

# The Three Stages of Error

Gene Veith - April 25, 2012

Charles Porterfield Krauth was an American Lutheran theologian of the 19th century. His book *The Conservative Reformation* is a classic of theology and church history. You may perhaps have heard what he said about the three stages of error—from the request for **toleration** to a demand for **equality** to the imposition of **superiority** over truth—but thanks to Pastor Mark Schroeder for posting the actual quotation:

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

via *Steadfast Lutherans* » *Charles Porterfield Krauth’s Three Steps to Doctrinal and Ecclesial “Nihilism”*. <http://steadfastlutherans.org/?p=18553>