant unto Thy holy Church throughout the world purity of doctrine (L. H., 13)

In the “General Prayer” of the Order of the Holy Communion we petition God:

Most heartily we beseech Thee so to rule and govern Thy Church Universal...that we may be preserved in the pure doctrine of Thy saving Word (L.H., 24)

In other prayers which appear in our Lutheran Hymnal we plead:

Send, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, Thy Holy Spirit into our hearts that He...may defend us from all error, and lead us into all truth (p. 102)

Almighty and everlasting God... impart the grace and help of Thy Holy Spirit to all ministers of Thy Word that they may purely teach it to the saving of men. Bring to naught ... all the counsels of those who hate Thy Word and who, by corrupt teaching or with violent hands would destroy it (p. 103)

Almighty, merciful, and gracious God and Father, with our whole heart we beseech Thee for all who have forsaken the Christian faith, all who have wandered from any portion thereof, or are in doubt or temptation through the corrupters of Thy Word, that Thou wouldest visit them as a Father, reveal unto them their error, and bring them back from their wanderings, that they, in singleness of hearts taking pleasure alone in the pure truth of Thy Word, may be made wise thereby unto everlasting life. (p. 104)

We poor sinners do beseech Thee... O Lord God, ... to preserve all pastors and ministers of Thy Church in the true knowledge and understanding of Thy Word... to put an end to all schisms and causes of offense; to bring into the way of truth all such as have erred or are deceived; to beat down Satan under our feet; to ... raise up them that fall and to strengthen such as do stand. (P. 111)

In the majestic Pentecost hymn, “Come, Holy Ghost, God and Lord!” we plead with Luther:

From ev’ry error keep us free; Let none but Christ our Master be (L. H., hymn 224)

In the hymn “Lord Jesus Christ, with us abide” we pray:

In these last days of sore distress
Grant us, dear Lord, true steadfastness,
That pure we keep till life is spent
Thy holy Word and Sacrament (L. H., hymn 292)

In the powerful Reformation hymn “O Lord, look down from heaven, behold”, we pray with Luther:

Defend Thy truth, O God, and stay
This evil generation;
And from the error of its way
Keep Thine own congregation.
The wicked everywhere abound
And would Thy little flock confound;
But Thou art our Salvation (L. H., hymn 260)

In all these and other prayers and hymns of our Christian heritage we confess: 1) that there is such a reality as “doctrine”; 2) that there is “pure doctrine”, 3) that there is “false and pernicious doctrine,” “corrupt teaching,” and that there are “corrupters of God’s Word”; 4) that there are those who have erred because they were ensnared by “false doctrine”; 5) that because of “false doctrine” schisms exist in the Church; 6) that Satan has a hand in “false doctrine”; 7) that we recognize only Christ as our Master, our Teacher, in determining what is “true” and “false doctrine”; 8) that we need to pray for the gift and preservation of “pure doctrine.”

But all these confessions which we have enumerated are not merely the product of pious devout Christian hearts, but they are also the echo and reflection of what Scripture itself as the Word of God says regarding “doctrine,” “pure doctrine,” “false doctrine,” “error,” “heresy,” and similar realities. It would now be in order to investigate and tell in greater detail, therefore, precisely what Scripture has to say about “doctrine” and related terms. This we hope to do in the four essays we plan to present. But before submitting our first essay, we wish at this point to say a few words regarding the term “doctrine” as we find it about fifty times in the New Testament in order to clear the path for what we shall submit in the following essays.

The New Testament employs the term “doctrine” in forty-eight passages as a translation of two Greek terms (“*didache*” and “*didaskalia*”) which are closely related etymologically and in their meaning and usage. These terms nearly always appear in the singular and are rendered in the KJ version with “doctrine.” The plural “doctrines” occurs in only two passages. Jesus charges the scribes and Pharisees: “In vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Matt. 15:9; Mk. 7:7). And Paul writes to Timothy: “The Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faiths giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils” (1 Tim. 4:1).

Furthermore, it is significant that in the original text of the New Testament the term “doctrine” is in nearly every instance preceded by the definite article “the.” Thus Paul tells Timothy, “Take heed unto the doctrine” (KJ). This means that the speaker or writer such as Jesus, Paul or John has something quite definite and well-known in mind. Jesus had made known His doctrine through His preaching and teaching (Jn. 7:16; 18:19) in the synagogues in the Temple in Jerusalem, along the shores of the Galilean Sea and in the desert places to which he withdrew with His disciples. Also Paul’s and John’s doctrine had, as a result of their preaching, become well-known. It never took long for people to find just what it was that Paul and John or, for that matter, any of the other apostles or their assistants, or evangelists or prophets, were preaching and teaching. And so we conclude that when either one of the two Greek terms, both translated “doctrine” in the KJ version, appear in the NT, these terms refer in the overwhelming majority of instances to a specific, well-known “doctrine,” and that, since both terms appear in the singular in the sense of the doctrine of God communicated by Christ and His apostles, that divine doctrine is “one.” Just as there is one body, one Spirit, one hope, one

Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all (Eph. 4:4.5), so there is but one doctrine. That one doctrine embraces God's entire revelation to man and is centered in Jesus Christ and His salvation. Luther is therefore right when he says in his lectures on Galatians (1531): "Doctrine must be a round and golden ring without a break." And Luther adds the illustration: "If I deny God in one article, I do so in all" (WA 11, 47, 3. 48, 6). Again, Luther uses the illustration of a bell whose sound is impaired if it has only a very minor crack. (WA 54, 159, 1: "*Kurzes Bekenntnis vom heiligen Sakrament,*" 1544). Luther concludes: "*Rund und rein gantz und alles geglaubt, oder nichts geglaubt, Der heilige Geist lest sich nicht trennen noch teilen, das er ein stueck solt warhafftig und das ander falsch leren oder glauben lassen*" (VIA 54, 158, 28).

Though there is only one doctrine, we do of course speak of "doctrines" of Scripture. The Augsburg Confession to which we as Lutherans subscribe presents twenty-one articles which it terms "articles of faith and doctrine." Luther's Small Catechism, which the Formula of Concord calls the "Bible of the Laity," is composed of a number of chief parts of Christian doctrine. In teaching "doctrine" to our students and pupils, we naturally categorize aspects of God's "doctrine" for the purpose of accenting and exhaustively dealing with every facet of the "doctrine." And yet the "doctrine" is one. It is God's one revelation to man of Himself and of His great acts culminating in the incarnation, death, resurrection, and exaltation and recorded in the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures.

Of this one doctrine the New Testament in particular has much to say. This doctrine Jesus had received from the Father and taught His disciples (Jn. 7:16). About that doctrine the High priest inquired of Jesus at the Savior's trial before the Jewish court (Jn. 18:19). The people "were astonished at His doctrine, for His word was with power" (Lk. 4:32). This doctrine Paul calls "the doctrine of God our Savior" (Tit. 2:10) and says that "it should not be blasphemed" (1 Tim. 6:1). Luke calls it "the apostles' doctrine" (Acts 2:42) because the apostles proclaimed it. With this doctrine the apostles "filled all Jerusalem" (Acts 5:28). To the standard or norm of this doctrine the Christians in Rome had been converted and committed some years before Paul wrote them his Epistle (Rom. 6:17; cf. also Rom. 16:17). This doctrine was something wholly "now" to the wise philosophers of Athens (Acts 17:19). In preaching this doctrine Paul and the elders had labored (2 Tim. 3:10; 1 Tim. 5:17). Paul calls it "good" doctrine (1 Tim. 4:6). He also calls it "sound" doctrine, that is, healthy, wholesome, pure, right, doctrine (1 Tim. 1:10; 2 Tim. 4:3; Tit. 1:9; 2:1). As we shall develop later, the heart and center of this doctrine is always Jesus Christ, His salvation, the forgiveness merited by Him for all men. But this doctrine possesses also dynamic power; it has the capacity not merely to create faith, but also to change human lives, to instill a new life, to re-establish man in the sight of God, to make him God's beloved child, to fill man's heart with love for the brethren, with hope, with a clean conscience, with the certainty of eternal bliss in Heaven.

Following this general introduction, which reminds me of the introduction of a sermon since it suggests the motifs to be presented in the body of the sermon, I will now indicate the headings of the four essays which will be submitted:

- I. God's concern for His doctrine
- II. The source of divine doctrine
- III. The content of divine doctrine
- IV. The communication of divine doctrine

God's Concern for His Doctrine

God is concerned about His doctrines, His revelation, chiefly because of the competition His doctrine meets at the hands of those who teach false and pernicious doctrine. False doctrine, ungodly doctrine, was introduced into the world when Satan tempted Eve in the Garden by saying: "Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" (Gen. 3:1), When Eve objected and said: "God hath said: 'Ye shall not eat of its neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die'" (Gen. 3:3) the Tempter said: "Ye shall not surely die: for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened and ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:4,5*). In the moment Eve yielded to that temptation, pernicious error, false doctrine, the "great

lie"-- "The devil to the murderer since the beginning (the first one) and did not abide in the truth. When he speaks the lie, he speaks according to his own nature, because he is a liar and the Father of it," (John 8:44)--was introduced into the world. Since that time it is strictly a case of God's doctrine versus Satan's doctrine, God's saving truth versus Satan's damning lie.

As we read the Old Testament Scriptures, we soon learn that all true doctrine comes from God and that God is deeply concerned about His truth. He wants that truth or doctrine to prevail. He is opposed to all false doctrine and lies, God's doctrine is spoken of in the Old Testament under various terms, such as "judgments" (Deut. 4:1); "statutes". (Deut. 4:4); "God's ways" (Ps. 25:4); "God's truth" (Ps. 25:5); "good judgment and knowledge" (Ps. 119:66); "testimonies" (Ps. 132:12); "God's will" (Ps. 143:10); "God's law" (Ps 94:12); "God's Commandments" (Ex. 24:12); "the way of God's statutes" (Ps. 119:33). But God's doctrine in the Old Testament included not only laws and statutes and commandments and testimonies, it included also promises to His people in the covenants He made with Noah, Abraham and Israel. The most significant promise in His doctrine was that He would in course of time send His people a Messiah, a Savior, from the house of David, to be born in Bethlehem, who would rule over His Kingdom for ever and ever, into whose Kingdom also Gentiles from all parts of the world would be invited and into which they would be welcomed.

God was most jealous of His doctrine. Over and over again He spoke out through His chosen prophets against false prophets, false dreamers and their false prophecies and dreams, and He threatened these false prophets and false dreamers and their followers with fearful punishment (Deut. 18:22). We cite only two passages:

If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder... thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams...and that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death (Deut. 13:1-5).

And the Lord says: Because they have forsaken my law which I set before them, and have not obeyed my voice, or walked in accord with it, but have stubbornly followed their own hearts and have gone after the Baals, as their fathers taught them; therefore thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I will feed this people with wormwood, and give them poisonous water to drink (Jer. 9:13-15).

When we attempt to summarize what it was that constituted true doctrine in the Old Testament, we arrive at these conclusions: 1) that all true doctrine comes from God, and that false doctrine was initiated by the devil; 2) that God revealed Himself and His doctrine through Moses and the other prophets; 3) that God's will and doctrine demanded absolute obedience; 4) that God's doctrine stood in direct opposition to that of false prophets and false prophecies, the doctrines of men; 5) that God's honor was violated and offended when men falsified and perverted God's pure teaching and followed after the teachings of false teachers; 6) that God's doctrine in the Old Testament included also the promise of a Messiah, the Suffering Servant, who would suffer and die and rise again for the sins and eternal welfare of His people; that this Messiah would establish a Kingdom of which He Himself would be king, that this Kingdom would endure forever and that both Jews and Gentiles would be subjects in that Kingdom. Here, then, was a great body of "doctrine" which was God's "doctrine" since He gave it, and behind which stood God's honor and supreme authority, as is evidenced also by His so often repeated "Thus saith the Lord, the Holy One of Israel." That doctrine was intended to have Israel recognize God as its absolute ruler and king whose laws and commandments, testimonies and statutes, could never be set aside with impunity. But this doctrine included also the theme that this same God was forgiving and merciful to those who confessed their sins and pledged renewed allegiance to God's covenant.

In the life of Jesus we note both a very positive and negative concern about "doctrine": a positive concern for His doctrine and a negative concern regarding all false doctrine. Jesus Himself taught; in Mt. 4:23, which summarizes the activity of Jesus in Galilee, it is said first "that he taught in the synagogues," Then we read that He proclaimed the good news of the Kingdom of God and healed the sick (Mt. 9:35; 12:9f.). Like the

Rabbis of His day, Jesus too interpreted passages from the Old Testament (Lk. 4:16ff.; Mt. 5:21f; 15; 2; 22:37). But He was not primarily concerned about providing intellectual knowledge, but rather, like Moses and the prophets, toward ordering the life of His hearers toward God and toward love of the neighbor (Mt. 22:37; 19; 16ff.). Therefore his doctrine always appealed to the will and to a decision for or against the will of God. Like the Rabbis and scribes, Jesus too taught that God's will is revealed in the Old Testament Scriptures, especially in the Law, so that He refused to surrender even a jot or tittle of the Law (Matt. 5:17). For Jesus, however, the will of God was inextricably bound up with Jesus' own person. He declared Himself to be the Son of God and the Messiah. This amazed His hearers as much as what He taught, for He put Himself on the same level with God (Mt. 7:28-13:53; 7:29; Mk. 1:22).

It is in the Gospel of John where we learn most clearly what His doctrine was. It was not only an underscoring of the Law of Moses and a stress on God's absolute claim on man. It was rather, and that was the distinctive aspect of His doctrine, that as the Son of God He had come to declare the Father, to reveal Him, and to execute the Father's will for the redemption of man, to die as the Lamb of God for the sins of the world, and to give eternal life and salvation to all who believed on Him as their Savior. Such believers would not enter into judgment, and He would raise them up on the last day. And those who believed in Him, would live also in Him, and would manifest their love for Him by their love of the brethren.

We note also that Jesus, though He recognized the validity of God's Law as given in the Old Testament, rose above the false interpretations of that Law with His majestic and authoritative "But I say unto you" (Mt. 5:21ff.). His authority was that of an ambassador sent from God, who does not have His doctrine from Himself, but from Him who sent (Jn. 7:16; 8:28). And His doctrine did not consist in exalted and esoteric wisdom intended for a few brilliant minds, but in the revelation of Himself to all who would hear Him by His words and deeds as the Messiah, the Son of God, and the Savior of mankind. His call to repentance demanded a conversion by God Himself, and his teaching a whole-hearted discipleship and an absolute obedience. He Himself selected the Twelve whom He meant to send out into the world. They did not choose Him. These disciples did not become teachers in the sense that they, too, now founded schools of thought. But they remained faithful students of that one Master who had called them into the service. Their task was to be His ambassadors, to communicate His Word which He Himself had received from the Father, to recognize His authority as final (Mt. 26:18; Mk. 14:14; Lk. 22:11; Mt. 23:8), to witness to Him, to His Word and mighty acts, in particular to His resurrection from the dead.

But just as Jesus was concerned in a positive way about the doctrine which He taught and communicated to His disciples, so He opposed also all false doctrines. Therefore He warned against the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees, that is, their false doctrine. Therefore He rejected the traditions of the Jewish teachers which had taken the place of God's doctrine recorded in the Old Testament. Therefore He warned against false prophets who would come in sheep's clothing. Therefore He told His disciples not to be deceived by false Christs and false prophets who would appear at the end of time and would deceive, if this were possible, even the elect. His one concern was that His way, His doctrine, His truth--for He was Himself the truth--would be accepted and believed. This means also: recognition that God is God and that He has the first and last claim on man's life; that man must be born from above, from God, through the water and the spirit; that man must believe in Jesus as the Son of God and Savior of the world; that man must deny Himself and take up the cross and follow the Savior; that man must be prepared even to lay down his life for the brethren; that the disciple must be ready to disciple the whole world and to teach those who had been baptized to "observe all that He had commanded them," that is, His Word and His sacraments. He taught His disciples to understand the Old Testament Scriptures; He opened their eyes to see in all the Old Testament Scriptures the things concerning Himself, "that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in His name to all nations" (Lk. 24:46,47). And when His own teaching ministry came to a close, He promised His disciples another teacher, the Comforter, the Holy Spirit whom He would send from the Father. This Comforter, the Spirit of truth, would be with the disciples forever (Jn. 14:16). "He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (Jn. 14:26). "He will

bear witness of me” (Jn. 16:26). “He will reprove the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment” (Jn. 16:8). Because of this Comforter, the Spirit of truth, the disciples would have power also to witness boldly in the name and to the name of Jesus.

Jesus had given His disciples His doctrine, His Word, and His Sacraments. He had carefully instructed them. He had also warned them against false prophets and false Messiahs who would attempt to deceive them. As we study the New Testament books, in particular the letters of Paul and Peter and John, we note that not long after the founding of the Church in Jerusalem the Savior’s warnings began to materialize. Paul tells the elders of Ephesus: “I know that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch and remember that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day” (Acts 20:29-31). Paul had to tell the Galatians: “I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel; which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the Gospel of Christ. But 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” (Gal. 1:6-8). In 1 Cor. 15 Paul directs himself in strong words against those who denied the resurrection of the body (1 Cor. 15:12-20). In Colossians he attacks what may be called the beginnings of gnostic errors. He writes “Beware lest any man make a prey of you by philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ” (Col. 2:8). He warns the Ephesian Christians that they should not henceforth be “children tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of man, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive” (Eph. 4:14). And again, “Let no man deceive you with vain words” (Eph. 5:6). To the Corinthians Paul writes to be on their guard against “false apostles, deceitful workers, who transform themselves into the apostles of Christ.” And he adds: “And no marvel: for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:13-14).

In his letters to Timothy and Titus, Paul, as we had already noted, speaks of the doctrine which he preached as “good” doctrine, as “sound,” that is, healthy, wholesome, right, true, doctrine. As we gather from Paul’s letters themselves, for Paul “doctrine is “good” and “sound” if it is in accord with the words of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Tim. 6:4); if it is in accordance with Scripture, that is, the Old Testament Scriptures; if it is “according to godliness,” that is, if it is in keeping with the faith of the church which had been founded through the preaching and teaching of Jesus and the apostles. In these letters to Timothy and Titus Paul expresses also frequent and great concerns about false doctrines. He warns against people who “occupy themselves with myths and endless genealogies which promote speculations rather than the divine training that is in faith” (1 Tim. 1:4); “against deceitful spirits and doctrines of devils” (1 Tim. 4:1); against what appears to be gnostic heresies (1 Tim. 4:3: “forbidding marriage and enjoining abstinence from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving”); against “disputing about words, which does no goods but only ruins the hearers; against godless chatter; against senseless,, stupid controversies” (2 Tim. 2:14,16, 23).

As one other apostle who warns most seriously against false and heretical teachers and teachings we mention John. John, like Paul, is concerned about the true doctrine, that is, the doctrine about God and the Lord Jesus Christ. He refers to commandments he had preached and taught the Christians to whom he is writing. He says: These commandments I have received from the beginning, that is, from Christ Himself, such as: God is light; Christians should walk as He is in the light (1 John 1:5-7 “And this is His commandment that we should believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another” (1 John 3:23). And he repeatedly uses the terms “truth” and “doctrine” obviously as a summary of the total doctrine which he had received from the Master. He, too, like Paul, warns against false Christs, which he calls antichrists who are attempting to deceive the members of the church. “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). “John does not treat Christianity as a religion containing elements of truth, or even more truth than any religion which had preceded it. John presents Christianity to the soul as a religion which necessarily has everything to it, if it is not really to be worse than

nothing (Alex Ross, *The Epistles of James and John*, pp. 171-172).” Similar warnings against false doctrine and false teachers we find in the Epistles of Peter, in Jude, and in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

We can make only a summary statement regarding the concern of great Christian leaders after the death of the apostles for the truth and purity of Christian doctrine. In retrospect it appears that whenever the Church was attacked by errorists and heretics, the Lord of the Church raised up stalwart confessors of the truth who were prepared to suffer all, even death, in defense of sound doctrine. We think, for instance, of Athanasius the true originator of the Nicene Creed adopted in 325, who throughout his life defended the deity of Christ and helped clarify for Christians on the basis of Scripture the relation between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Missouri Synod recognized the great theological contribution made by Athanasius when it in 1926, at the dedication of the new Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, honored the memory of Athanasius by an archway bearing a plaque with this inscription: “Athanasius, 296-373, Preserver of the Faith of Christendom, Victorious Defender of the Doctrine of the Deity of Christ, Persecuted for Righteousness’ Sake, Revered to Endless Ages.” We think, too, with gratitude to God of the great ecumenical councils in the fourth and fifth centuries, which have sometimes been stingingly referred to as quarrels among theologians (“*Theologen-Gezaenk*”), but which were in truth dominated by a profound concern to preserve the truth of Scripture and to establish unity in the Church of Christ.

As we skip over the centuries constituting what we are wont to call the Middle Ages, we pause whenever we think of the sixteenth century. For in this century, too, God raised up a great leader, Martin Luther, who with his loyal coworkers purified the church from doctrinal errors that had crept in over the centuries, and who attempted to restore the church doctrinally to the church of the apostolic period. We give thanks to God for the Augsburg Confession and its Apology, for Luther’s Catechisms, and the other writings which we call our Lutheran Symbols. We note, whenever we read them, the deep concern of these confessors, that the Word of God be proclaimed and taught in its purity, and the Sacraments administered according to Christ’s institution. We note in these Symbols the condemnations of grievous errors and heresies which disturbed the church since the early centuries. And as we reflect a bit on the great orthodox teachers of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, we again thank God for having given the church these teachers whose genuine concern was to help preserve the truth recovered in the Reformation and to guard it against the incursions of false Roman and Reformed teachings.

We think of the great Christian leaders whom God gave to our own church, men who left Europe for conscience’ sake and came to our country in the hope that here they could worship God according to convictions founded on the pure Word of God as summarized in our Lutheran Symbols. And we think, with deep gratitude, also of the great leaders of our church in the generations following Walther, Wyneken, Sihler, and others; for these too, pastors, missionaries, and teachers were equally devoted to the concern of preserving pure doctrine and defending it against all errors. Our own generation needs to ask itself whether it is as truly concerned about God’s doctrine and truth as were the fathers and forefathers, or whether it is, because of many temptations within and without the church, yielding to an indifferent attitude toward doctrinal values. When a church increases statistically, it is in great temptation to become more concerned about organization and administration matters, about rapid expansion methods, about uniformity in worship, about public relations, than about its doctrinal basis and heritage. All these phases of church activity have their place; but they must always occupy a place subordinate to the doctrine of the church. For the church must first of all give evidence to its members and to the world that it stands wholly committed to “all that Christ commanded His disciples;” it must constantly be on the alert in all its projects and activities that “sound,” “pure” doctrine be proclaimed and taught, and that the life of the church reflect God’s love in Christ through the church’s love of the brethren and through its endeavor to evangelize all nations.

We are living in a day of almost incredible scientific research. We are also living in a day of almost incredible Scriptural research carried on philologically, archaeologically, philosophically, and psychologically. No one will question that such research has resulted in values. But we may never become blind to the dangers involved. We can engage in so much Scriptural research that we no longer hear God’s voice in Scripture. We

can do so much Biblical research that we no longer search the Scriptures to find in them Christ and eternal life. Scripture is God's book given by Him to the church. In it God speaks and teaches to make men wise unto salvation; and this Scripture is useful also for instruction, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16). Thus God's concern for the truth and doctrine of His Word in Scripture must continue to be also the most basic concern of the church. It must, therefore, continue to be the deepest concern of our Synod.

Holy Scripture is the book given by God the Holy Spirit to His Church. From this book the Church learns what the Church is, what the Church must do, what the Church must suffer where the Church should abide (*bleiben*). Where this book ceases, there the Church ceases. For He (Jesus) says: His Church will not listen to the voice of strangers (Martin Luther, Erlangen ed., 26, 100-101).

The Source of Divine Doctrine

“Take heed unto the doctrine!” So Paul writes to Timothy. What was the source of the doctrine to which Timothy was to give attention and which Paul had committed to Timothy as a sacred trust? Was it the doctrine of the Pharisees in which Paul had been instructed when he sat at the feet of Gamaliel? Was it the product of Paul's own fertile mind and imagination? Was it the doctrine which Paul had discovered in philosophical systems of thought, such as Stoicism and Epicureanism, currents of philosophic speculation with which Paul had come in contact in the larger cities where his missionary zeal had taken him? Was it some Oriental cult stemming from Egypt or Persia or even India, which formed the basis of Paul's doctrinal orientation? Was it an adaptation of first century Gnosticism with which Paul had to contend as we note in some of his Epistles? Or was his doctrine no more than a Hellenized form of a Jewish myth?

It was none of these. Paul could rather refer directly to two sources of his doctrine which were however closely inter-related. It is these which he wishes Timothy to remember and to which Timothy was to cling. One of these sources was the Old Testament. This was for Paul God's authoritative Word. From it he frequently quotes in his Epistles. In reference to this source he can say “according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3.4). The other source is the Gospel which Paul had proclaimed and taught. Of this he declares:

But I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not man's gospel for I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:11.12).

Repeatedly Paul therefore uses the phrase “according to my Gospel” (Rom. 2:16; 16:25a; 2 Tim. 2:8; 1 Tim. 1:11.). But that Gospel he had received from the Lord. Furthermore, in his Epistles Paul tells us several times that he is quoting a Word, a saying, of the Lord Jesus. He tells the elders of Ephesus: “One must remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said: It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35; cf. also 1 Cor. 7:10).

Finally, though Paul became an apostle as “one untimely born,” since he was called into the apostleship by the risen Lord after the other apostles had already begun their missionary activity, Paul nevertheless shared in the authority and responsibility which the Lord had given His Twelve during His life on earth and in the interim between the Resurrection and Ascension. Writing therefore from prison and daily awaiting his execution, Paul, as a true apostle, warns Timothy in his Second Epistle to him: “Do not be overcome by deceivers. Evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived” (2 Tim 3:13). Then he adds the authoritative directive: “Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them.” It was Eunice and Lois, Timothy's mother and grandmother, who had first introduced young Timothy to the Old Testament. But it was Paul, the apostle of Jesus Christ, who had brought Timothy to a knowledge of Jesus when he met Timothy at Lystra on his second journey (Acts 16:1-3). And it was from the apostle Paul that Timothy had learned how correctly to interpret the Old Testament, namely, that the Old Testament with its promises and types of the Messiah is to be understood

Christologically. Therefore Paul continues: “And that from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures of the Old Testament, which are able,” that is, which possess the dynamic power to instruct you for salvation by creating in you faith in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 3:15). And Paul the apostle characterizes the divine nature of these Holy Scriptures in the well-known verse: “All Scripture since it is give by inspiration of God, is profitable also for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim. 5:16). Thus Paul saw in the Gospel committed to him not a new doctrine, but rather the fulfillment of what God had long ago promised in the sacred Scriptures of the Old Testament. The immediate source of his doctrine which he taught Timothy was his Gospel, that Gospel which the ascended Lord had revealed to this last of His chosen apostles, but that Gospel had its deepest roots in the inspired writings of the Old Testament. This Gospel Paul left as a heritage to the church in his Epistles.

But what Paul declared to be the source of his doctrine, was also the source of what the other apostles proclaimed and taught. They too regarded the Old Testament not only as God’s authoritative Word, but also as God’s revelation in which He held out the promises of a Messiah-King. These other apostles had been fortunate to see and hear what the Old Testament prophets did not see and hear. They saw the Messiah-King in person, were called by Him into His fellowship, discipleship, and apostleship, and under the guidance of His Spirit the Comforter, composed those books of the New Testament not written by Paul. The doctrine which they proclaimed, taught, and wrote they, too, received from Christ Himself and from the Old Testament Scriptures. And thus the Christian church from the earliest times believes, proclaims, and teaches the divine doctrine which has its source in the Old Testament and in the words and teachings of Jesus Himself. At first the church read only the Old Testament books in its divine services. But in course of time our New Testament books were also read and received the same authoritative sanction which the Old Testament had enjoyed. By and by these New Testament books were gathered into what is known as the New Testament canon. These books the church, through the providential care of God, preserved throughout the ages to our own day. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament, therefore constitute for Christians the source of divine doctrine. It is these Scriptures which were given by the Spirit of God. In them God speaks to every generation regardless of culture and language. They are the deposit which contain for all times the divine doctrine, the divine teaching, through which God builds and preserves the Church.

By the grace of God Luther discovered, in the course of his controversies with the Roman Church, the great truth that Scripture alone is the source of divine doctrine. This became also the position of his followers, in fact, also of the Reformed churches that came into being in the sixteenth century. The principle “Scripture alone” is made most explicit in the Formula of Concord, the last of the Lutheran Symbols. From “The Summary, Content, Rules and Standard according to which all dogmas should be judged, and the erroneous teachings that have occurred should be decided and explained in a Christian way” we quote the following:

We believe, teach, and confess that the sole rule and standard according to which all dogmas together with (all) teachers should be estimated and judged are the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and of the New Testament alone...Other writings, however, of ancient or modern teachers, whatever name they bear, must not be regarded as equal to the Holy Scriptures, but all of them together be subjected to them, and should not be received otherwise or further than as witnesses, which are to show in what manner after the time of the apostles, and at what places, this pure doctrine of the prophets and apostles was preserved. (Triglote, 777).

The Holy Scriptures alone remain the only judge, rule, and standard, according to which, as the only test-stone, all dogmas shall and must be discerned and judged, as to whether they are good or evil, right or wrong (Triglote, 779).

Unfortunately, however, throughout the history of the church, in fact, since Old Testament times, not only the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, but also other sources have been, and in instances still are, regarded to be sources of divine doctrine. There were the false prophets and seers in the Old Testament period who also claimed to be possessed by the Spirit of God and to proclaim divine truth. There were the traditions of the scribes and Pharisees termed by Jesus “traditions of men” which had in course of time achieved the same authoritative status as the Old Testament itself. There were the false teachers, false spirits, antichrists, who appeared in the apostolic church and claimed to have a divine mission. There were the efforts of some in the early centuries to introduce as other sources of truth pagan myths and Greek philosophic speculation as sources of divine truth. There was, for a time at least, an alleged “secret apostolic tradition” known only so it was claimed, to certain especially endowed leaders in the early church.

We must object also to the position of the Roman Catholic church regarding its source of doctrine. In this church tradition replaces Scripture as norm of doctrine. For this church tradition is not merely conservatism, but the dynamic voice of the church. The Roman Church, then, is in a position in which it can, and in fact does, add to the sum of saving truth. We need think only, as a case in point, of the promulgation of the “Dogma of the Bodily Assumption of Mary” by Pius XII (1950).

But we think, also of the Enthusiasts in Luther’s day - Luther regarded even the Pope to be an Enthusiast, but they are found in every age - who claim to receive revelations from the Spirit of God apart from the Word of God which we have in the Holy Scriptures. There is furthermore the effort first made in the early Christian centuries to combine with the divine doctrine of Scripture philosophic thought, an effort which culminated in the thirteenth century in the theological system of Thomas Aquinas. There is the effort in our day to do the same thing by theologians who are not satisfied with the doctrine of God as Scripture has it, but who limit it by an existential interpretation or broaden its scope by proposing a wider philosophic foundation for the determination of Christian doctrine.

The principle “Scripture alone” means also for us as Lutherans that Scripture is its own interpreter; not the wisdom of men, not the mind of the interpreter who dares to rise above Scripture and dictate to Scripture what it must mean; least of all an ecclesiastical authority which presumes to be able to determine with absolute certainty the intended meaning of difficult Scripture passages. And when we say “Scripture alone” we are also saying: Scripture in its immediate and most obvious sense, regardless of whether that sense meets or does not meet the approval of the interpreter. Thus no one has the right arbitrarily to excise or expurgate portions of Scripture as though he were editing for high school students a novel by Walter Scott or Washington Irving. No one has the right to interpolate, or re-partition or re-arrange sections of a Biblical book to suit his own fancy. Least of all is it within the right of anyone to empty the text of Scripture of its obvious meaning on the grounds that the thought patterns of Scripture are couched in ancient and no longer intelligible mythological terms, and to fill those emptied words with other meanings suggested by the mind of the interpreter. The Lutheran interpreter must therefore reject the following views and practices:

- 1) co-ordinating with Scripture “ecclesiastical tradition”;
- 2) placing any authority - popes, councils, or symbols - above Scripture;
- 3) viewing Scripture as the record of the natural evolution of the faith of Israel and the early Church;
- 4) viewing Scripture as a book of inferences made by men from God’s mighty acts;
- 5) all views which regard the prophetic and apostolic word as no more than a unique but fallible, human witness to revelation;
- 6) failure to acknowledge the organic unity and essential Christocentricity of the old and the New Testaments;
- 7) all attempt to get beyond or away from the “plain sense” of Scripture by means of allegorical, demythological, or existential methods of interpretation;
- 8) arbitrary excision, interpolation, or emendation of the text;

- 9) every interpretation of Scripture which is not in accord with Scripture's central teaching, namely, justification by faith in Christ;
- 10) failure to hear Scripture on its own terms and in its own categories by the attempt to make it conform to a pre-conceived system of thought;
- 11) abuse of the recognition that Scripture employs literary types by arbitrarily assigning certain sections of Scripture to myth or legend.

Note: These eleven theses are a summary compiled by Merrill Kluhsmn for my course *Bola Scriptura* (Spring quarter, 1958-59).

But the question is in order: What is the relation of the "dogmas and doctrines" of the Church to Scripture as the source and fountain of all divine doctrine? We all know that the church has "dogmas and doctrines" though, as we indicated above, strictly speaking "divine doctrine is one." We think of the Ecumenical Creeds (Apostolic Creed, Nicene Creed, Athanasian Creed). These ecumenical Creeds, as we call them, express the faith of all Christians who revere the Bible as the Word of God: They deal with most important facets of divine doctrine, such as the person and work of Jesus Christ, and the Holy Trinity. Yet these Creeds do not presume to be doctrinal additions to what is contained in the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures. They are no more than summary statements in which the great Scriptural truth regarding Jesus Christ and the Holy Trinity is precisely and succinctly stated for the upbuilding of the faith and for the rejection of errors. We have, furthermore, our Lutheran Symbols: the Augsburg Confession and its Apology; Luther's two Catechisms; the Smalcald Articles; the Formula of Concord. These Symbols merely spell out the pure doctrine of Scripture as Luther and his co-laborers and followers discerned it in Scripture. To both the Ecumenical Creeds and the Lutheran Symbols every pastor, teacher, and congregation belonging to Synod subscribes as the true exposition of the Scriptures. Our Church subscribes to these Creeds and Symbols, furthermore, not "insofar as," but "because" they are in truth the true interpretation of God's Word in Holy Scripture.

When we, as Lutherans, confess that Scripture alone is the source and fountain of divine doctrine, and when we say that the Creeds and our Lutheran Symbols are for us true expositions of the Christian faith, we are thanking and glorifying God for what He has done for us moved only by His love and grace. We are also in deep humility confessing to the world that we regard ourselves as belonging to that great multitude of saints known as the Church, which as Luther reminds us, originated already in the Garden of Eden, has continued to our own day and will endure to the end of time. In making this confession we are also declaring that we belong and want to belong to that Church of the ages which has most faithfully clung to the pure doctrine of the Holy Scriptures. We are at the same time thanking God for the many teachers He gave to the Church who taught the Word of God in its purity and transmitted it in its purity to future generations. And we are, finally, breathing a prayer that God would preserve to us that truth and enable us to transmit it in its purity and fullness to our children and children's children.

But whenever we are aware of our obligation to Scripture and the Creeds and Symbols of our church, we are in that moment also indicating our dissent from all those who limit or expand the scope of divine truth. There are those in Christendom who believe that the substance of Christian doctrine can be neatly summarized in the simple confession "Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior," but who leave it to the individual to interpret this confession as he will. There are others who scorn and reject all creeds and confessions as man-made doctrines and barriers to personal faith. There are still others who believe that the substance of Christian doctrine is sufficiently summarized in the Apostles' Creed and that Scripture as the great fountain of divine doctrine is really antiquated and outdated. There are others, finally, who believe that the source of divine truth is larger than Holy Scripture. They tell us that since divine truth might be found also in the sacred books of other religions, Christians ought to expand their canon to include these other sacred books. Against all these views we

Lutherans maintain that God, who once spoke portion by portion and in various ways, and at various times through His prophets in the period of the Old Covenant, has spoken in these last days, that is, at the beginning of the Messianic Age, with finality and with unique clarity and sufficiency through His Son, and that this Son Jesus Christ has spoken by His Spirit through His chosen Apostles the authoritative Word of God, and that it pleased God to deposit His Word in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.

With the Formula of Concord we believe, teach, and confess:

Primum igitur toto pectore prophetica et apostolica scriptis Veteris et Novi Testamenti, ut limpidissimos purissimosque Israelis fontes, recipimus et amplectimur et sacras litteras solas unicam et certissimam illam regulam esse credimus, ad quam omnia dogmata exigere, et secundum quam de omnibus tum doctrinis tum doctoribus iudicare oporteat (Triglot, 850).

We therefore receive and embrace with our whole heart the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as the clear and pure fountain of Israel, and we believe only the Holy Scriptures to be the unique and most certain standard by which all teachers and teachings are to be judged.

The Content of Divine Doctrine

The term “doctrine” in the sense of “Scriptural doctrine” does not enjoy great favor in present-day Protestantism. Scriptural doctrine was oftentimes perverted even in the early days of Christianity. But in our day perhaps more so than before in the entire history of Christianity the very term “doctrine” is receiving rough treatment. In any case, the term is frequently regarded with an air of disdain and condescension. “Doctrine,” so it is claimed, only sharpens and deepens divisions among churches. Stress on “doctrine,” so it is argued, leads to static formalism and a dead faith. The term “orthodoxy” is scorned and made to resemble a fierce-looking scarecrow of which not only children but also adults need to be afraid. And so we find that the many formulations of Christian doctrine compiled in the days of the Reformation have hardly more than passing historical significance and carry little, if any, weight in many Protestant churches.

What is stressed in our day by many Protestants is not “doctrine,” but the “proclamation of the Gospel,” for which an important Greek New Testament word is “*kerygma*.” Thus we hear a great deal about “kerygmatic preaching.” Let us, so it is said, not take creeds, confessions, doctrinal formulations too seriously, for we have a superhuman job to do, we must “evangelize” the world. For, so it is sometimes put, faith in the New Testament is not faith in any creedal or doctrinal statement, but is faith in the person of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, God is not an “it,” about which we make statements and formulate definitions, He is not even a “He” regarding whom we might say many good things. God is rather a “Thou.” Therefore let us stress the “I-Thou” relationship between the sinner and God, and we will revitalize the faith of the Church and pave the way, in addition, for a coalition and unification of all Christian bodies. A distinguished theologian puts it this way:

Our dealing with God is of the nature of a dialogue rather than philosophic reflection. Revelation, then, in the Biblical sense, is a personal matter, not academic, as with a set of truths or propositions. Much Christian theology, it is true, has caused confusion here. Both Catholic and Protestant thinkers have been at fault, and have made the mistake of treating the Gospel as if it were philosophic, or speaking of it in terms of truth but forgetting that it is always personal truth. But recent Biblical scholarship has shown how misleading this is (E. C. Blackman in *Biblical Interpretation*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1958, 26-27).

Now, no one acquainted with the history of the Church will deny that Christianity has in some periods of its history created the impression that a set of doctrinal statements and creeds approved, confessed, proclaimed, and taught by the church was sufficient evidence of a vibrant living and personal faith. Every confessional church can, without a doubt, succumb to this danger. For it is possible to know and believe a great

deal of “doctrine” and yet to stand in no believing and trusting relation to God and the Savior Jesus Christ. “Doctrine” can be so one-sidedly stressed and its content so meticulously and exhaustively phrased and organized that a score of volumes may be needed to make explicit many of its implications. Nor will anyone deny that a living faith in the living God must always be a personal faith and a faith which does stand in an “I-Thou” relationship to God and Christ, a faith which manifests the new birth, the stirrings of the new life, the being in Christ, the living for Christ, the possession of the Spirit, genuine love of the brethren, a faith because of which the individual is prepared to suffer and to bring the supreme sacrifice.

And yet, though all this is true, there are two reasons why the Church must constantly be alive to “doctrine.” One is that whatever we know about God and Christ, about sin and salvation, about creation and the destiny of the universe, is made known to us by God in words, phrases, statements by His holy writers. They tell us, by way of illustration, who the true God is, who Christ is, what His relation is to the Father, who the Holy Spirit is and what He does, what it means to be saved, and what the nature of the Christian life is. These same Scriptures also supply Christians with the motivation and the power to believe and do what God says in the Scriptures. All this, assembled in however comprehensive a form, we call “doctrine.” To say, “I believe in Jesus,” but not to be aware that Jesus is the Son of God and also true man, that He fulfilled the Law for sinners, that He died and rose again in man’s stead, that He achieved for all mankind pardon for sin, release from the fear of eternal death, that because He arose from the dead, also His followers will arise bodily to eternal life, that He imparts to the Christian His life and enables him to serve Christ in righteousness, innocence and holiness--to have no knowledge of this may still be faith, but it is hardly a faith which knows whom it believes and which is capable to sustain one in the severe trials and temptations of life. But this is only one consideration. The other is this.

The New Testament repeatedly stresses not only the Gospel and its proclamation, but also the reality and importance of “doctrine” in a wider sense. We have such references particularly in Paul’s Epistles to Timothy and Titus and in the Epistles of John.

Having warned against scandalous sins, Paul simply concludes: “And if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine” (1 Tim 1:10)

2 Tim. 4:3: The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine

Tit. 1:9: Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught that he may be able to sound doctrine to exhort and convince the gainsayers.

1 Tim. 4:3: If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained.

2 John 9.10: 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 in your house.

Moreover, for Paul and John and other writers of the New Testaments “doctrine” is conceived of not only as a process of communication. Rather, for Paul and John and others who contributed to our New Testament, “doctrine” also has content, it has, as it were, building blocks, it is something that can be and should be known. Wholly apart from such injunctions as we quoted above, we need think only of the New Testament Epistles. Let us cast a quick glance into Paul’s Epistles to the Romans and to the Ephesians. In the former Paul declares and elaborates that all men, Jews and Gentiles, are under sin and what sin is; then he presents that grand doctrine known as Justification by Faith without the deeds of the Law; thereupon he speaks of the sanctified Christian life, sanctified by the Spirit of God; then he speaks of the certainty of the Christian faith; he also speaks explicitly of God’s foreknowledge and predestination; finally he provides in great detail directives

for Christian life and conduct. In his Epistle to the Ephesians Paul tells about the nature of the Christian Church, that it is constituted of both Jews and Gentiles; but here too, he points out how Christians, who are members of the Church, need to live. Why is the New Testament so full of “doctrine”? Because the apostles took seriously what Jesus had commanded them when He met them in Galilee after His resurrection and told them: “Go and teach, that is, make disciples of all peoples... teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19). Paul could therefore honestly tell the Ephesian elders: “I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). We think also of John who in his First Epistle calls attention to specific commands he had heard from the Lord. These John had always preached. Yet he found it necessary again and again to bring them to the attention of his readers. We remember also that the apostles filled with the Spirit of truth promised them by Jesus spoke as that Spirit directed them; for that Spirit brought to their remembrance all that Jesus had told them and led them into all truth.

To stress “doctrine” at the expense of personal faith and the “I-Thou” relationship between the Christian and God, or to stress “doctrine” at the expense of the “proclamation of the Gospel”, easily leads to formalism and a “dead” orthodoxy. Likewise, to stress the “I-Thou” relationship at the expense of the “doctrine,” or “the proclamation of the Gospel” at the expense of the “doctrine” can lead to a vacuous and baseless enthusiasm. We overcome both dangers by not separating what Scripture does not separate. Perhaps Paul and Luther give us a cue how to keep the two together, Paul writes to the Romans:

Rom. 10:9,10; If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

Thus Paul joins in one statement the confession made by the mouth, which necessarily has doctrinal implications, and faith which proceeds from the heart, which also has doctrinal implications.

We can also learn from Luther. In his explanations of the articles of the Apostolic Creed, Luther begins each explanation with “I believe.” This is followed by a “that” clause in which Luther enumerates what the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are and do. But in these “that” clauses Luther injects the “me” and the “my,” thus involving the personal faith of the Christian in his confession of faith. Luther says: “I believe that God has made me and all creatures...” I believe that Jesus Christ, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord who has redeemed me...” “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to Him, but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel,” etc. Then Luther speaks of the church: “Even as lie calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian church...” “ Thus we note in these explanations a confession of the content of the Christian faith, but also stress on the personal relationship of the believer to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

But Paul emphasizes not only the fact of “doctrine.” He not only is concerned about transmitting to Timothy as a sacred trust the totality of “doctrine” which he had preached and taught on all his travels; he is concerned also about “sound,” that is, “healthy, wholesome, true, right” doctrine (1 Tim. 1:10; 2 Tim. 4:3; Tit. 1:9; Tit. 2:1). His doctrine (2 Tim. 3:10) is the “doctrine of God our Savior” (Tit. 2:10). It is the “doctrine” which is “according to godliness” (Tit. 2:10), that is, the doctrine which is in conformity with the Christian faith (see Joachim Jeremias, *Die Briefe an Timotheus und Titus (Das Neue Testament Deutsch)*. Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1949, p. 36). For that reason Paul calls the “doctrine” “good,” that is, faultless and precious, doctrine: “If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained” (1 Tim. 4t&).

But, alas, as there is little interest in our day in “doctrine” as such, there is less interest in the ascertainment of “sound” and “good” doctrine. I must call attention, however, to a notable exception. That exception is the North American Conference on Faith and Order which convened in Oberlin, Ohio, Sept. 3-10, 1957. There was evident in that conference a genuine interest in the ascertainment of truth and of “sound” and

“good” doctrine as anyone who carefully studies the official report, which appeared under the title *The Nature of the Unity We Seek* (St. Louis: The Bethany Press, 1968), will grant. What the criteria were for Paul in determining what “sound” and “good” doctrine is, we noted above. It is the Christological interpretation of the Old Testament, it is the Gospel which he had received from the Lord Jesus, and it is the words of Jesus. In our day we would merely say: It is the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament with the constant accent on the article of Justification by Faith.

The Lutheran Church, and in our country particularly the Synods affiliated in the Synodical Conference, have sometimes been faulted because of their concern for “sound” and “good” “doctrine.” Professor Hermann Sasse’s observation is relevant at this Point. In one of his letters (“The Problem of the Confessions in World Lutheranism,” p. 108) he writes:

If the orthodox leaders in the fourth century had been more concerned about evangelizing than about defining Scripturally the nature of Christ, they might have done more evangelizing, but they would have lost the Gospel whose heart and center is Christ who is both God and man in one person.

Similarly, Lutheranism in the sixteenth century had to take most seriously the concept of “doctrine” and “pure” doctrine. For the leaders of the Lutheran Church in that period it was a most serious matter so to state their teaching that they could with a good conscience face the judgment seat of Christ. And so it was in the seventeenth century, that period which is stigmatized by many as “the age of dead Orthodoxy.” So it has been in the history of the Lutheran Church -Missouri Synod. This we need to recognize with humble gratitude to God and without any Pharisaic pride. But this concern of our church also means that we need constantly to examine “doctrine” in the light of Scripture. There is no other infallible authority in Lutheranism or outside of Lutheranism which is capable of determining with finality the purity and rightness of any aspect of the divine doctrine except the Holy Scriptures. Nor can any aspect of doctrine be valid if it cannot be demonstrated and supported Scripturally. What an obligation therefore also for our church constantly to examine its teaching with reference to its Scripturalness.

But, now, what is the content of divine doctrine? What is the content of the “faith” of which Jude speaks when he refers to “the faith once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3) and when he admonishes his readers: “Beloved, build up yourselves on your most holy faith?” (Jude 20). What is the “truth” a term so often used by John in his Epistles as when he writes: “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in the truth?” (3 John 4). What is that “Word” of which Paul tells Timothy that he should preach it in season and out of season, and that he should (surely with that “Word”) reprove, rebukes exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine? (2 Tim. 4:2). For it seems obvious that these terms “doctrine,” “faith,” “truth,” and even “Word” are closely related in meaning, and that in the passages referred to they suggest a specific and well-known content which must be preached, taught, and guarded against error. Therefore we ask: What, then, is “the doctrine,” or “the faith,” or “the truth,” or “the Word?” What is its scope and extent, what is its goal and purpose?

Since “the doctrine” comes from God, it deals with matters and events which reflect the greatness of God who makes Himself known in the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures. It deals with matters which transcend and even defy human thought and understanding. It deals with matters that to the human mind are incredible and foolish. Scriptural doctrine reaches back to the timeless ages of eternity before the foundation of the world, and it reaches forward to the timeless ages when there will be a... heaven and a new earth. It tells that the Father loved His Son “before the foundation of the world” Jn. 17:24). It tells that the Lamb without blemish and without spot, by whose precious blood we are redeemed, was foreordained, that is, destined “before the foundation of the world” to become man’s Savior (1 Pet. 1:19,20). It tells that God “has chosen us in Him (in Christ) before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before Him (Eph. 1:4).” This doctrine tells us that God created all things in heaven and on earth, all things visible and invisible, the hugest mountain ranges and the tiniest particle known to the physicist but not visible through the lens of the most powerful microscope. It tells also of the existence of invisible principalities and powers and leaderships and

dominions which surround man, but over which Christ triumphed and which He will at last consign to eternal darkness. But Scriptural doctrine tells, in particular, of God's Son whom the Father sent into the world to redeem sinful mankind, and of the manner in which God reconciled the world unto Himself and how He justifies sinners. Scriptural doctrine, therefore, has as its heart and center Jesus Christ come into the flesh, and the salvation wrought by Him for man.

We can never speak too often and too eloquently about Jesus Christ. All we have to do when we think that we have exhausted what might be said about Him is to reread and restudy the great Christological passages in Scripture, such as John 1:1-18; Eph. 1:19-23; Phil. 2:6-11; Col. 1:12-20; Hebr. 1:1-2:18; 1 Tim. 3:16; 1 Tim. 2:4-6; and many other passages, not overlooking the Messianic Psalms and the Messianic portions in Isaiah and other prophets. For who is Jesus Christ?

He is, summarily stated, the Alpha and Omega of the Scriptures. He is the mediator of all of creation, the mediator of redemption, and the consummator of the universe. He was destined by the Father before the foundation of the world to become the Lamb of God which would take away the sin of the world. He was foretold by the prophets in words and symbols. His conception and birth was announced by God through His Chosen messenger, an angel. He was identified by John the Baptist as the Lamb of God, and the Son of God. The Father, on two occasions, declared Him to be His beloved Son, and as God's Son He was convincingly attested through His resurrection from the dead. He was feared by demons, worshipped and served by angels, believed on by His disciples; taken up in glory: the victor over death and devil; the second Adam; superior to the Law, to Abraham, to Moses, to the Aaronic Priesthood, to John the Baptist, to the Temple; the one true Messiah as opposed to all false Jewish Messiahs; the Savior and Redeemer; the founder of -the church; the ruler of the universe; the King of kings and Lord of lords; the Judge to come; the image of God; God incarnate; God with the Father and the Spirit. Only He could say, as Augustine reminds us. "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Mt. 11:28).

Yet however important it is that He declared for us the Father and told man of the Father's love for a fallen world, that revelation by Him is transcendent by what He did. For in Him God reconciled the world unto Himself. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but for the sins of the whole world. By one offering He perfected forever them that are sanctified. "And this is His commandment: We should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as He (Christ) gave us commandment" (1 John 3:23).

But all that Christ did for our salvation, Paul comprehends under what we term the article of Justification by Faith without the deeds of the Law. Paul defines this article for us especially in his Epistles to the Romans and Galatians, but it is present everywhere in Scripture. It permeates all of Scripture, and so we call it the central article of Christian doctrine. It is that article which holds all other articles of Christian doctrine together. Of this article the Formula of Concord says:

This article concerning Justification by Faith...is the chief article in the entire Christian doctrine, without which no poor conscience can have any firm consolation, or can truly know the riches of the grace of Christ, as Dr. Luther also has written;

"If this only article remains pure on the battle field, the Christian Church also remains pure and in beautiful harmony and without *any* sects; but if it does not remain pure, it is not possible that *any* error or fanatical spirit can be resisted" (*Sol. Decl.* 111, 6; *Triglot*, 917).

Luther calls this article elsewhere "the teacher and chief, the Lord, ruler, judge over all kinds of doctrines." A Lutheran bishop recently wrote about this article:

This article, whose roots lie in the Trinitarian dogma and in the message of both the Old and New Testament, certainly is not an article of faith among many others, like one green tree among many green trees in the forest. It is rather that tree which makes green all trees. In the forest of articles of faith, that which vitalizes and determines all articles of faith because it makes audible to mankind the heart-beat of God in Jesus Christ

through the Holy Spirit (Bishop Hermann Dietzfelbiger in *Informationsblatt für die Gemeinden in den Neiderdeutschen Lutherischen Landeskirchen*. 1. September, 1956, p. 260).

It is this article which constitutes the heart and center of our Lutheran Symbols from the Augsburg Confession to the Formula of Concord.

But this teaching Justification by Faith without the deeds of Law not only brings about peace with God, it also becomes in the hearts of those who individually have been justified by God the great motive power for a life lived in accord with God's will. Those who have once tested the love of God in Christ will also love the brethren. Having become new-born children through the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, they also apply to themselves and seek to conform to all the directives which God supplies in His doctrine regarding the relation of parents to children, children to parents, spouses to each other, employers to employees, citizens toward the rulers of the state. They know that having been baptized into Christ and having put on Christ "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female" for they are "all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). There are no color and racial lines. They are eager also to do all in their power to evangelize the world and to that end support the church with their time and gifts and talents. Thus divine doctrine and the acceptance of divine doctrine with all its many facets, never becomes for Christians who are alive in Christ a mere set of doctrinal formulations subscribed to and believed, but a powerful dynamic for a consecrated life of holiness and service to their fellowmen.

But this consecrated life here on earth is for Christians only the prelude to that life in eternity where they will join the great hosts of prophets, apostles, martyrs and saints and sing eternal Hallelujahs to the Lamb that was slain and redeemed mankind by its blood, and to Him who sits upon the throne.

The Communication of Divine Doctrine

When we are born of God through the washing of Holy Baptism and thus become His children, we enjoy all the blessings and privileges which Jesus gained for us. We have forgiveness, life and salvation. We have confidence to enter into the heavenly sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way which He opened for us through His flesh. Whatever we ask the Father in Jesus' name, He will grant us. If we sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. If our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart. Though we are now the children of God, it does not yet appear what we shall be. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him; we shall see Him as He is. And when He returns in glory, He will raise our lowly and corruptible bodies to be like His glorious body. We shall then throughout eternity partake of the heavenly manna and drink of the fountain of living water forevermore.

Nevertheless, as children of God we enjoy not only great and wonderful blessings, but we also assume great responsibilities. Throughout our life it must be our aim to glorify, to praise, and thank God, the giver of all good gifts. Here we are to follow the example of Jesus Himself who consistently glorified His heavenly Father in His prayers and His actions. Paul directs us, "Glorify God in your body and your spirit, which are God's" (1 Cor. 5:20). Having reminded his readers how they were to use God's gifts, Peter closes on the note: "That God in all things might be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever, Amen" (1 Pet, 4:11). But we are to glorify God also in the interest of our fellowmen. Peter tells us: "Maintain good conduct among the Gentiles that, in case they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation" (1 Pet. 2:12).

Furthermore, we are to testify to, to witness to, to confess and not to deny the Gospel and the Lord Jesus Christ. We are to be able at all times whole-heartedly to say with Paul: "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ for it is the power of God unto salvation unto every one that believeth" (Rom. 1:16). This same Paul appeals to Timothy, "Be not ashamed then of testifying to our Lord" (2 Tim. 1:8). The Lord Jesus Himself commends the church in Pergamum: "Thou holdest fast my name and hast not denied my faith" (Rev. 2:13). He likewise commends the church in Philadelphia: "Thou hast kept my word and hast not denied my name" (Rev.3:8). That the Lord Jesus is most seriously intent that His disciples confess and not deny Him, we gather

from His saying: “Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven” (Mt. 10:32,33). John warns in his First Epistle: “Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son. Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father” (1 John 2:22,23). In passing we note that not only some churches deny Jesus Christ as the Christ, the Son of God, and the Savior of the world, but that this is done also in the ritualistic ceremonies of many fraternal societies. These ritualistic ceremonies deny Him frequently not by default, but by design, since they do not wish to offend those who regard Jesus of Nazareth a false Messiah. We need always to bear in mind that men worship idols if they worship a God other than the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

But Christians should also give an account and make a defense of their faith when this is challenged and questioned. Peter tells us: “Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you” (1 Pet. 3:15). Paul instructs Titus, “In your teaching show integrity, gravity, and sound speech that cannot be censured so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say of us” (Tit. 2:7,8). We are also to bear in mind that a Christian must be concerned to guard and preserve the faith. Paul writes: “Guard the truth that has been entrusted to you by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us” (2 Tim. 1:14); “Hold firm the sure word as taught” (Tit. 1:9).

Christians must be willing also to suffer for the truth. “Take your share of suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 2:3). To the Philippians Paul writes: “For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in Him but also suffer for His sake, engaged in the same conflict which you saw and now hear to be mine” (Phil. 1:29,30). From prison Paul writes Timothy: “Watch thou in all things; endure afflictions” (2 Tim.4:5). Paul did not hesitate to tell those early converts in Asia: “We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).

Christians are, furthermore, commanded to announce and proclaim to all the world the praises, that is, the great and mighty acts of God who called them by the Gospel out of darkness into His marvelous light. Though they are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, the new Israel, they are not to regard themselves a kind of a closed membership organization or secret society composed of God’s elite. They are not to be a community living by themselves in isolation from the rest of the world. They are rather to be God’s messengers, God’s angels, God’s ambassadors, God’s apostles to all people in the world, ringing the changes on the theme: “Unto you is born a Savior, Jesus Christ the Lord, He was crucified, He died. But God raised Him up from the dead and He lives forever. In Him God reconciled the world to Himself. You, too were reconciled to God through Christ. Believe in Him, and you will be saved.” This is the greatest responsibility and task of the church and of every Christian. For this we plan and pray and give and work: to proclaim throughout the world through posters, missionaries, over radio and TV the great and mighty acts of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light.

But Christians should not only glorify God, witness to the Gospel and to Christ, be prepared at all times to give an account of their faith, suffer for the truth, and proclaim to the world God’s mighty acts for the salvation of man. They should also perpetuate the teaching ministry of Jesus.

Jesus Himself taught. He was known as the “Teacher come from God” who made explicit to His disciples the doctrine He had received from the Father. Before He returned to the Father He commissioned His disciples to “teach them (the peoples of the world) whatsoever I have commanded you” (Mt 28:20). Paul in particular laid much stress on “teaching,” on communicating to others Christian doctrine. Twice in his epistles to Timothy he calls himself “a preacher and apostle and teacher” (1 Tim. 2:7; 2 Tim, 1:11). Luke records the charge brought against Paul when Paul was seized in the Temple after his return from his third journey: “This is the man who, is teaching men everywhere against the people and the law and this place” (Acts 21.28). The last item mentioned by Luke in the Book of Acts regarding Paul’s activity in Rome is that “Paul preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 28:31). In two of his epistles, Paul specifically lists “teachers” among the gifts given by the ascended Christ to His Church. “God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers...” (1 Cor. 12-28). “And His gifts were that some should be apostles,

some prophets, some pastors and teachers, for the equipment of the saints, for the work of the ministry for building up the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:11,12). We can therefore appreciate Paul’s directives to Timothy: “Command and teach these things” (1 Tim. 4:11); “Teach and urge these duties” (1 Tim. 6:2). “Be unfailing in patience and teaching” (2 Tim. 4:2), That teaching was actually done in the apostolic churches we gather from Acts 13:1, where Luke lists as members of the church in Antioch both prophets and “teachers,” and from Paul’s directive to Timothy: “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching” (1 Tim. 5:17).

Paul was concerned also that bishops, the chief leaders in the congregations, “be apt to teach,” that is, be competent to teach, for twice he singles out this qualification in his epistles to Timothy. Paul was equally concerned about what was to be taught. “A bishop... must hold firm to the sure word as taught, so that he may be able to give instructions in sound doctrine” (Tit. 1:9). “If any one teaches otherwise and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching which accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit, he knows nothing” (1 Tim. 6:3,4). “Charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine than the divine training that is in faith” (1 Tim. 1:3,4). Why was Paul so concerned that “teachers” teach “sound” doctrine? We discover two reasons. On the one hand, so he writes, “The time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander into myths” (2 Tim. 4:3, 4). On the other hand, Paul believed it his duty to do all he could that “sound doctrine” would be transmitted to coming generations. Therefore he writes: “What you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2).

What we have just said ought assure us that the apostles were most eager to carry out the command of the Savior: “Teach them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Mt. 28:19). Under the guidance of the Spirit they sought to proclaim and teach all that Christ had commanded them, and to proclaim and teach it in that sense in which Jesus Himself had proclaimed and taught it. Their further concern was that, since all peoples of the world were to be made disciples, it was their sacred obligation to see to it that individuals were especially prepared and educated to continue the preaching and teaching ministry of Jesus after the passing of the apostles. To this end there needed to be already in the apostolic church pastors and teachers.

When we seek to determine the content, the substance of “doctrine” which was taught in the early apostolic church, we find some clues especially in the epistle to the Hebrews. The writer of this epistle speaks of the “first principles of God’s Word” (Heb. 5:12) and of “the elementary doctrines of Christ” (Heb. 6:1). Among these he lists “instruction about ablutions, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment” (Heb. 6:2). These items he regards to be essential in what he calls “the laying of a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God (Heb. 6:1). The writer then exhorts his readers to progress to maturity in Christian knowledge and understanding and he censures them: “Though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of God’s Word” (Heb. 5:12). The same writer speaks also of “a confession” which his readers had made most probably at the time when they were baptized. Therefore he encourages them: “Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering” (Heb. 10:23). Thus it appears that already in the early church the fundamental aspects of Christian doctrine had been singled out and compiled in a kind of formal statement. It appears also from Paul’s admonition to the Ephesians that they be “no longer children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine” (Eph. 4:13,14) that Paul assumes the existence of a body of doctrine in which the Ephesian Christians had been instructed. Also from Paul’s introduction to his epistle to Titus, “Paul a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to further the faith of God’s elect and their knowledge of the truth” (Tit. 1:1), it appears inescapable that Paul is presupposing a substance of Christian doctrine with which those to whom he had brought the Gospel had become acquainted. Paul’s concern was to “further their knowledge of the truth.” When we recall, finally as we indicated above, that such terms as “faith,” “truth,” the combination “truth and faith,” and even the bare term

“Word” oftentimes parallel the term “doctrine” and refer specifically to what Christians were taught to believe, then it appears that already in the apostolic church there was a body, a substance of divine truth which was “taught” not only by the apostles but also by “teachers” in the congregations appointed for this special task.

At this point misunderstandings can arise and have arisen. The content of divine doctrine is never merely a body of information to be grasped and assimilated by the Christian’s intellect, stored away in his memory or his sub-conscious like most knowledge which we acquire day after day in secular matters. Therefore divine doctrine is not another philosophy however superior it might be to other philosophies. Nor is divine doctrine a kind of ethical system analogous to other ethical systems. As such it is sometimes regarded. In particular the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount are held aloft by people who have no use whatever for God’s revelation in Scripture of Himself and of His way of salvation. Nor is the unique nature of divine doctrine necessarily inferred from the noble and virtuous character of Bible heroes, saints, and martyrs whose lives some people believe should be imitated for the purpose of gaining God’s favor. Divine doctrine, though it comes to us through the mind and understanding, is never mere information or a mere challenge to better moral conduct. Rather, being “divine” doctrine, God Himself addresses the person who is brought under the influence of that doctrine. This doctrine uncovers for man the true nature of his being. It reveals to him his sinfulness. It rouses his conscience. It compels him to realize that he can do nothing to save himself from God’s fiery anger. But this doctrine - and this is its noblest and most sublime feature - also tells the sinner that in Jesus Christ he is holy and just in the sight of God and an heir of eternal salvation. This doctrine persuades him that it is divine and therefore absolutely authoritative. At the same time it fills him with the power of the Spirit to lay hold on the gracious promises in this doctrine, to rejoice in the proffered forgiveness, to love the brethren, to resist sin, and to tell and teach others about the doctrine he has learned.

The teaching of divine doctrine became a more and more significant factor in the expansion of Christianity following the apostolic period. Catechumens preparing for reception into the church were thoroughly taught the elements of divine doctrine. But even as errors crept into the “pure doctrine” when it was preached, so they also crept into the teaching of that doctrine. In course of time divine doctrine included not only the great articles of the Creeds, but also such false and unscriptural teachings as purgatory, invocation of saints, penance, and other commandments and doctrines of men. We owe it to Luther that, having discovered by God’s enlightening Spirit that the heart and center of divine doctrine is the sinner’s justification by God without any merit in man and purely as a result of God’s love and because of the substitutionary suffering and death of Christ, that Luther set about to have that “pure doctrine” also taught by parents to their children and by pastors and teachers to the laity of the church. To that end Luther wrote his two Catechisms, the Small and the Large Catechism. What blessings have come to the Church as a result of these Catechisms! What an incomparable though brief compend of the chief elements of divine doctrine the Small Catechism contains. Here we have, one should like to say, the purest exhibition of divine doctrine ever gathered in so small a compass!

The very mention of Luther’s Small Catechism must evoke in all of us most grateful recollections. Is it an overstatement that the overwhelming majority in this assembly learned what divine doctrine really is from their instruction in Luther’s Small Catechism in confirmation classes, in our schools and Sunday Schools? As a result of Luther’s great concern for the Christian training of the youth of the church a new day of Christian education dawned on the church. We are among the beneficiaries of that great blessing of God. Soon after our forefathers arrived in this country, they regarded it their sacred duty to establish schools for their children and schools for the education of pastors and teachers. Our forefathers and fathers bore in mind also that their preaching must also be teaching, and so we find that they stressed “doctrinal” sermons and also preached sermons on the Catechism. They also introduced what became known as “Christenlehre,” instruction for Christians in Christian doctrine. In this instruction the entire congregation participated. They also introduced Saturday schools. Later Sunday Schools were established and, only a few years ago, Vacation Bible Schools. In recent years more and more Bible classes have been called into existence for adults of all ages. Some larger Lutheran communities have arranged for Bible Institutes. Especially in the last decades our system of parish schools has enjoyed a remarkable growth. In most recent years Lutheran high schools have been built in cities

where there are concentrated constituencies of our people. Since 1925 consecrated members of our Church conduct a flourishing University at Valparaiso, Indiana, which provides for instruction in divine doctrine for men and women of college age. Synod as a Synod, that is, as a fellowship of many congregations throughout the country, is supporting two theological Seminaries (Springfield, St. Louis) for the theological preparation of pastors, two teachers colleges for the training of men and women teachers in our elementary schools, and almost a dozen colleges where students are prepared for admission to our theological Seminary at St. Louis. In addition, our Synod, for ninety years, maintains its own publishing house whose purpose it is to print and distribute Christian literature which reflects the divine doctrine entrusted to our Church. A large number of periodicals, also published by our Church, find their way into tens of thousands of homes of our members and provide them with that kind of reading material which strengthens and deepens their knowledge and appreciation of divine doctrine. Through a system of supervision by officials of our Synod, our church makes sincere efforts that we retain and pass on to our children the “sound” doctrine which we have inherited by God’s grace from our fathers.

Earlier in one of these essays we called attention to the great and intensive research that is being done also in the area of God’s Word, Holy Scripture. We may be certain that if this research is done in the fear of God, and if those who pursue it will at all times place themselves under the Word of God, then God will use the results of these efforts for the benefit of His Church. But those of us charged by our church to communicate divine doctrine on the elementary level or secondary level, in our colleges, Seminaries, and the University, need always to bear in mind what an eminent Lutheran theologian and professor at Wittenberg, Caspar Loescher, wrote way back in 1689 (he was the father of the celebrated and stalwart Lutheran theologian Dr. Valentin Ernst Loescher):

Truly, to convert a single soul to God, is a far nobler work than to create ten thousand masters, several thousand licentiates, or a thousand profoundly educated doctors, whom the most thorough education and learnedness is not able to save. (dates of Caspar Loescher: 1636-1718. See Loescher’s *Gelehrten-Lexikon* under “Caspar Loescher”)

We indeed need to teach the divine doctrine most thoroughly and to that end employ on all levels the best tools and methods available in our day. But we may do this only with that ultimate goal in view that our pupils, students, and all members of our parishes great and small, might grow in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ and of His Word, become strengthened in their faith, their love, and their hope, and that they too acquire that Christian assurance and joyous conviction which only the Holy Spirit can create through the Word of Scripture. To this assurance John in his First Epistle gives expression in the last three of his many “we know.” These three “we know” read:

We know that any one born of God does not sin (that is, does not sin willfully), but He (Jesus) who was born of God, keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him.

We know that we are of God, and the whole world is in the power of the evil one (that is, the devil). What a challenge to proclaim the Gospel in all the world!

We know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding to know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life (1 John 5:18-20).

With John’s assurance of triumph and victory in our hearts and on our lips may we continue to carry on the great work entrusted by God to our Synod and to each of us.