

# Concordia Theological Monthly



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## John Henry Charles Fritz, D. D. 1874—1953

ON SUNDAY, April 12, 1953, about 9:40 A. M., at Springfield, Ill., there was called to his eternal reward a churchman, pastor, educator, editor, and administrator of our Church who was highly esteemed both at home and abroad — John Henry Charles Fritz. Born on July 30, 1874, he reached the age of 78 years.

In Dr. Fritz' long and blessed ministry we find above all three outstanding characteristics that made him the useful servant of Christ that he was: pre-eminent gifts of leadership, wholehearted consecration to the divine Lord and His Word, and an undaunted, triumphant faith in his Savior.

He used his gifts of leadership as Vice-President (1915—1919) and President (1919—1920) of the Western District of our Church. He put them to use in still larger service as dean of men at Concordia Seminary (1920—1940), as organizer with others of the St. Louis Noonday Lenten Services, as co-founder of Synod's radio and television mission, as representative of Dr. J. W. Behnken at many District conventions, as promoter of numerous mission and educational drives, and other similar church ventures.

Dr. Fritz' leadership was both impelling and propelling: it propelled others as it impelled him. Wherever there were boards — mission, financial, or otherwise — his place was there to stir up people to action. He thus served for years on Synod's Constitutional Committee to supply pastors and congregations with plain and practical regulations for greater and better service. And always he proved himself a valuable Christian leader.

The eminent leadership gifts of Dr. Fritz were sanctified by wholehearted consecration to the Lord and His divine Word. He was reared in a Lutheran parsonage, his father, the Rev. John Fritz, before coming to America, having served for several years as a Lutheran missionary among the Arabs in Jerusalem. It was at Martin's Ferry, Ohio, that Dr. Fritz was born and received his first Christian instruction from his sainted mother, Catherine nee Kirchner. Later his father was called to a small parish near Frankenmuth, Mich., belonging to the Michigan Synod, where young John attended the parish school of our Frankenmuth Missouri Synod congregation. This was his first contact with the Church which later he served so loyally.

He received his later training in the public schools of Marshall and Albion, Mich., in Concordia College, Fort Wayne, Ind. (1888 to 1894), and in Concordia Seminary, St. Louis (1894—1897). At all these schools he was a pious and diligent student.

He proved his deep consecration to the Lord and His Church in the pastoral ministry, after his ordination on July 4, 1897, first, in his mission parish at Bismarck and Pilot Knob, Mo. (1897—1901), then in Brooklyn, N. Y. (*Our Savior*, 1901—1914), and at last in St. Louis (Bethlehem, 1914—1920). He evinced it, moreover, as professor of Church History and Pastoral Theology at Concordia Seminary (1920—1953), for after his honorable retirement he continued teaching in the Graduate School of the Seminary (1949 to 1953). His consecration to the Lord and His Word, moreover, showed itself in his work as an essayist at many conventions, as a contributor to the *Lutheran Witness* and the THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY, and its predecessors, and above all as editor of *Der Lutheraner* (1949—1953). His deep consecration appears also in his books, *The Practical Missionary*, *Pastoral Theology*, *Essentials of Preaching*, *The Preacher's Manual*. To Dr. Fritz the Word of God meant something very definite, namely, the entire Bible, inspired by God, the precious doctrinal content of the ecumenical creeds and the Lutheran Confessions. His consecration to the divine Word allowed no unionism or liberalism. As he grew older, he sought for expression of his devotion to the divine Word ever new ministries. For years he served the St. Louis Bible Institute as teacher, and almost to the end of his life he successfully conducted

a Bible class at Bethel Lutheran Church, of which he was also an active elder. Thus by word and pen he spoke the Word of God to thousands of people. His valuable services were recognized by Concordia College, Adelaide, South Australia, which in 1930 conferred upon him the degree of Doctor of Divinity *honoris causa*.

Dr. Fritz' wholehearted consecration to God and His Word was the sanctified fruit of an unflinching, triumphant faith in Christ, his Savior. This sincere faith showed itself first of all in his home life as a devoted husband and as loving father of two daughters (Mrs. Walter Baepler and Mrs. Adolph Meyer) and of one adopted son, Henry Fritz. On December 29, 1898, he married Emilie, nee Koerber, who survives him with the three children just named, ten grandchildren, and five great-grandchildren. He proved his ardent faith also by his service on Synod's Committee on Doctrinal Unity, for he was eager to bring about a truly Lutheran church union, by diligent church attendance despite his advanced age, by generous giving, by bearing with patience and fortitude the many trials of his long life, and especially by his joyous departure in the Lord. The last prayer which his son-in-law, Dr. W. A. Baepler, prayed with him was the simple child's bedtime prayer "Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep." He closed it with the words, emphatically added: "And this I pray for Jesus' sake," remarking after the "Amen": "Our faith is so simple and satisfying. Why don't people want to believe it?"

With Dr. Fritz "a prince and a great man has fallen" (2 Sam. 3:38). That was attested by his well-attended funeral and the appreciative comments on his ministry. May it be ours to remember him in his witness of the divine Word and his sincere, triumphant faith.

J. T. MUELLER