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AUGUST VILMAR'S *THEOLOGY OF FACT*
VERSUS
THE THEOLOGY OF RHETORIC

A SEMINAR PAPER SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF SACRED THEOLOGY

BY

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SAINT LOUIS, MISSOURI

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AUGUST VILMAR'S THEOLOGY OF FACT VERSUS THE THEOLOGY OF RHETORIC

When a small book, the *Theology of Fact Versus the Theology of Rhetoric*,¹ appeared in 1856, its immediate success probably surprised no one more than its author, the recently appointed professor of theology at the German University of Marburg, August Friedrich Christian Vilmar (1800-1868). Written in the early days of that year, by November it had gone into its third edition. The controversial author, widely known as an educator, pastor, philologist, author, editor, and church government official, had gone against the theological currents of his day. In questioning the method of theology practiced in its very disciplines, examining what he held to be fallacious presuppositions of a "scientific" theology, and in questioning the method of pastoral training and spiritual formation, he offered a radical departure from procedures accepted for generations. These ideas had been institutionalized in the secular universities of the German states, in the government mandates of union between Lutheran and Reformed confessions.

The book was polemical: attacking specific theological issues which had involved prominent names in the German universities, and it was dogmatic: addressing various doctrinal questions concerning the protestant churches in the German states, at that time a group of sovereign nations restored by treaty following the Napoleonic wars. Evaluations of Vilmar's book and the theology it presented have varied from enthusiastic support to condemnation by those who thought Vilmar's brand of Christianity unfounded.

The work and theology of August Vilmar has largely been neglected in this country even though he was a prominent theologian who lent substantial weight in a momentous effort to resurrect and restore the Lutheran confessions² to Germany in the first half of the nineteenth

¹A.F.C. Vilmar, Die Theologie der Tatsachen wider Theologie der Rhetorik [The theology of fact versus the theology of rhetoric] (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1984). This edition reproduces the third edition which Vilmar revised in 1856 and is the basis for the translation here. All citations of the book in this Preface are from this German edition.

²The term "Lutheran confessions" is used throughout rather than the more specific Book of Concord containing all of the Lutheran confessions. The former term is preferable when speaking of the Hessian Church

century. This translation is an attempt to recognize the vast contributions which Vilmar made to this effort and to identify those writings which would serve the church well today. Vilmar left no school of thought or method behind him as other great figures in the German universities often did. There are many reasons for this absence. Vilmar and his confessional movement were located in the German state of Kurhesse (also known as “Lower Hesse”). As a result of Kurhesse’s support of Austria in the Seven Weeks War of 1866, Kurhesse was annexed by the Prussian regime, and the union church of Prussia was forcibly imposed upon that country; the movement of Confessional Lutherans identified with Vilmar, centered in the Diocese of Kassel, was suppressed in the *Kirchenkampf* of the 1870’s; during this period the Prussian regime attempted to suppress by arrests and fines those congregations who would not participate in the church union imposed upon Kurhesse. Also, unlike similar Lutheran groups in other German states, the Lutherans of Kurhesse organized no migrations of emigrants to other lands as did the Saxons, Wends, Bavarians, and Prussians to America, so that their brothers in faith had little institutional contact with these Kurhessen Lutherans even though they faced common issues and addressed the church with a common language found in the Lutheran confessions. Nevertheless Vilmar, made an immense contribution to the confessing Evangelical Lutheran Church and left a legacy which both engages and enriches us today. Though no admirer of Vilmar, Karl Barth, who provided the world of his day with an alternative to liberal theology, calls attention to his enduring legacy which points beyond his own time.³ This translation is meant as a beginning, a first attempt to recognize the man of whom Hermann Sasse said, “Here is Vilmar, the great, lonesome conqueror of Schleiermacher in the nineteenth century.”⁴

since it did not adopt the last of the sixteenth century confessions, the Formula of Concord. Adoption of it was not an issue in nineteenth century Hesse. The Hessian Lutheran congregations, the “Renitenz Church,” finally adopted the Formula of Concord confession following the Second World War when it established fellowship with other Lutheran bodies.

³Karl Barth, *Die protestantische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert: Ihre Vorgeschichte und ihre Geschichte* (Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag AG Zollikon), 1947. Karl Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century: Its Background and History* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1973) (ET).

⁴Hermann Sasse, „Zur Einführung in Vilmars Theologie,“ *Lutherische Blätter*, XIV (1938), 11. This document is translated in the next section of this work, and provides a biography and evaluation of Vilmar. “*Hier ist Vilmar der grosse, im 19. Jahrhundert so einsame Überwinder Schleiermachers.*”

This preface will consider this “conqueror of Schleiermacher” as it examines the manner in which Vilmar presented the Theology of Fact and its alternative; it will do this in three areas which figure prominently in this book. First, Vilmar’s theological development is described. He not only possessed an orthodox understanding of Scripture and the doctrine of the Lutheran confessions, but he relentlessly asked the question of Luther, “What does this mean?” and found life in trusting the promises of God. Next, Vilmar has been examined at length in his substantive contributions to theology, but little has been said of his hermeneutical method; accordingly his method, his formal principles will be examined within the context of his times: Biblical hermeneutics and the presuppositions of theology. Finally, the doctrine of the church and the Office of the Holy Ministry will be examined as the substantive focus of Vilmar’s theology presented in this book.

The Rejection of Rhetoric and and the Discovery of Fact

In the theological issues of the early nineteenth century, Vilmar was to discover essentially two types of theology: that of fact which was not normed by the experience of individuals but by the experience of the church and was recorded in its dogmas. On the other hand there was that of rhetoric, which was the abstract, subjective speculation of individuals and bore no relation to the real life of the church at all. In locating this truth in the dogmas which had been discounted by the mainstream of theological thinking in his own day, Vilmar proposed a radical departure from presuppositions which had governed theological thinking in much of the Western world for over a century with the philosophies of Lessing and Kant, and more recently in the thought of Romanticists whose idealistic theology often promoted a purely subjective point of reference. Though a learned man and trained as a theologian, Vilmar saw no basis of truth in such philosophies or in a “scientific” theology (*Religionswissenschaft*) which considered all doctrine as so historically conditioned that there was no reasonable basis for it to be handed from one generation to another as the reality of salvation.

Vilmar found what he would call the “Theology of Fact” after a long search for truth in theology. In his rationalist theological training at the University of Marburg, an institution

typical for its day, he learned only that in the future everything would be forgotten. Included within the promised oblivion of all truth were the articles of doctrine which had sustained and been taught by the church from its earliest days:

These sections (articles of doctrine) were chiefly the ones on faith, on justification by faith, of the person of Christ, of the sacraments and of the gifts of grace by the Holy Spirit. But they had no meaning; they were meant only for pen and paper; they were chiefly meant for examinations, for learning and the subsequent forgetting of established words and formulas; all these things were schemes and schematics, chiefly good only to obtain a theological diploma (*chria aphthoniana*), and it was learned accordingly.⁵

In the Introduction to the Theology of Fact, he related a long and nearly fruitless search for truth: "I sought after certainty, for a firm basis, on which I could stand in the world, from where I could reach out and grasp the world with a strong hand." This certainty, this basis in fact eluded him as he searched through the rationalist theology which was a legacy of the Enlightenment. His one certainty became that of the certainty of nothingness:

... certainty – yes, that I found. Theology, as it was then, existed only in turning pages; of that I had no doubt. I left off turning pages and left off seeking after words. Words gave no certainty and no nourishment for life. I rejected the words and things which were not theology. In this, nothingness was also a reality.⁶

When Vilmar finally discovered the Theology of Fact, it stood in sharp contrast to the nothingness of the theology of his youth. This theology of nothingness he would label by its method: rhetoric. This rhetoric was not the ancient discipline of Cicero and other ancients who had so inspired Martin Luther. It is ironic that Vilmar's theology of nothingness would be called "rhetoric." In the effort of the sixteenth century reformers to free the western church from the abstract, Aristotelian theology of the late Middle Ages, rhetoric would prove an effective device to ground theology in the church's canon of Scripture and the historical experience of the church. Luther recognized that it was by faith that we are saved, and the trust of faith is trust in God's promises. By the time of Vilmar's day rhetoric had assumed a meaning often given it in today's use, empty talk, a discourse with no substance. Vilmar sought certainty, and he writes in

⁵Vilmar, Theology der Tatsachen, 1.

⁶Ibid., 2.

this Introduction of this effort, "Instead it was dark and became darker, ever darker in this dogmatic; 'immortality' would be dubious to us; the forgiveness of sins was merely a futile way of speaking (*modus loquendi*) of the 'moral endeavor,' and the sacrifice on Golgotha was reduced to nothing."

The Lutheran confessions played a large role in bringing Vilmar this theology of fact. In 1817 Germany attempted to restore itself; it could not be politically united, then it sought out those aspects of its culture which were not those of a bankrupt Enlightenment. Its abstract concepts were made so repugnant by the occupation by Napoleon, by the imposition of a code of law which had no basis in the experience of the German nations, and by a forced alliance which had brought mischief and untold grief to households throughout the German lands. Following Napoleon's defeat at Leipzig by a resurgent Germany and his final defeat at Waterloo in 1814, the German states sought to restore (*Restauration*) themselves and free themselves from the burden of the Enlightenment. The Treaty of Vienna (1815) was the occasion for the nations of Europe to reestablish themselves in this fashion in politics no less than in religion. In the midst of a religious awakening (*Erweckungsbewegung*) the traditionally Protestant lands of northern Germany found a religious basis in the Augsburg Confession whose tercentennial was conveniently on the horizon in 1830.

The celebration surrounding the remembrance of the Augsburg Confession would not be entirely beneficial for Lutheran Christians. For Vilmar and his fellow confessional Lutherans, the 1817 Prussian Union proclaimed by the Prussian king, Frederick William III, set an example for numerous other German lands for a similar union between the Reformed and Lutheran confessions. It appealed to those who increasingly saw points of agreement in doctrine as a closer exposition of the Christian faith than points of disagreement; not entirely freeing themselves from the Enlightenment, many Germans were prepared by it for a general religious toleration and were now inclined to carry it forward to the removal of confessional distinctions. Numerous other German states enacted church confessional union following the Prussian example: Nassau (1817), Hanau, the Rhineland Palatinate, Waldeck and Pyromont (1818),

Anhalt-Bernburg (1820), Baden and the Hessian Rhinelands (1821), and Württemberg (1823).⁷ But there were other religious currents running which did not converge with this confessional novelty, and would strenuously oppose it as a product of what Vilmar dismissed as the “Theology of Rhetoric.”

The obliteration of confessional distinctions by political fiat aroused the opposition of many leaders who considered the Lutheran confessions to be a true exposition of the Christian faith, and opposed the increasing tendency, also inherited from the Enlightenment, for each man to find his own religious authority. For Vilmar, this tendency for individual autonomy would be inimical to true Christianity and would produce a theology without any authority or basis other than the individual’s own subjective speculations. This was the Theology of Rhetoric which was the theology of darkness.

The question of confessional subscription became politicized. A wave of political liberalism was sweeping Germany and much of western Europe in the wake of the restoration following the Treaty of Vienna. The desire to free the church from confessional and thus “party” spirit was akin to the liberals’ hope for a political arena where individual conscience would be the defining factor in the citizens political allegiance. The *Theology of Fact versus the Theology of Rhetoric* was one of many confrontations, not only between political forces, but also between the parties of various confessional views. These matters of religion could not be separated from the highly charged political environment in Vilmar’s country of Kurhesse following the Revolution of 1848. This revolution was only one of four revolutions which Vilmar identified as framing the activities of a very active life; these revolutions were two “from above,” the conquest of Kurhesse by the French Army of Napoleon in 1806 and the annexation of Kurhesse in 1866 by the Prussia. The other two revolutions which played such a significant role in this life were the Revolutions of 1830 and 1848 which swept into Germany from France. Vilmar was to observe

⁷Walter H. Conser, Church and Confession: Conservative Theologians in Germany, England, and America, 1815–1866 (Mercer: Mercer University Press, 1984), 18.

that in the first and last he could only be an observer, but in the second and third he was active in his opposition to them.⁸

Hermeneutics and the Task of Theology

What has largely been overlooked are the hermeneutical issues which dominated Vilmar's critique. Formal principles governing interpretation had long been rationalist and had been institutionalized in the universities of the German states beginning with the University of Berlin in 1809. Its founders were such luminaries as the philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814) and the theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), since known as the "Father of Modern Theology." Both believed that the study of theology was a science and could and should be approached without presuppositions. To secure this self-assumed, unexamined objectivity, the university was established as theologically neutral though it was mandated to train clergy for the churches of the land. Could a university do this though it claimed to have no confession? A persistent theme in the *Theology of Fact* is an emphatic denial.

The founders of this university echoed the views of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) whose rationalism led him to criticize the theological faculty at the University of Königsberg where he produced his *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*. He saw the three higher faculties of theology, medicine, and law to be founded on statutes rather than reason. By contrast the philosophical faculty where he served "was accountable for the truth of its teaching and must therefore be 'free, standing only under the jurisdiction of reason, not of government.' The three higher faculties have usefulness as their aim; that of philosophy serves truth."⁹ Theology was seen as a coupling of practical skills and revelation; it could not be called a science and therefore its place in the university was questionable. Thus Fichte thought that the tasks for the study of theology should be divided between philosophy, history, and philology. His opinions were not incorporated into the organization of the new university model, but they expressed the accepted wisdom of the day: theology with presuppositions was not a science, and only science had a

⁸Walter Schwartz, August Friedrich Christian Vilmar: Ein Leben für Volkstum, Schule, und Kirche (Berlin: Im furche-Verlag, 1938).

⁹Hans Frie, Types of Christian Theology, edited by George Hunsinger and William C. Placher (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), 105.

place in this new university.¹⁰ Therefore the direction that theology would take in a secular university would be that of a science claiming a self-asserting, rationalist lack of presuppositions.

By 1856 this model of the secular university training the pastors of Christian churches had long since become the standard model throughout Germany; it seemed that everyone looked to Berlin for the model of the scientific university, whose premise was that subjects should be taught scientifically with no presuppositions, with all issues divorced from their context. Vilmar found this hermeneutical principle deficient and destructive of the Christian faith. He has often been the subject of studies on the substantive content of his theology, but rarely has anyone recognized that his critique in this book and others was essentially hermeneutical, and his theology could not be properly accessed without an understanding of his hermeneutical method applied both to Scripture and doctrine.

As stated earlier, his hermeneutic, his theory of interpretation, was radical for his time. It relied on “critical retrievals,”¹¹ such as the 16th century Lutheran confessions and especially the Augsburg Confession (1530). He saw the task of theology as essentially internal, not relying on “presuppositionless science” which he branded a sham theology. Such theology of science was external to the church and its dogma which described its experience throughout history. In his own day he recognized and denounced the confusion of the theological disciplines as the witness to the events and the experiences of the real life of the church resulting from their reduction “science,” which he denied could be applied to theology. Rather, dogma and ethics reflected the true life of salvation as it reflected the true life of the church; it reflected the connection between belief and practice. He recognized that abstractions of individual were little more than speculation and were based upon unexamined presuppositions. It recognized the truth of

¹⁰Ibid., 92-106.

¹¹This term is taken from William Placher in his book The Domestication of Transcendence: How Modern Thinking about God Went Wrong (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1996).

theology not as abstract and subjective but relational and normative for its adherents within their confessional body. The life of the church was described in its confessions.¹²

Such a hermeneutic reminds us of postmodern thought in our own day, and especially the writings of postliberal theologians of the last two decades such as George Lindbeck, Joseph Dileo, William Placher, Hans Frei, and Anthony Thiselton. Indeed it could be argued that such a hermeneutic which views the task of theology as essentially internal, and indeed we would today also critically name "nonfoundational," and constructively as "descriptive,"¹³ would not be found in such a comprehensive form again until the writing of *Church Dogmatics* by Karl Barth several generations later. Though such thinking has not in our own day advocated unified aims, content, or goals, it nevertheless has put forward formal, not substantive, principles and continues to be of interest to any student of hermeneutics. It is especially useful to examine the academic situation of Vilmar's time and the theology which anticipated so much of what is now discussed in our post critical age.

Vilmar identified two types of theology based upon their method and presuppositions: one of fact and one of rhetoric. The former was the life of the church, its common experiences throughout its history expressed in doctrine, and the other, one of abstraction, divorced from the life of the church in academic theology.¹⁴

Hans Frei has described the two types of theology which parallel what Vilmar identified in this book. One is *Wissenschaftslehre*, or scientific teaching, which applied not just to those subjects which we now call "science" but were an inquiry into principles justifying all systematic method and explanation.¹⁵ This form of theology based its method on disciplines outside of theology proper such as those Fichte and Kant had favored. The other type is that favored by Vilmar who denied that theology can be a science in this manner; rather theology is a matter

¹²Vilmar, *Theology of Fact*, 36ff.

¹³The terms "nonfoundational" and "descriptive" have been used by Ronald F. Theimann in *Constructing a Public Theology: The Church in a Pluralistic Culture* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 23, and *Revelation and Theology*, 23.

¹⁴Frei, *Types of Theology*, 2, for a discussion of academic theology see page 116ff.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 98.

internal to the life of the church. The type he advocated consisted of first order statements, Scripture, and second order statements, those of doctrine. This second method is especially congenial to Lutheran theology; since the 16th century Reformation it had recognized the role of the Bible as the norming norm (*norma normans*). That is to say that contemporary issues and philosophy may pose questions of the church and its theologians but orthodox Lutheranism is nonfoundational, basing its truth claims not on philosophical presuppositions but on Scripture. nd

Vilmar criticized the "scientific" foundational method for its inconsistencies in its method and in its conclusions alike: "...the essence of rhetorical theology is inconsistency, employing dialectical method, distinguishing it from (genuine sciences) of geometry and astronomy."¹⁶ He compares it unfavorably to the exact sciences which attain mathematical precision, but he does not number theology among the sciences at all:

It is an itch for new findings, an itch for new discoveries, by which the theology of rhetoric is constantly plagued, and from which it cannot be freed. It has no Neptune in its orbit whose existence can simply be determined by mathematical calculation....(as Leverrier had done in the 18th century).¹⁷

Vilmar cites proofs of these inconsistencies which had developed relatively recently, and it might be argued have not been resolved even today:

They have chosen the area of Biblical literature to make these discoveries. But it remains only a knowledge of vocabulary and art of grammar with the distinction between Pauline and Petrine use of language, with the conflict of Yahweh against the Elohist, with the change of order and the age of Biblical books, etc.¹⁸

He remarks that these deficiencies and inconsistencies are found with respect to both the Old and New Testaments. He rejects any possibility of the theology of rhetoric as scientific in any genuine way:

These things are the results of the "science" of rhetorical theology, the results of its discoveries. It does not strike me as necessary to completely reject their work, but to claim these things as theological science is laughable. They (the theologians of rhetoric) are indescribably laughable as they present themselves

¹⁶Vilmar, *Theologie der Tatsachen*, 22.

¹⁷Ibid., 24.

¹⁸Ibid.

to people of real science, of natural research, before all the botanists and astronomers, the doctors and even the philologists....¹⁹

Vilmar compares the method of rhetorical theology to placing the parts of a dissected human body together and making the claim that one could know the person as it was when it was alive.

He specifically dismissed the subjective attempt by David Friedrich Strauss (1808-1874) to make the Gospel accounts acceptable. In his *Life of Jesus* (1835) the narratives about Jesus are explained as the attempts of Jesus' followers to honor their leader who only eventually came to recognize himself as the Messiah. The results of this scientific method used for Biblical exegesis were here carried to their logical extreme. He attempted to answer the question he now posed of how to relate the Jesus of faith reflected in traditional dogma to the Jesus of history, a Jesus who could not be found in factual narrative of the Bible. He discovered that the meaning of the narratives was to be found in the author's consciousness which was conditioned to its cultural-religious context; he identified this meaning as myth. Meaning was now found in a new way, in some other conceptual framework, some other story, some other world. Before Strauss, explication and application were only formally different; now they were substantively different as well. One of the far-reaching effects of this view was the assertion of Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872) that divine-human reconciliation is the "divine reconciliation power of the human race."²⁰ Vilmar equally rejected this assertion of Feuerbach who sought to explain religion as nothing more than the projections of the reason, emotion, and love innate in people. In particular his *Essence of Christianity* (1841) claimed that Christian faith was but a dream in which people worship and deify their own natures.²¹ The author of *Theology of Fact* dismisses this dialectical theology as a concept which "disintegrates theology for everyone." The parts of

¹⁹Ibid., 24, 26.

²⁰Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven and London: 1974), 224-226, 233-244.

²¹Vilmar, *Theologie der Tatsachen*, 13-14.

theology only have existence in "connection with the whole of divine life to which it belongs;" "as simple parts they mean nothing and are self-contradictory."²²

Vilmar was quick to anticipate the result of their method and critiqued the inevitable result of their science in theology:

To apply this concept of science in its full authority to theology is a case of antitheology It is the theology of Strauss in his reference to form and correct method, and the content of his extremely foolish books (the Christian doctrine, in its historical development and in struggle with the modern science depicted in 1840), thereafter it is the theology of Feuerbach, and after him others with inferior talent who consequently used this concept in theology. The complete and logical use of this concept can only disintegrate theology for everyone who uses it. The parts and members of theology have existence only in connection with the whole of the divine life, to which they belong. Beyond that, it means nothing and is invalid and self-contradicting to say that they are simply parts which might or might not be added to the constructed whole. It is invalid and self-contradictory precisely because this ability or inability to place them arbitrarily together departs from the essence of theology.²³

Instead of this academic theological method which Vilmar labeled a concept of disintegration, he proposed a hermeneutic of restoration, not the rationalist approach of skepticism.²⁴

The 18th century sought to determine if the Bible really was revelation or only some other material of a religious nature. The predominant issue early in the 19th century became the separation of faith and history occasioned by Strauss. At this juncture the task of Biblical scholarship increasingly became one of locating a meaning not ostensibly reported in the narrative. Hence, Vilmar would complain that those topics which we today label "isogogics" occupied by far the largest portion of the curriculum. The search for meaning beyond the plain meaning of the Biblical accounts included those who believed that the text's meaning could only be found in a moral truth which stood outside of the Scriptures. Then there were those who believed that the texts were myth, though as Hans Frei clearly shows, this myth was of a type which the ancients did not know. And then there were those like Vilmar who believed in the

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid, 22.

²⁴Frei, Types of Theology, 12.

ostensive meaning of the Scriptures, believing that the physical, historical events reported actually happened.²⁵ Consequently, the historical circumstances assumed a much greater role for the study of the Biblical accounts. This resulted in a demise of Biblical knowledge among pastors. Vilmar writes of their university instruction in the Bible:

‘One who has thoroughly worked through the introduction, can dispense with almost entirely with exegesis’ has become a routine axiom for young theological students, and one not entirely in error, because a large part which is addressed in the introductory material repeats itself again in the exegetical lectures, but in expanded form, and it specializes in the minutiae. Often the introduction to Holy Scripture, it should be explained, takes almost half of the entire lecture time. Indeed for a period of years already I have seen one very reputable university teacher’s basic lecture on the *Epistle to the Romans* in which the introduction filled three quarters of the entire lecture.²⁶

Vilmar not only regretted the time lost to the actual study of the texts but attributed it to the same malady which afflicted all theology. Its claims of objectivity dictated a method which disregarded the experience of the church. In particular the Biblical theology of his day produced interpretations which bore claims of objectivity but ignored the experience of the church as it had been handed down; the worst kind of mischief resulted. He criticized Biblical theology which had become an alternative to doctrine in many circles:

... Biblical theology bears the impression of subjectivity by current teachers as if they possessed a lasting significance and were part of its essential substance, and a necessary part of its being. Biblical theology can be good, but it can also be absolutely bad. ... Biblical theology bears the impression of uncertainty in itself. But of course it leads to the claim of objectivity. In Biblical theology no one wants “to mediate” in order not to appear subjective, but the experience of the church must not be allowed to intercede in order to teach unscientific church theology; it is easy in that case, to teach the sentences of Holy Scripture “unmediated,” i.e. really, as conflicting statements standing next to each other. And that is precisely nothing other than the worst subjectivity.²⁷

The solution for this situation in teaching the Scriptures consisted of several elements. First the students are to learn the content of Scripture and this of course in the original Biblical

²⁵Frei, *Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, 256–266.

²⁶Vilmar, *Theologie der Tatsachen*, 26.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 32.

languages. Next the teachers are to demonstrate this knowledge and apply it to their role as masters of the theological disciples whom they instruct. Next the course of study would include an entire reading of the Bible. Vilmar is convinced that immersion in this word of the Holy Spirit, this word flowing from the very springs of life, would bring a peace and joy which can only be found there and would allow the future pastors to impart it to their congregations as well.

The Church

Vilmar's substantive theology of the church may be examined in two parts, each addressing an issue of his time. The first was doctrinal definition of the church as an institute of Christ in response to the view of the church from Schleiermacher which held that the church was really only a voluntary assembly of believers who agreed on a common view of doctrine. The former definition focused on God; the latter definition focused on man. The other issue was to protect the governance of the church from political interference. The theology of the Office of the Ministry was an integral part of both views. These questions dominated the religious discussion in Lower Hesse in the decades before its annexation. Those two parts of Vilmar's theology and his actions will be examined here.

The challenge to the doctrine of the Church assumed a large role in the early 19th Century. So widespread was this concern that the camp of his enemies included Prussian conservatives who advocated the union of the protestant denominations, Reformed believers, Pietists, and those influenced by the Enlightenment who were enemies of any form of particularism. In fact, the one uniting factor of these diverse groups was an antipathy to Confessionalism.

A vital part of Vilmar's theology was that of the living efficacious Spirit who is in Holy Scripture and who acts in and through the experience of the Church, the experience to which the Confessions pointed:

People seem to act as if the Christian faith originally was begotten from the written Word and as though Holy Scripture were not only the norm but the

absolute source of the Christian faith; but the source of Christian faith is Christ - not a distant historical Christ but an eternal living Christ, who still lives today and who through the Holy Ghost is still an efficacious Christ today. All of these well calculated and well grounded theories about Scripture and hedges around Scripture will do no good for the pure doctrine of the Church, if one has no eyes to see the living Christ, to see from Him into Scripture and from Scripture into Him.... The confessions come from the depth of the heart; they come from the life of the Church itself, and are not adopted by it, but are produced and are experienced by a Christian generation and have as its other purpose to pass them on to the next generation, as a church treasure, a safely guarded treasure to the world to come. To adhere to the Symbols is nothing else than to recognize the experiences of the Church as such and to live according to these experiences and to know them and appropriate them as one's own experiences. But not to recognize the Symbols is nothing else than to disown the Church and the history of her own experiences, to claim that she should not have formed these experiences, or to assert that her experiences have become wholly or partly frauds.²⁸

Vilmar employed the term of Friedrich Julius Stahl (1802–1861) who described the church as an “organic institute.” This theme of the organic church borrowed terms found in the Romanticism of the early nineteenth century and its philosophy of idealism. It recognized that the church was the body of Christ, instituted by him; it was the very “I (*ich*) of Christ.”

...what we before carefully only called an expansion of the personality of Christ, it is not alone maintained as such, but still more certain is it indicated, that for the world Christ substantially appears in the church: the “Ich” of Christ (person) shows itself in the members of the church, who are members of a body, different in manifestation, but the same in substance.²⁹

²⁸August Vilmar, *Dogmatik*, vol. II (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1874), 103, 129; translated in Edward Frederick Peters, “The Sacraments and Sacramental Actions in the works of August Friedrich Christian Vilmar” (STM Thesis, Concordia Seminary, 1958), 16. This thesis lists in fn. 2 this quote as found in *Dogmatik*, vol. II, p. 130. It actually is two passages found on p. 102-103 and p. 129: *Man stellt sich gerade so an, als wenn der christliche Glaube ursprünglich durch das geschriebene Wort erzeugt worden, als sei die heil. Schrift nicht nur Norm, sondern absolute Quelle des christlichen Glaubens, während die Quelle des christlichen Glaubens doch Christus und zwar nicht ein historisch abgethaner Christus, sondern der noch heute und allezeit lebendige, durch den heil. Geist noch eben so wie vom Anfang der wirksame Christus ist; alle noch so wolberechnete und wolgegründete Schriftheorie und Schriftverzäunung hilft nichts für die reine Lehre der Kirche, wenn nicht Augen da sind, welche den lebendigen Christus sehen, als Ihm heraus in die Schrift und wieder aus der Schrift heraus in Ihn sehen Die Bekenntnisse sind somit aus dem innersten Herzen, aus dem Leben der Kirche selbst hervorgegangen, nicht von derselben angenommen, sondern von derselben produciert worden und haben seinen andern Zweck, als die Erfahrungen, welche eine christliche Generation gemacht hatte, für die folgende Generation festzustellen, sie als einen Kirchenschatz, ein in Sicherheit gebrachtes Seligkeitsgut, der Nachwelt unversehr zu überliefern. Sich zu den Symbolen bekennen, heisst also nichts anderes, als die von der Kirche gemachten Erfahrungen als solche anerkennen, diese Erfahrungen nacherleben, und dieselben als seine eigenen Erfahrungen wissen und empfinden. Die Symbola nicht anerkennen, heisst dagegen nichts Anderes, als der Kirche in das Gesicht ihre eigenen Erlebnisse ableugnen -- fordern, dass sie die von ihr gemachten Erfahrungen nicht solle gemacht haben, oder behaupten, dass tiefe Erfahrungen ganz oder teilweise Täuschungen gewesen seien.*

²⁹Vilmar, *Dogmatik*, vol. II, p. 192. “... was wir vorher vorsichtig nur eine Expansion der Persönlichkeit Christi genannt haben, nicht allein als solche bestätigt, sondern noch bestimmter dahin angegeben wird, dass für die Welt Christus wesentlich in der Kirche zur Erscheinung komme: Christi Ich (Person) zeigt sich in den Gliedern der Kirche, die eben Glieder sind an Einem Leibe, verschieden in der Aeusserung, aber Derselbe in der Substanz.”

This “incarnational” view of the church lent it objectivity which was lacking in the subjective view of the congregation as merely a society of like-minded believers. It was the experience of the church found in the confessions which were the result of its life in this world. The source of this life was God himself who sustained the church with the streams of life, that is by the means of grace, by the very presence of the Holy Spirit. Organic thinking in nature held that nature and spirit come together in this world and are found in the government, literature, and other manifestations of culture in any given period. This manner of thinking was given expression by Johann Adam Möhler in the Roman Catholic Tübingen School and is reflected in his *Symbolik* (1832). It influenced Vilmar in the 1830’s as he sought to express the view of the church provided in the Augsburg Confession.³⁰ The organic view of the church recognized the inflowing of the Holy Spirit by the means of grace; to describe the church as “organic” recognizes a unity of the whole as well as its source of its life, originating externally, and drawing the church to that source of life.³¹ The language of German idealism is employed with eloquence in the beginning of Chapter 2 of *Theology of Fact* as Vilmar shows this relationship between God and the life of his church.

It is like the inexhaustible water supply in the mountains, out of whose unfathomable secret fountains thousands of springs break forth from deep, interior, natural pressure, and go down into the valleys and plains, flowing along as brooks and rivers. Then they form into lakes and ascend in powerful springs, until the secretive draft reaches the heights of the mountains from which they came, back to the source of their life. There they dissipate into fog, clouds and rain, so that they can then again descend onto the mountain tops from where they once started as small springs.

There is a similar power of God, who brought forth through his entire creation the living waters, these springs and streams, and in his cycle of creation returns them again to their source. This same power of the living God also proceeds from a hidden source of his essence, his eternal power and divinity. He likewise sends forth the streams of his revelation among the race of mankind, so that this race should not be created alone from these springs and bathe in these streams while they otherwise belong to another element, but that they should be entirely and thoroughly submerged. They should live

³⁰Friederich Wilhelm Kantzenbach, “Vilmar’s ‘Theologie der Tatsachen’ und die ‘Symbolik’ Johann Adam Möhlers” in *Zeitschriften für Kirchen Geschichte* 73, No. 3–4 (1959), 254–256. Also Wilhelm Maurer „Der Organismusgedanke bei Schelling und in der Theologie der Katholischen Tübinger Schule.“ Essay in *Kirche und Geschichte: Gesammelte Aufsätze* 1 (Göttingen, 1970), 29–79.

³¹Wilhelm Maurer, *Aufklärung, Idealismus, und Restauration*, 2. (Giessen, 1930) 251ff.

with their whole being in these sources and streams of the divine life, just as the fish has his entire life in living water, and he has his entire existence there.³²

This experience of the church is also a feature of the liturgy where Christ comes to his people with his saving word and his sacraments. It is with these means of grace that the church receives the living Christ and the gift of salvation is assured, delivered, and appropriated, just as it was among the Christians of previous ages. Vilmar maintained that the doctrine of the church was still unfolding. The 19th century saw a growing discussion of the doctrine of the church, and uncompleted doctrine, noted August Vilmar.³³ He identified his age with the breaking of the sixth seal in the Book of Revelation. It would be this age of the clarification of the doctrine of the church which would be accomplished with the breaking of the sixth seal. The breaking of the seventh seal was the realization of the doctrine of the last things.³⁴ In this regard he also assigned a teleological role to the Christian Church. Its doctrine would continue to unfold bringing it into the last times. Vilmar thought that the doctrine of the Christian Church as found in the Confessions was incomplete and would eventually be completed in the future. Nevertheless he felt this doctrine was correct as far as it went.

At this juncture we examine Vilmar's use of the Latin word *exhibere* as it is found in the Confessions. In his *Dogmatik* he cited several references of this word which serve to illustrate the meaning of its usage in the confessions and point to the emphases on "*exhibitiv*" in his theology of the sacraments, particularly the Lord's Supper. In his discussion of the way in which sacraments in general are beneficial, he cites AC VIII (*Quid sit ecclesia?*): "*Et sacramenta et verbum propter ordinationem et mandatum Christi sunt efficacia, etiamsi per malos exhibantur.*"³⁵ This passage connects the understanding of the church with the benefits offered

³²Vilmar, *Theologie der Tatsachen*, 11–12.

³³Hermann Sasse, "Article VII of the Augsburg Confession in the Present Crisis of Lutheranism (Letters to Lutheran Pastors, No. 53, April 1961), " in *We Confess the Church* (We Confess Series 3), tr. Norman Nagel, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986), 45.

³⁴Peters, "The Sacraments in August Vilmar," STM Thesis, Concordia Seminary, 1958, p. 20.

³⁵*Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, 11th ed., (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992), 62.

in the sacraments. Further he cites AC XIII (*De usu sacramentorum* .): “*Itaque utendum est sacramentis ita, ut fides accedat, quae credat promissionibus, quae per sacramenta exhibentur et ostenduntur.*”³⁶ Here in discussing the benefit of the sacraments, Vilmar asserts that the sacrament will only benefit if it is received in faith. “Promises, offered...will be put out as grace only insofar as they are received by men or rejected, in faith or unbelief, to blessedness or judgment.”³⁷ We begin to see the importance of the exhibitiv nature of the means of grace and their relation to the church as Vilmar observes that the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the sacraments existed before any church congregation was founded. The exhibitiv nature of all sacramental action is the means of the essential, constant, and personal presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church. The visible means of grace accompanies a pronounced doctrine of the Holy Spirit in his theology.³⁸

In defining the church he attacked the distinction of the Reformed Church of the visible and invisible church. He used the Augsburg Confession V to point to the visible aspects of the church since the church was only found where it was gathered around Word and Sacrament. He made a distinction between the *communio sanctorum* and the *sancta ecclesia catholica* . The former refers to the members of Christ’s Body as distinguished from the hypocrites and evil people who were also to be found around the Word and sacraments. Those of the *communio sanctorum* are included within the *sancta ecclesia catholica* . Hence the Church was visible since it could be equated with the baptized.³⁹

³⁶Ibid., p. 68.

³⁷August Vilmar, *Dogmatik*, vol. II (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 11874), p. 232-233. “*Verheissen, angeboten (wie der deutsche Text von Art. 13 sagt) wird die Gnade nur in sofern, als sie den Menschen zur Annahme oder Verwerfung, zum Glauben oder Unglauben, zur Seligkeit oder zum Gericht, vorgelegt wird.*”

³⁸Cf. with Hermann Sasse, *We Confess the Church*, We Confess Series, vol. 3; translated by Norman Nagel (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986), 36. “The doctrine of the Holy Spirit belongs to the uncompleted doctrines of the church. Can we find the explanation for this in the fact that, strictly speaking, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit belongs with *eschatology* , the doctrine of the Last Things? When on the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the apostles, there was fulfilled, as Peter said in the church’s first Pentecost sermon, that which according to the prophet Joel was to happen ‘in the last days,’ in the days of the Messiah, at the end of the world.... The Holy Spirit as the possession of the entire people of God, not merely as an occasional and temporary gift, is a gift of the end times.”

³⁹Vilmar, *Dogmatik*, vol. II, p. 202. Cf. Hermann Sasse, *We Confess the Church*, We Confess Series, vol. 3 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986), 45-46. “Our Confession does not make this distinction between an invisible and a visible church. Luther does indeed, now and then, speak of the church as invisible, but in an altogether different sense. It would have been better for Lutheran theology never to have spoken as though there

This denial of the church as exclusively invisible led Vilmar into conflict with his opponents who preferred the Reformed (largely unionist by this time in Kurhesse) concept of the church. Confessional subscription had not been identified in the constitution of Kurhesse following the Congress of Vienna. Consequently the question of the rightful, legally established church confession for Kurhesse was a source of conflict until the end of Vilmar's life. In *Theology of Fact* we see Vilmar making frequent references to the Church Orders (*Kirchenordnungen*) in the struggle to demonstrate that the religious practice of Kurhesse had all along been Lutheran as it recognized the sacramental aspects of worship and other features which he asserted were directly attributable to the Augsburg Confession. The question became intensely politicized as advocates of a union of Reformed and Lutheran confessions attempted to follow the Prussian example. This issue had also been a major grievance among revolutionaries in 1848 whose spectrum of political concepts varied from liberals who simply wanted to disestablish the church in a quest for religious toleration, to those radicals who renounced religion altogether and identified it with the established authority and the forces of reaction.

Following the initial successes of the Revolution of 1848, the Elector, the ruler of Hesse, had agreed to concessions in this matter of the established religion. In legislation passed that year, Kurhesse renounced any ties of the government to any religious confession. This was a drastic new development; previously, though the confessional subscription of the ruler had not been established in the constitution, confessional subscription was found in the various dioceses of the country. In the Diocese of Kassel where Vilmar served as a representative of the General Superintendent, confessional subscription tended to be Lutheran and worship practice was essentially that found in the old Church Orders which supported the Lutheran confessions. With the renunciation of any confessional subscription, the prince was now perceived to be only a

were two churches, one visible and another invisible. This distinction derives from the Reformed doctrine of predestination. It goes back to Augustine, and in the Middle Ages is found in Wycliffe. The invisible church is made up of all the predestined, the visible church of the baptized. It is possible to be a member of the one without being a member of the other. The sacrament of Baptism is here then only the outward sign of the baptism with the Holy Spirit. For the person who is not predestined to eternal life the baptism with water remains only a sign without effect.

This distinction is rejected by the Lutheran Church as unbiblical. Baptism according to the New Testament is not only a sign but the means that washes away sins (Eph. 5: 26), 'the washing of regeneration' (Titus 3: 5)."

secular official who nevertheless governed the church as its bishop (*Summepiscopat*) through his consistory. Sensing that confessional Lutheran belief was now in jeopardy, a group of Lutherans, with Vilmar prominent in its leadership, formed in Kassel on October 19, 1848, calling themselves “Members and Friends of the Hessian Church.” On February 14, 1849 this group met in Jesberg and issued a memorandum denying that the ruler of Kurhessen had any right to govern the church any longer. They drafted and proposed a change to the constitution transferring the administration of the church to the clergy.⁴⁰

Later the fortunes of the revolutionaries waned and this legislation which had been the cause of so much discontent among Lutherans was repealed. There was a reconciliation between Vilmar and the new conservative government. As a representative of the Superintendent of the Diocese of Kassel, he did much to improve the quality of pastoral care as well as church administration. In 1855, following the death of the General Superintendent, Vilmar was nominated by the pastors of this diocese to assume that office; he was popular among the pastors and was recommended by a vote of 110 of the 124 votes cast. However the Prince–Elector was hesitant to raise such a controversial figure to this position. He sought the advice of other theologians. They included Ludwig Richter at the University of Berlin; Richter was to condemn many of Vilmar’s policies along with his advocacy of the Augsburg Confession as the norm for the Hessian Church as ‘catholicizing tendencies.’⁴¹ Because Vilmar represented a large and influential party within the church, he was offered instead the position as Professor of Theology at the Hessian University of Marburg. On assuming his new duties, he took the occasion to reply to the critics who had attacked him in the opinions requested by his prince. The *Theology of Fact versus the Theology of Rhetoric* was conceived. Besides Richter, many of his critics were

⁴⁰Sälter, Renate. Die Vilmarianer: Von der fürstentreuen kirchlichen Restaurationspartei zur hessischen Rentienz. (Darmstadt und Marburg, 1985), 116–124. The text of the Jesberg Memorandum is contained in Willem Wibbeling, “Um die Freiheit des geistlichen Kirchenregiments: Die Bedeutung der Jesberger Konferenz und des Allerunertüchtigsten Memorandums von 1849,” in Aus Theologie und Kirche: Beiträge Kurhessischer Pfarrer als Festgabe zum 60. Geburtstag von Professor D. Hans Freiherr von Soden (München: Evangelischer Verlag Albert Lempp, 1941)107ff..

⁴¹Sälter, Die Vilmarianer, 153–154.

in the theological faculty to which he was now called. One of the most prominent and one who is singled out for personal attention in this book was Heinrich Heppe.

In his official capacity in the Hessian administration from 1851–1855, Vilmar had been quite controversial though popular among many pastors who admired him for his administrative abilities and his pastoral heart. But the question of the proper confessional subscription for Hesse again became a matter for public debate. In a series of publications, the Hessian Reformed theologian and Professor of Theology at Marburg, Heinrich Heppe (1820-1879) interpreted the historical circumstances of the Lutheran confessions with Hegelian dialectic, set in language more amenable to the subjective language of Schleiermacher than that of Vilmar and the Lutheran confessions. He formulated a theory of the “Protestant Idea” to explain the development of the Protestant Church in the latter 16th Century, emphasizing the change which history must make on dogmatic presuppositions.

In Heppe’s “objective” viewpoint the thesis of Catholicism was met by the antithesis of the Reformation, and then the synthesis of a Melanchthonian way of doing theology following the Augsburg Confession of 1530; this synthesis he termed the “Protestant Idea.” Accordingly, no one could be rightfully bound to the Augsburg Confession of 1530. The confession of the *Augustana* was revitalized by Heppe’s assertion that “common use of the Augsburg Confession must be limited to its basis in a common Protestant principle (Idea).”⁴² With Heppe we see an example of the replacement of orthodoxy and its recognition of the authority of Scripture with Idealism. The irenic attempts by Melanchthon to placate all parties in the Leipzig Interim were really an attempt to find fellowship without doctrinal agreement according to Heppe. He identified this legitimate Protestant Idea with the unionism of his day with its irenic intentions of toleration, but it was so detrimental to the orthodox Lutheran doctrine in the sixteenth century as well as the nineteenth century. This interpretation coincided with the thought of Schleiermacher who located religious consciousness in a person’s feelings (of absolute dependence), or religion

⁴²J. Rendtorff, ed., *Die (sic) Verhandlung des sechsten deutschen evangelischen Kirchentages zu Berlin im Sept. 1853* (Berlin, 1853), 55; quoted in Lowell H. Zuck, ‘Heinrich Heppe: A Melanchthonian Liberal in the Nineteenth-Century German Reformed Church,’ *Church History* Vol. 51 (Dec 1992), 430.

was located in the *idea* of religion. Karl Daub, the Heidelberg systematician, used “idea” in its technical sense given to it by Idealism: “it means not just any abstract concept, such as ‘cause’ or ‘end,’ but a concrete concept in which the thought and the reality it means are co-present.”⁴³

Heppe tied his “Protestant Idea” to the institution of the “old Protestant church.”

“The character of the old Protestant church was thoroughly unionistic Melancthon’s “*Loci communes*” were part of the same theme unified throughout At the heart of it was the fact that Protestantism was to be understood not as a collection of assorted teachings but rather as a *principle*, namely as a *fact*, a *reality*, in the consciousness of the individual believer. This principle and essence of German Protestantism, namely, the satisfying of the longing through the church of the salvation-seeking heart for personal and secure possession of salvation, was basic, and other teachings which differed from each other were quite unimportant.”⁴⁴

Heppe’s conclusions do not stand up under the weight of history. He concludes that all churches who designated themselves as “Lutheran” by a subscription to the Augsburg Confession were a perversion of and a “caricature of the true sources of the life of the German church” with its “materializing” of salvation.⁴⁵ The views of Heppe are difficult to accept because of the presuppositions which surround what is supposedly an objective science of religion. According to this view all Lutheran churches which continued their confessional belief and practices were illegitimate because they did not conform to the synthesis of the Protestant Idea. It come as no surprise that Heppe is also singled out for criticism in *Theology of Fact*.

Another facet of Vilmar’s theology which emerged from the Jesberg Memorandum and the controversy which followed it was the high view he held of the Office of the Pastoral Ministry. At Jesberg and afterward he would maintain that the ordained pastorate alone, those who had been ordained into the Office of Word and Sacrament, exclusively had authority to manage the internal affairs of the church. He wrote eloquently on the topic of the pastoral

⁴³Robert P. Scharlemann, “*Confessio and Scientia: Life and Truth in Theology*,” *Discord, Dialogue, and Concord: Studies in the Lutheran Reformation’s Formula of Concord*, ed. Lewis W. Spitz and Wenzel Lohff (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 105.

⁴⁴Rendtorff, *Verhandlung des sechsten deutschen Evangelischen Kirchentages*, 153, in Zuck, “Heppe: A Melancthonian Liberal,” *Church History*, 430.

⁴⁵Heinrich Heppe, *Geschichte des deutschen Protestantismus* vol. 2 (Marburg: Elwert’scher Druck und Verlag, 1853), 7, 341-344. Also see volume 1, pp. 5-10 for the Hegelian interpretation of the Reformation and a contrasting of the German moderate Reformation with the more radical “Slavic” Reformation.

ministry, touching upon it throughout and directly addressing it in Chapters 1, 2, 8, 9, and 11. The office looms so large in the church that saving the church becomes a matter of the spiritual formation of pastoral candidates.

Vilmar denied any authority derived by pastors from their congregation. For him, it was impossible for people to forgive themselves the sins which they had committed; only the holder of the office had the mandate of the authority associated with the office, and the Holy Spirit as it was imparted in his ordination. To allow for a congregational authority from which the pastor would gain his authority was for Vilmar the worst kind of subjectivity and cast into doubt the exhibitiv nature of his office and acts.

The confessional content of "exhibitiv" is explained by Vilmar as beginning with the dominical mandate to the apostles, then extending to the office of the Holy Ministry, to be found only within the church, and then the church being exhibitiv as the forgiveness of sins is actually delivered with the words of the pastor to his people. His writings on Holy Absolution illustrate these elements:

Absolution is a power granted by the Lord himself to his Apostles. Matt. 16: 19, 18: 18 where the promise is cited and Jn. 20: 22-23 where the communication of this power (after the resurrection) is cited. It is then one of the functions of the apostles for the preservation of the church by the resulting shepherd's office, and it is an erroneous idea when the exercise of this function is granted to the entire church.... spoken confession (of sins) belongs to Absolution, i.e. a power of the divine mandate, in the name and in the direct authority of Christ consummating the pronouncement of the forgiveness of sins. Whoever thinks he can arrange it between Christ and himself in stillness (without the pronouncement), lives in the unclear and confusing notion of an invisible church, indeed if he still knows anything of a church at all, and not the church of the uncommitted individual, who in error shackles himself into a capricious relationship to Christ.⁴⁶

⁴⁶Vilmar, *Dogmatik*, vol. II, p. 229. "Matth. 16, 19. 18, 18, wo die Verheissung und Joh. 20, 22-23, wo die wirkliche Mitteilung dieser Postestät (nach der Auferstehung) referiert wird. Sie ist mithin eine Function des die Functionen des Apostolats zur Erhaltung der Kirche fortfessenden Hirtenamtes, und es ist die Vorstellung irrig, also sei die Austübung dieser Function der ganzen Kirche verliehen.... Bekenntnis entsprechend gehört dazu auch eine Absolution, d.h. ein kraft göttlichen Mandats, im Namen und aus der directen Vollmacht Christi vollzogenes Aussprechen der Sündenvergebung. Wer da meint, er könne Beides zwischen Christo und sich in der Stille abmachen, der lebt in den unklaren und verworrenen Begriffen von einer unsichtbaren Kirche, wenn er ja überhaupt noch von einer Kirche weiss, und nicht die Kirche in Individuen auslöst, welche in irgend ein willkürliches Verhältnis zu Christo sich selbst fessen."

Here we see the elements of the mandate of Christ, the Apostolic office, the resulting office of the Holy Ministry, the forgiveness given within the church, and the alternative of a mistaken, and uncertain forgiveness of sins when the individual thinks he can initiate and maintain a blessed relationship with Christ. Is this “exhibitive?” Vilmar leaves little doubt.

Every pronouncement of the absolution may now self-evidently not be understood as a simple verbal (*enuntiative*) absolution....the absolution must be exhibitive which genuine desire for the forgiveness of sins genuinely grants....⁴⁷

Here we see he has essentially defined exhibitive in terms of absolution. It is especially appropriate that Holy Absolution be considered in connection with the theology of the Lord’s Supper and its liturgy. In considering the exhibitive effect of each these sacraments, Vilmar insisted that absolution was a necessary prerequisite to the reception of the Lord’s Supper. This prerequisite meant to adhere to the apostolic injunctions of 1 Corinthians 10 and to receive the mandated benefits of both. So confession and absolution are indispensable (*unerlässlich*). “...first death is to be removed, before the man can be nourished with the powers of eternal life, and the removal of death is done through confession of sins and absolution.”⁴⁸ He thought it a contradiction to receive the powers of eternal life to the resurrection of the dead in those who do not perceive their own sin. For this reason confession and absolution are essential.

It should be said that Vilmar thought it also essential that the sacraments should be administered by the clergy. For the Office of the Ministry was mandated and instituted by Jesus through the apostles to deliver the Word and Sacraments and all that go with them. He was to say that their main task was “*austragen*,” to deliver the means of grace, to deliver the forgiveness of sins. He considered the office of the ministry as the cornerstone and central point (*Grundstein und Mittelpunkt*) of the church as a visible form (*äusseren Gestalt*).⁴⁹ The

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 229-230. “Jenes Aussprechung der Sündenvergebung darf nun aber selbstverständlich nicht als eine bloss enuntiative Sündenvergebung aufgefasst werden....die Absolution muss exhibitiv sein, die wirklich begehrte Sündenvergebung wirklich erteilen....”

⁴⁸August Vilmar, *Lehrbuch der Pastoraltheologie*, ed. by A.W. Piderit (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1872), 116. “...denn erst [sic] muss der Tod wegschaft sein, ehe der Mensch mit den Kräften des ewigen Lebens genährt werden kann und die Wegschaffung des Todes geschieht durch Sünderbekenntnis und Vergebung.”

⁴⁹Schwarz, *Vilmar*, p. 95-96.

office of the pastoral ministry and the means of grace are inseparably bound together. In stressing the relationship between theology and the pastorate, Karl Barth recognized that Vilmar “said something new to this time.”⁵⁰

The Twentieth Century and Beyond

Vilmar’s legacy lived on in the institution of the small, often dissident *Renitenz* (“Obstinacy”) Church of Lower Hesse. But nearly a century later, Vilmar had a much wider appeal to the church in Germany as it sought to answer questions in the 1930’s and 1940’s concerning Christian belief and the relationship of the church to the state brought about by National Socialism. Vilmar’s incisive statements regarding the independence of the church from intrusive authority of the government were appealing when the church faced persecution for questioning the authority of a government to direct the churches when the government’s leaders lacked any confessional subscription and whose policies were seen as inimical to the church. Also in his organic model of the church, Vilmar made specific connections to the welfare of the German people and Christendom. According to Vilmar German culture was Christian and had been for a thousand years. He saw the decay of the church and the resulting decay of the German nation as unavoidably linked with an organic, unified connection. Vilmar maintained that there were many institutions in German life which were linked to the gospel and could not be demolished without the most serious consequences.⁵¹ He had predicted a day which seemingly had arrived:

The inheritance of our fathers by way of natural means, order, and morality visible to the eye, enters its last decline. In a short time as men measure such things, and in our time these means of support will be completely exhausted. It will be the end of our people; it is horrible and certain. Who shows them (theology students) in our day that with the living word of God, in their heart and in their mouth, they alone can prevent this catastrophe? Who shows them that they alone, when this catastrophe happens, can spring out, unhurt from the general ruin of the present order of worldly things, and on this rubble they should stand with unswerving hearts and strong vision as gatherers of a new people? Who shows them that they alone can be the bronze wall of which the prophet (Jer. 15: 20) speaks, and by what means they can do this?⁵²

⁵⁰Barth, Die protestantische Theologie, 577.

⁵¹Vilmar, Pastoraltheologie, 143.

⁵²Vilmar, Theologie der Tatsachen, 7.

Such churchmen as Karl Ränge would call for a new recognition of this organic connection and for a renewal of confessional loyalty against idealism, spiritualism, subjectivism, socialism and all the movements which had produced a period of history which offered little that was certain.⁵³ *Theology of Fact* identifies the Office of the Ministry as the sole institution which can assess and remedy this collapsing civilization. This is not only their ability “but also their right.”⁵⁴

From Vilmar we inherit much that is useful in our own day. Vilmar left us a strong example of faithfulness as he contended for the faith of the Augsburg Confession not only with many theological writings but in engagement with society as pastor, educator, and government servant, as well as in other disciplines such as philology, history, and ethics. He saw through the specious arguments of those who would reduce the faith to an empty shell by devices which they label as “objective” and “scientific,” and he condemned it as the worst kind of subjectivism. Such methods are outside the tradition of the church and leave the church, where it might still exist, as an empty shadow of its former self. He left us with a direction for those who can find no method for determining the truth. He left us an idiom for determining and describing the truth: it is the experience of the church.

The truth is in the doctrine of the church where reality of salvation is really and exclusively found. The Scriptures whose interpretation is shorn of historical-critical presuppositions bring us the peace and joy of Christ. The Scriptures of the church serve as the norming norm for such pre-critical documents as the Augsburg Confession which Vilmar and like-minded churchmen recognized as the norm for the life of the church.

He belonged to a movement which recognized in the Lutheran confessions of the sixteenth century a witness to the faith of the apostles and to the Christ who had commissioned them to bring life to the church. Vilmar recognized that our understanding of the church would unfold as we faced new challenges to the certainty which it gave us. He would maintain that we still live in the “era of the church” and that we are still facing and expressing new understandings

⁵³ Karl Ränge, *Vilmars Bedeutung für die Kirche der Gegenwart* (Essen: Lichtweg Verlag, 1941), 19–22.

⁵⁴ Vilmar, *Theologie der Tatsachen*, 7.

which do not change the Lutheran confessions but find a basis for new understandings in them. He saw salvation delivered by two certain means, word and sacrament; in all times, he recognized that there was another requisite element to secure these, Christ's institute of the church.

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Introduction to Vilmar's Theology

August Vilmar was born on November 21, 1800 in Solz in Kurhessen as the oldest son in a parsonage with many children. With his life-long friend and brother, Wilhelm (1804–1884), the leader of the Hessian Renitanz Church beginning in 1873, he belonged to that generation from which came the great vanquishers of the Enlightenment and new discoverers of the church of the nineteenth century and the confessions of Christendom. These included such men as Tholuck (born 1799) and Hengstenberg (1802) in Prussia, Harless (1806) and Löhe (1808) in Bavaria, Kohlbrügge (1803) and Vinet (1797) in the Reformed Church of the German and French languages, Newman (1801) and Pusey (1800) in the Church of England, Möhler (1796) and Döllinger (1799) in German Catholicism. These names are associated with and symbolize a movement throughout all of western Christendom beginning around 1830, and within which the life's work of the great Lutheran theologians and men of the church must be understood. The course of Vilmar's early years was determined by the legacy of a pious home life, in which there existed something of the pre-rationalist period, by the experiences of the Napoleonic period and by the growth of the spiritual world of the late Enlightenment, chiefly by his theological studies at the University of Marburg from 1818 until 1820 where rationalism ruled.

Filled with rationalism and the ideals of the student fraternities (*Bursenschaft*) he was ordained in 1821 and in 1824 began work in education which at that time was still closely association with the pastoral office. Although he often yearned for the duties of the pastor, as (school) rector in Rothenburg, as teacher at the gymnasium in Hersfeld (1827) and as director of the gymnasium in Marburg (1833) he was firmly established in the teaching calling until he had to assume duties in 1850 as Consistory Commissioner (*Konsistorialrat*) in the department of Church and School Affairs in the Ministry in Kassel under Hassenpflug.

Equipped with a basic classical–philological education, he was an entirely distinguished educator (*Schulreden über Fragen der Zeit* , 3d Edition, 1886) and school reformer, and he developed at the same time into one of the best scholars of German culture of the nineteenth century. Of his philological–literary historical writings only his famous *History of the German National Literature* (*Geschichte der deutschen Nationalliteratur*, 1845, 26th edition, 1905) need be mentioned. But his heart always belonged to theology. As a consistent rationalist he was at first a decided opponent of the “wretched Formula of Concordists (*Konkordienformulisten*)” Claus Harms and the “catholicizing mysticism,” as he labeled the piety of the Awakening, he eventually discovered the complete theological and ecclesial inadequacy, the emptiness and the hopelessness of rationalism. Thus began in 1827, about the same time Harless experienced an entirely similar conversion, the great inner transformation of Vilmar.

The experiences of his own heart, events in the circle of his dearest friends, the influence of his brother, Wilhelm, the influences of the time, which in philosophy and poetry began to turn him away from the Enlightenment, the serious study of Augustine and Tertullian whose human “Theology of Facts” made a special impression on Vilmar – as it also did on Harless – the thorough occupation with Johann Gerhard, Calov and Hollaz and finally the study of the confessions on the occasion of the Tercentennial of the Augsburg Confession in 1830 opened to him a deeper understanding of the Holy Scriptures and led him step by step on the path to a new appreciation of theology. Especially important for him was the preparation of the commemoration speech for this celebration of the Augsburg Confession. He “realized at that stage – as if a bolt of lightning lit up an entire landscape – that all searches would be in vain, because all that was sought was already long at hand: the Augsburg Confession completely unlocked for me as if by a painting the readings from Tertullian , Augustine, Gerhard, and my theological transformation was complete. The occasion, to deal seriously deal with Schleiermacher once more, was certainly needed, but also Schleiermacher, in the course of the reading itself, was completely conquered.... At the same time in my further studies I happened upon the Old Saxon “Savior (*Heiland*),” and this wonderful gem also affected me theologically

in the strongest way. It was things which were set forth with the deepest conviction of immediate experience (Wilhelm Hopf, *August Vilmar*, 1913, I, 167).” Vilmar’s conversion was completed, as he further reported, through a song of Luther’s: “It is impossible to describe the deep bliss which I sensed in the first days of my conversion, other than I found the complete expression of what I had sought, and in Luther’s songs: ‘Now Christians one and all rejoice (*Nun freut euch, lieben Christen gmein*, Ibid.).’” We have here before us a development as it often was in the Awakening Movement (*Erweckungsbewegung*), during the time of the pietistic religion of experience to a church renewal (*zu neuer Kirchlichkeit*), which has been experienced by many and as Harless described it, when he said of his studies of the Confessions of the Lutheran Church, “I cannot describe the excitement and emotion with which I found that its contents would agree to that of which I had become certain from the Scripture and from the experience of faith (Th. Heckel, *Adolf von Harless*, 1933, p. 28).” Vilmar’s way resembles that which Harless took in that it led from the Bible to the church fathers and the orthodox theologians (as Vilmar) respectively to the Scholastics (as Harless) to the Confessions of the Lutheran Church and only from there led to Luther. Today that is perceived as a serious flaw. One might think that confessionalism, which was then recently resurrected, would not be sufficiently reforming (*reformatorisch*). “It was really less Luther than the old orthodoxy which then experienced an resurrection (W. v. Loewenich, *Die Geschichte der Kirche*, 1937, p. 405). About this it can only be said that it is entirely astounding how much these theologians recognized in spite of that the errors of a contemporary Luther edition. When they began their intensive and systematic studies of Luther in the 1830’s, they then had already read more of Luther than some present day theologians who are known as Luther specialists. And secondly there is the question, whether the proper way of the church to Luther is not through the Confessions, a way which we all have to take, and the way which we in the evangelical church have been raised. Because theological understanding of Luther actually means understanding him as reformer, understanding him as a teacher of the church. Where then could there be a better entry into the teacher of the church as there, where the church proclaims him as its teacher

before the world, and prescribes his doctrine as doctrine for the true believing church? So it is neither an historical accident nor a flaw in the Luther editions which led these theologians on the path from the Confessions to Luther. They wanted to introduce neither a Luther Renaissance nor to reprimatinate an old protestant orthodoxy. They sought much more as did all serious people of the Christian west at that time, the lost church in the century of Pietism and the Enlightenment, of religious individualism and the rule of reason. They hearkened to the voice of the church when for the first time the Confessions of the Lutheran Church spoke to them. So they became Lutherans, they became orthodox theologians simply against their own wills. Even in his commemoration speech from June 25 1830, Vilmar decisively distanced himself from a “rigid orthodoxy” and “heresy (*Verketzerung*)” of unwavering confessionalism, although he declared that a time of great church interest had dawned and that we again understand the reformers and their writings as they had not been understood for a century. But soon he thought differently about it. “When I had been turned around by God, a short period of time was needed to convey a greater certainty of the church, and namely the true church, not a theoretical, abstract (*erspeculierten*) church – an idol, around which today so many otherwise true Christians dance around,” he wrote in 1864 (Cited by J. Haussleiter, “Vilmar, *Realencyclopädie*, XX, 652). In the quest for the church of God, for the true church, not an imagined church, Vilmar and his like-minded companions found the Lutheran Church, just as the Reformed, the Anglicans, the Catholics of that time found their confessional church. Only in this way can we generally understand confessionalism of the nineteenth century and in particular Vilmar’s confessional Lutheran theology.

Vilmar must be understood as a man of the church not only in his thoughts but in his actions, that is in his political activity, which beginning with his election in the Kurhessen estate convocation (*Ständeversammlung*) in 1831 included his official acts in the school and church. On this account he was hated as no other theologian of the nineteenth century. Hengstenberg met only the abysmal hatred of the liberal German middle class, but Vilmar was additionally met with the hostility of the Prussian conservatives and Prussian–German nationalism. We who

experienced the ruin of the Bismarkian realm and the end of the Prussian state, should finally free ourselves from the polemics with which preceding generations characterized Vilmar. Today whoever is able to read in an unbiased fashion his collected essays in the three volumes *On the New Cultural History of Germany* (*Zur neuesten Culturgeschichte Deutschlands* , 1858–1867) and in *Church and World* (*Kirche und Welt* , 1872–1873), he knows that Vilmar with all the limits of his political thought was a true prophetic interpreter of the German history of his time. Today it simply does not work anymore to dismiss his place in the great questions of the time with empty expressions of “reaction” and “conservatism.” Certainly Vilmar was conservative – it is truly no sin to be one. Rather we only liken his views of state and authority, monarchy and revolution with those of Stahl, Hengstenberg or Görres; we liken his protest against state rule over the church’s authority and against the mixing of state and church with what conservative-Christian Europe thought received from Romanticism about throne and altar, and we recognize immediately with what sovereign freedom this churchman stood bound with the doctrine of the Lutheran Reformation as opposed to the political doctrines of his time.

The years 1851–1855 shaped the high point in the life and work of Vilmar, when he discharged his duties as a representative of the General Superintendent of Kassel in addition to his office in the ministry. It was the tragedy of his life that the prince–elector deserted him at the succession to this office from political and church political reasons, although the pastors had elected him. Thus was a great episcopal activity interrupted, very much to the harm of the Kurhessen church, which Vilmar had aroused from the sleep of the Enlightenment and had begun to lead it back from a completely vague confessional relationship to its old Lutheran confession. He resisted the attempt to place him subsequently in the call to a university chair of German Culture outside of Hesse, and accepted an offer to be a professor (*Ordinariat*) in the theological faculty of Marburg. In this office he was often deeply isolated and for a long time was engaged in a tenacious struggle with his theological opponents and performed blessed work until his death on July 30, 1868. His great thoughts about the church and its office of the ministry, which he

was no longer able to carry out in the episcopal office, he bequeathed to a true circle of scholars and thus bequeathed them to the whole Evangelical Lutheran Church as a legacy for the future.

The literary output of the academic period of Vilmar is presented except for the powerful proposals in *The Theology of Rhetoric versus the Theology of Rhetoric* (*Die Theologie der Tatsachen wider die Theologie der Rhetoric*, 1856, Fourth Edition, 1876, New Printing, Erlangen, 1938) in a whole series of lectures, which after the death of the author was published by his students. The most famous is the *Collegium Biblicum* (edited by Chr. Müller, 6 vol., Gütersloh, 1876). These lectures, which led the students through the entire Bible in six semesters, is truly the best proof of how seriously Vilmar used a firm Biblical basis for theology. Besides a short course of lectures over *The Augsburg Confession* (*Die Augsburgische Konfession*, 1870), *The Doctrine of the Pastoral Office* (*Die Lehre vom geistlichen Amt*, 1872), *Pastoral Theology* (*Pastoraltheologie*, 1872), *Christian Church Discipline* (*Christliche Kirchenzucht*, 1872), appeared in 1871 the *Moral Theology* (*Theologische Moral*) edited by C. Chr. Israel and 1874 the *Dogmatics* (*Dogmatik*) edited by K.W. Piderit, which in 1938 was issued in an unchanged edition. All of these posthumous works, which mostly appeared from Gütersloh, suffer naturally from the author no longer having been able to give them literary form which is excellent in his other books. Their language is the dispassionate language of college textbooks – the text of the *Dogmatics* is based upon “various painstakingly copied notebooks of his students” besides the original manuscript of Vilmar, but one, “Theology of Fact,” which intentionally turned against this “Theology of Rhetoric, was able to do no damage to this external simplicity of form. The men who then performed the thankless work of editing, gained in any case great merit, not only concerning the history of theology but also concerning the church.

The deep lack of comprehension with which theology also Lutheran theology of his and later times which stood opposed to the great Hessian churchman – no theological faculty had awarded him a doctorate is explained in part no one understood the gravity of the church situation which Vilmar saw with prophetic vision. We read today the well-intended criticism with which Frank in 1875 in the sixty-ninth volume of *Magazine for Protestantism and Church*

(*Zeitschrift für Protestantismus und Kirche*) made the Vilmarian doctrine after its appearance identical with that of the lapsed, ineffectual German Lutheranism of the Bismarck period. We have the same impression with the Haussleiter articles about Vilmar in the encyclopedia of 1908: this theology resembled nothing of the dead seriousness of the powerful struggles into which Vilmar saw the church going and which today have become reality. They were not able to understand his theology, his doctrine of the church. As it may always be with the details of this doctrine, as one may judge it, whether Vilmar really understood the entire essence of the church, there can be no doubt that he saw with all of his limitations and with all his one-sided truths about the church, that no serious theology can any longer be overlooked. Our generation begins to understand these truths from the experiences of the life of the church. From these we understand anew the basic thoughts of his dogma, with which he stood completely alone in the nineteenth century, when he fought the subjectivism in theology with decisiveness as the great opponent of Schleiermacher. If "I, the Christian, am my own product of my own science as a theologian (Hofman)," then there is also no possibility even with the best intentions, to prevent the realization of theology as a self observation of pious humanity.

The great truths of Christian faith cannot even once be traced back to the self-consciousness of pious humans. Here is Vilmar the great, lonesome conqueror of Schleiermacher in the nineteenth century. He is the conqueror also in other questions in which he, for example, recognized the indefensibility of the alternative, with which Schleiermacher exercised so deep an influence on the conclusions of theology as science, namely whether the knots of history are unraveled in this way: science with unbelief and Christendom with barbarity. Vilmar, who was not only at home in the various disciplines of theology, but also in some other sciences, knew that real theology was different and boundlessly greater than that which the nineteenth century designated with pride after David Friedrich Strauss as "modern science" in the sense of "presuppositionless" research. A generation who experienced the great turning the church and in theology from subject to object, who experienced the great turn from rhetoric to facts, will be able, unlike their fathers, to be called by August Vilmar "to pay attention

(*zur Sache*)” in a sense to each word of Augustine, which Vilmar himself wrote under his picture and above his theology: “In the church this is of no avail: Thus I say; thus you say; thus he says, but rather: Thus says the Lord (*In ecclesia non valet: hoc ego dico, hoc tu dicis, hoc ille dicit, sed: Haec dicit Dominus.*)”

Erlangen, New Year, 1938

Hermann Sasse

FORWARD TO THE THIRD EDITION

This short work, which was written at the beginning of this year, already begins its third edition at the end of it. It should express in the greatest possible simplicity and immediacy the impression which theology makes in one of its chief forms of recent times on upright Christianity about the sound faith of the visible evangelical church. It should do this first of all on pastors, to whom the salvation of the flock of a congregation is entrusted, on one who is certain of his faith, and on someone who on the strong basis of his church opposes the world, and even though he is in the world, stands in the reality of life. Indeed I have said that I would provoke here extreme offense by this very form of theology, yet I have in no way avoided this blow and did not want to soften it at all. The collision of the real life of the church with this rhetorical method of theology is a reality, and it is a very hard one; should I have depicted it as easier than it is? That would be again a new method of rhetoric.

It should be easy of itself to understand why I do not change my view of theology. How could I come to a settlement with the *Protestant Church Newspaper* or with Baur and Zeller's *Theological Yearbook* or even with the *General Church Newspaper* both of which are now the same thing? It is a matter of importance to declare the fundamental difference of the point of view within the church with its faith versus the standpoint of the leader of these newspaper. Up until now, and now more than ever, I have exposed through my writings the inconsistency of rhetorical theology with the sound life of the church. It looks as if I achieved my goal according to all estimates of my writing which have come to my attention. I gladly believe that the noble critics from among those who oppose me, that the experiences which I have had remain far removed from their own experiences, and that my experiences make these critics uncomfortable to a high degree. With a sincere heart, I wish them that they have similar and even more far reaching—experiences in their future lives, and not as they are now, by wanting to stay with empty words and abstract

formulas; since we cannot demand to be a forty year old when we are only twenty-five, so my opponents should not expect me to come down to their point of view. Perhaps such an unreasonable request from them little pleases the majority for whom I have written. The invective which has come my way in part by it, I gladly forgive, especially since I am rather used to similar things, and I learned and understand the value of "let him be silent."

What I wanted to achieve with good intentions but often did not accomplish, was that a person on our side would end the games with the word "science." We are secure enough that we do not again need to insist for the usage of the word "science" its older meaning (as *ἐπιστήμη*, *doctrina*); it is not rashly though justifiably that we again want to use the word "science" for our theology especially in dogmatics and ethics. I hardly believe, however, that our strength for the change of the usage in speech will be enough, especially since our opponents' usage claims indisputable authority for itself. Since a change of this usage is not possible, we do better to keep this name for our disciplines rather than to fight the current usage. Otherwise we would at the very least confuse distinctions, if we would not ourselves become the enemy, which is human autonomy, through the unnoticed introduction of this term. Confusers of distinction and smugglers of foreign meanings are those whom I name rhetoricians.

Both of the previous editions contained a personal defense (against Richter in Berlin). The goal of that edition was met since this little book found sufficient circulation. I have here deleted this defense, so far as it has a personal character, but the things to which the defense was directed, remain unchanged. The small Kurhessian details are not removed where they are about the struggle between faith and sham faith, and it must be left to the judgment of the reader, whether hostile or friendly, whether this writing pertains to this struggle. I owe it accordingly to the friendly readers to cast aside those weapons, which only suit a warrior and are a burden for all others. That is the remaining task.

Marburg, Beginning of November 1856.

Vilmar

INTRODUCTION

Some thirty-eight years ago, when I sat at in the classroom intending “to study theology,” none of the many words which I heard in the classroom made a stronger impression, and in the beginning, even a frightening impression on me – and soon it was a seductive impression – than the memory of a teacher of dogmatics attending to some sections of this discipline concluded them, “in the future everything is forgotten (*in futuram oblivionem*), gentlemen!” These sections were chiefly the ones on faith, on justification by faith, of the person of Christ, of the sacraments and of the gifts of grace by the Holy Spirit. But they had no meaning; they were meant only for pen and paper; they were chiefly meant for examinations, for learning and the subsequent forgetting of established words and formulas; all these things were schemes and schematics, chiefly good only to obtain a theological diploma (*chria aphthoniana*), and it was learned accordingly. And with all the other things contained in those dogmatics, it made no difference if all the other things were also forgotten: that there was a God, and that he would be revealed to us. Instead it was dark and became darker still darker in this dogmatic; “immortality” would be dubious to us; the forgiveness of sins was merely a futile way of speaking (*modus loquendi*) of the “moral endeavor,” and the sacrifice on Golgotha was reduced to nothing. If those former things were words and formulas, why not these also? There was no mention of the souls which before long would be laid upon our own souls, and that consequently we would be answerable to the Lord of salvation for their salvation.

Faithfully I learned all these things. I learned what would be forgotten in the future, as well as all the rest; indeed both were not forgotten in the future. I sought after certainty, for a firm basis, on which I could stand in the world from where I could reach out and grasp the world with a strong hand. So I patiently for several years turned page after page in my writing and in several printed dogmatics. I looked forwards, and backwards and once again forwards, in order to find

the food of life, just as Eulenspiegel's donkey was untiringly turning page after page in his folio volumes in order to discover between the pages the hoped-for grains of wheat between these pages.¹

I did not find this food of life; but certainty – yes, that I found. Theology, as it was then, existed only in turning pages; of that I had no doubt. I left off turning pages and left off seeking after words. Words gave no certainty and no nourishment for life. I rejected the words and things which were not theology. In this, nothingness was also a reality. I became acquainted with it; theology of words urged me unceasingly towards this certainty, and it broke off “like dry tinder (*wie mürber Zunder*)” when I grasped this certainty of nothingness, for which it would not have occurred to me to plunge again and reimmerge myself into the theology of uncertainty and words which are rags and tatters for the royal rainment of the prince of this world, a school debate for an authoritative rule, a token and ticket for the glory of this world and the rule over its kingdoms far and wide. How should this exchange enter my mind? I despised the theology of uncertain words from the bottom of my heart. This contempt has never left me.

But the certainty of nothingness left me, and it left me quickly. I learned to recognize that there is truly certainty, that there are other certainties besides the one of nothingness and of the devil: a certainty of the living, personal, present, merciful God revealed in the flesh, and a certainty of eternal salvation. The merciful God then took the two-edged sword in his hand, and cut again and again, precisely and quickly, through heart and bone and soul and spirit, so that I became aware of the power and undoubted inner certainty of his word.

¹In this allusion we see Vilmar, the lover of German folk literature (and accordingly friends of the Brothers Grimm). The reference is from a collection of stories known as “Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks (*Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche*),” a collection of tales about a prankster who travels throughout Germany in the Middle Ages and who takes advantage of the greed and other shortcomings of seemingly respectable people he meets along the way. In the tale Vilmar speaks of here, “How Eulenspiegel Teaches a Donkey to Read (*Wie Eulenspiegel einen Esel das Lesen lehrt*),” Till arrives in Erfurt and is challenged by the scholars from the university there to perform a seemingly impossible task; they are convinced that a bumpkin like Till cannot outwit them. They challenge Till to teach a donkey to read. Till accepts the challenge and agreed that he should accept 500 guilders if he could do it. Placing wheat between the pages of an old book, he trained the donkey to turn the pages to seek the grain. Till duly informed the rector at the university that he was ready to demonstrate what the donkey could do. Asking him if the donkey had learned something already, Till replied that he had already taught him to read two letters. Naturally enough, the donkey could say “I-A, I-A” as he turned the leaves. The rector was taken ill with consternation. Till took his money and released the mule into the town, instructing him to join the rest of the Erfurt donkeys.

Today after nearly forty years, I myself stand at the theological lecturn. I look from this lecturn and from behind my desk into the same room where the theology of future oblivion was once proclaimed to me: I know the places where the teacher stood, and the place where I myself was seated. Not without being deeply moved do I look through the windows in the room: "Are you," this room asks me, "are you in condition to teach theology which will not be forgotten in the future, as it should be, and for many other it also was? Are you to teach a theology which exists in something other than simply words, formulas and schematics? Are you to teach a theology which some day will not be rejected with contempt? When you, in the evening of your life, are placed in this teaching position without your cooperation and against your will, are you in a condition to teach a theology which you once sought but without result, on long detours and wrong paths, and indeed found, but neither in nor through academic theology? Are you to teach a theology of undoubting divine certainty, for the care of souls and for food of eternal life, which is bestowed, on those who hear, so they can impart the same certainty, the same bread of life to the souls which will be one day entrusted to them?"

These questions are not unnecessary either for me or for someone who occupies a theological teaching position. They were just as necessary forty years ago, when someone would not easily suggest these questions without being ruined. In these last forty years it has really changed and even become better in some respects: considerable stretches in the bleak fields of theology have again become deeply green, and the scattered bones have again been gathered into the church's domain, and covered with veins and flesh. The theology of words from that time is, however, still not only present, but present in far greater development and with far greater art of deception.

From the half childish theology of the ABC's, and the theology of words from forty or fifty years ago, from the elementary theology of the alphabetizers, vocabulists and grammarians of those times, has grown a theology of rhetoric, deceiving itself and others, like these, but with a far greater art of deception. These facts are often not secrets, that this theology knows nothing and is able to give nothing: this theology knows all and is able to give all things, because it is science and

gives science, a word which at that time was almost exclusively used in the simple Roman sense of *scientia, doctrina, ars* , and contains no special claim. Today “science” has become the witching word casting a spell in almost every area of human life; in many, and especially in theology, it has become a curse. The theology of rhetoric by the way has borrowed from another theology. This is theology of dialectic and natural history, which we can plainly label the theology of decline. I have presently no intention of addressing this theology of dialectic and physics . However I will address the borrowed witching word, “science,” through which the theology of rhetoric was first made what it is. It will be made more than once an object of reflection.

As I answered these questions and as I am actually trying to answer them as much as possible, now upon reaching old age, these pages shall give an account. They contain at the same time in the various chapters resistance against the attacks which were directed by the theology of rhetoric against the representatives of the facts in the divine life of the church, and especially against me.

I. THEOLOGY, ITS MASTERS AND DISCIPLES

No one can claim theology for himself alone; he who possesses it only has it in the company of others, and only as it is for others. A worldly science can perhaps be the sole possession of those living in this world, e.g. the lover of books can protect his books and their contents, as a dragon carefully protects his treasure from outside eyes, not to mention a strangers' use. The philosopher can keep his esoteric subject matter for himself and a few intimate friends, and he may burn with anger, if someone publishes it. Nevertheless both remain men of science, even reputable scientists, and not unjustly. A theologian, who keeps his theology to himself, is no theologian because theology, even if it were only a knowledge of God, is an absolute contradiction of egotism; it is the contradiction of all that is "for itself;"¹ it is the contradiction of all that is esoteric. The knowledge of God, called theology, is at the same time a speaking of God. And the speaking of God proceeds into the world and into the lives of people.

Theology serves real life, real life in this world and in eternity, and every time the theologian looks away from real life, every step which theology takes apart from real life is a false step which will lead to a fall and finally to destruction if it continues. Theology communicates entirely and unabridged what it possesses. It cannot live without this sharing of its entire and complete contents, and lives anew from the feedback of this sharing. It receives what is receivable, and all because this reception is the breath of life, which is indispensable nourishment; it is nothing other than air and sunlight and bread because no human on earth can live who does not receive what comes from theology .

¹Here the German word is *Fürsich*, reminiscent of Hegel's famous distinction of the individual identity.

He cannot be called a theologian who does not have this deep need to learn and to share in unrestrained fullness, and if he does not possess with certain knowledge that in this regard his own need is a similarly deep need for receiving.

The need to receive however exists in the hunger and thirst for the word of God, the need for certainty of eternal life, for the certainty of salvation. This word of God should be given and received in theology. This word which is certainty, undoubting, and which gives the unassailable certainty of eternal life and of salvation. Theology uses the pastorate as shepherd to train in this way so that it guides each generation. Then they themselves can provide shepherds, who are able and ready to keep the sheep gathered, to follow them, and to look for and to find them. It has to raise shepherds, in whom this unceasing and painstaking work of protecting, pasturing and seeking the sheep, becomes second nature. It raises shepherds whose heart hurts if they do not care for the entire herd and every single member from morning until night. Their lives are consumed by this caring, and their concern is only extinguished after their last breath of life. He is no teacher of theology who does not finally have his attention focused on educating pastors.

Future shepherds have to have weapons placed into their hands to defend the flock against the thieves and murderers and the wolf. It goes without saying that especially in our time weapons have to be used which do not serve "science;" and this should be emphasized more than once during instruction. But when the future shepherd does not know who the wolf is or who the thieves and murderers are, what will he do with the weapons? If the future shepherd is not taught and does not learn to protect and to feed the sheep, or does not even know that the sheep need to be protected, and that he will be a shepherd, what does he need the weapons for? Then they are only a game to him, but it is a dangerous one.

And always there are many, very many of the disciples of theology, who do not know and never learn throughout the entire course of their theological studies that they will become shepherds and that they will tend a flock for which they have to answer with their

lives. Everything is addressed in the theological classroom, and everything is emphasized and repeated. But only seldom and vaguely will the terrible seriousness be perceived about the real life approaching every young men who attends these classes. Indeed there are theological classrooms where not once a word of the seriousness of judgment has been mentioned, which the Office of the Ministry presents before the eyes of the theological disciple.

These young men of the theological future should not be narrowly instructed, some say. We do not want them “instructed too early in practical matters.” It was already feared in the seventeenth century that “they would want to dwell on sermons.” This would be premature and finally they would all be bored (*Dormi secure*). Indeed! Their professors teach them not narrowly but rhetorically, not to become practical workers, but to be men of vocabulary and grammar, not to be preachers of sermons, but to become notebook writers, not to be idlers on classroom seats, but to be idlers in the Office of the Ministry, because they never learned that there is work in this Office and hard work at that.

Do our theological students have joy in their studies and in the work connected with it as students of natural science enjoy to a high degree, or shared to some extent by medical students, and until recently, those in the law?

Who will try to answer this question in the affirmative?

If this question must be answered in the negative, why do these students have no joy? The short answer is this: because their study has no serious goal for them, indeed no visible goal at all. Every young man with a healthy body and soul desires to be challenged by tasks and deeds concerning life! Who shows these young men their tasks in life? Who shows them deeds?

Who shows them that the church of Jesus Christ is the queen of the spirit in this world? Who dares show them that this authority exercised by these servants of the church alone and indeed without any outside help? But that this authority is only exercised through the humble but bold, unwavering, and powerful word of God? It is exercised

through this invisible word but world overpowering sacrament. Who in our time shows them where the supports of a worldly sort, which we leaned on for a thousand years, have grown rotten and certain collapse threatens. The inheritance of our fathers by way of natural means, order, and morality visible to the eye, enters its last decline. In a short time as men measure such things, and in our time these means of support will be completely exhausted. It will be the end of our people; it is horrible and certain. Who shows them in our day that they, and they with the living word of God, in their heart and in their mouth, can alone prevent this catastrophe? Who shows them that they alone, when this catastrophe happens, can spring out, unhurt from the general ruin of the present order of worldly things, and on this rubble they should stand with unswerving hearts and strong vision as gatherers of a new people? Who shows them that they alone can be the bronze wall of which the prophet (Jer. 15: 20) speaks, and by what means they can do this? Who shows them that no one else is able to test and to discern the spirits, and that this is not alone their ability, but also their responsibility and their right. In this responsibility and right, their souls authoritatively reach out with powerful spiritual arms to direct souls and spirits with the power of the almighty God? Who shows them that no one should be in this position, who cannot see every phenomenon of the world at its roots. They should determine whether these phenomena go with Christ or oppose him, since they alone are able to judge the preservation or the decline of the current situation, and that it is only they who can discern the course and the end of the world? And who shows them how this view of the events of the world will be achieved and on which path, through which peril of the soul, through which exercises, through which work, through which efforts and struggles this spiritual testing and discernment of spirits are accomplished ?

Who shows them what depths of the soul must be entered, in order to save the soul from eternal despair? Who prepares them for the horror, familiar in a deep but dark and scarred soul, out of whose depths the twinkling eyes of the dragon, the old serpent, shine forth? And who leads them to defeat not only the horror alone but the shining eyes, and

not only to stare back again, but to climb into every dark soul, and with the enemy, eye to eye, soul on soul, who teaches him to wrest and to overcome him?

Who shows all these to the students of theology? Who teaches them these things? If this would happen, if these tasks would be shown and their solutions taught, the number of those who dedicate themselves to theology would perhaps decrease. But the remainder would find a joy in this future calling more easily than any other students of different callings.

Indeed we see that when in recent times the facts of church became obvious to the students in an appropriate manner even in its presently still incomplete form, an interest for theological studies and an enthusiasm in the treatment of these factual questions has been awakened, whereof we have not seen the like in three generations.

Should an introduction into these tasks from of which only a few of the prominent examples are named, but not described, be called a narrow-minded education? And should an even more detailed description not be provided, because an introduction for the treatment of these maladies and instruction for their cure be termed a narrow minded education? Should careful preparation of the understanding and early exercises in the effort to find a solution to these tasks be called a premature (perhaps entirely rudimentary) practice, by continuously dwelling on sermons, and be called an encouragement to idleness?

We do not yet think that this would all be simply “pastoral theology,” and could be conveniently confined to the semester where it is taught. There these questions could only be answered superficially. To even approach these tasks superficially, requires a very long and very penetrating effort with the word of God. Isolated teaching sessions of this and that individual passage of the Holy Scriptures are certainly not sufficient – at least not if these passages are read in a manner focusing only on vocabulary and grammar. For that purpose a long and penetrating effort with the history and the ordinances of the Christian church is needed, that is, with the eighteen hundred years of experiences of the Christian church in teaching and life; these experiences we tend to call dogmatics and ethics. These

disciplines should not be exempt from the students of theology. The demands on these students in regard to these disciplines should rather be increased. It is to be demanded by all means that the eyes of the teacher should remain fixed on specific goals within these disciplines, and that the attention of the listener be turned with energy towards these goals.

For this to happen, the teachers must not simply be teachers, the listeners cannot simply be listeners and students; the former must be masters, so that the latter can be disciples. These masters must all be experienced and have themselves learned everything we just spoke of. They must have gone through these battles themselves, have done the work themselves, and performed these tasks themselves. The masters have to introduce their disciples to these matters, and from their own experiences. So I say it in short, the masters must be introduced into the eternal power of God's personal nearness and the unmediated presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Redeemer, who is risen and has taken from death its power. This they have to present through the power of the Holy Spirit. These masters are to find fulfillment in the responsibilities they bear. These responsibilities relate not only to the souls of their disciples, but to the many thousands, to the many millions of souls, for whom these disciples will be responsible. The smallest university assumes in this same manner responsibility for the many hundreds of thousands of souls through the souls of their theological teachers. The true masters are deeply immersed in this fact, because they know that they will some day, not figuratively but in reality, be standing before the gaze of the Lord Jesus Christ in giving letter for letter the account of their household, giving an account of the care for the souls which belong to the Lord Christ, and whom he will demand as his possession from the hands of the shepherd and leader of shepherds.

Now the theology, which does not acknowledge this position of master, which does not acknowledge this responsibility, or only figuratively, or only recognizes it "within limitations," which takes these tasks not for tasks but for arbitrary views of latent problems, this theology, which knows of one Jesus Christ who had been here, but not of a

Jesus Christ who still is personally present and near today. This theology, which teaches the resurrection of the Lord Christ without grasping the ongoing work of this tangible reality for the moment, and finally, this theology which contains a teaching of the Holy Spirit but which neither knows nor confesses the Holy Spirit -- this theology is the theology of rhetoric.

It is esoteric; it is certainly not for the people; it is theoretical, certainly not applicable in practice or even meant to be. It avoids events and fears experiences, perhaps recognizing neither the one nor the other. It is opposed to the real world as something foreign, and it is at home only in discussion avoiding real life. It opposes literature if it stands conversant on all points with theology of facts from which I started out.

We consider now consider both in their general aspects, and parts of them in detail, as we look at their occurrences and manifestations.

II. SCIENCE

Theology starts – or it should start – from the entire, full, conscious, and complete personality of the living God, and progress – or should progress – into the complete personality of the human. Theology does not proceed from single acts and revelations of God, but from the eternal, complete and entire personality of God. Theology does not proceed from words and miracles and single demonstrations of the eternal Son of God, but from the living person of the God-man in his entirety and undividedness. And yet his goal is not the individual part of a person, not his body alone, nor his soul alone, nor his spirit alone, nor his cognition or his thoughts, his feelings or his reason. Rather in theology, the goal is the entire person in his living unity. It is like the inexhaustible water supply in the mountains, out of whose unfathomable secret fountains thousands of springs break forth from deep, interior, natural pressure, and go down into the valleys and plains, flowing along as brooks and rivers. Then they form into lakes and ascend in powerful springs, until the secretive draft reaches the heights of the mountains from which they came, back to the source of their life. There they dissipate into fog, clouds and rain, so that they can then again descend onto the mountain tops from where they once started as small springs.

There is a similar power of God, who brought forth through his entire creation the living waters, these springs and streams, and in his cycle of creation returns them again to their source. This same power of the living God also proceeds from a hidden source of his essence, his eternal power and divinity. He likewise sends forth the streams of his revelation among the race of mankind, so that this race should not be created alone from these springs and bathe in these streams while they otherwise belong to another element, but that they should be entirely and thoroughly submerged. They should live with their whole being in these sources and streams of the divine life, just as the fish has his entire life in living water, and he has his entire existence there.

He, the Unfathomable, who was there, who is there and who will come, and will take back again these streams of his life, into their source, into himself. But he does this on his paths which he alone knows, which he alone prepares, on which he alone leads to the time when he raises the dead, when he establishes a new heaven and a new earth, and when he raises the new Jerusalem. There the resurrected Lord is lamp, light, and sun.

There is nothing left for us to do. There is nothing else necessary than to become entirely aware of these streams of the divine life, and to savor them, their depth and breadth, as far as our powers reach, to comprehend and to watch over and to protect ourselves and others so that we are not torn from these streams of life, so that we are not torn from our reason for being here, and thereby surrender ourselves to a slow death on the barren shore.

The “knowledge,” which finds place in theology, therefore rests on the life, on life throughout as a whole of this divine revelation; it rests entirely on the event, and on the whole experience. The part develops as a part of the whole, and will not be disclosed as a part purely from observation, did not become a member from observation of the other parts, much less will its entirety be built with single parts, or even that its entirety be grasped only by the independent observation and knowledge of the single parts.

This method of independent observation is rather the technique of science, with which theology has nothing to do, and whose name is only very improperly given to it. For in theology it is dangerous, indeed destructive to apply this name to it.¹ Biology knows the source of natural life, but it knows nothing concerning the source and creation of natural matter. Therefore its task concerns natural matter rather than, as formerly happened, raising and surrendering to hasty

¹Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), the “Father of Modern Theology,” brought Christianity into favor again after the rationalism of the Enlightenment, but with a different subjectivism than rationalism. He reduced the faith to a feeling of absolute dependence. Congregations were based upon the beliefs of those who had agreed to come together and not on the objective word of God reflected in orthodox doctrine. The adherents of this school of thought were more immediately Vilmar’s opponents than the rationalists of the Enlightenment.

Schleiermacher would approach theology as a science, complete with all the philosophical baggage which a human system must bear with it. In his famous book, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, he hopes to, “...have opened the sanctuary of true science.” The “concept” of theology as “science” would predominate in the theology of the 19th century where orthodoxy was frequently rejected. It assumed that people could find theological truths, particularly in exegesis of the Bible where the supposed impartiality of the reader would allow for unbiased analysis of the truth. Vilmar treats this assumption with unbridled contempt, as the actions and presence of God on Christ are ignored.

speculation over the wholeness of nature, and to give up its essence. It observes the detailed facts with a knife-sharp accuracy; it observes result after result, each laid next to each other like a mosaic, one row after another, and from these results science advances to new observations with new results.

This clear, unquestioned knowledge of detailed facts is called science. This method researches details, divides the whole into parts, and where possible arrives at a knowledge of the whole is called science in the modern sense. Most recently and in the modern sense this description corresponds with what we call science. It agrees with this description only in biology, mathematics, and medicine. Jurisprudence however is as little like science in the modern sense, as theology is. Jurisprudence originally came from an entirety; it came from the judicial sense of the Roman people's own folk-personality. It endured and did not need a reconstruction of its whole out of the details. It did not need to arrange a unity from an unending multitude of details just as theology did not need this method.

To apply this concept of science in its full authority to theology is a case of antitheology,² i.e. the theology of dialectic and of biology. It is a theology of decline. It is the theology of Stauss³ in his reference to form and correct method, and the content of his extremely foolish books (the Christian doctrine, in its historical development and in struggle with the modern science depicted in 1840), thereafter it is the theology of Feuerbach⁴ and after him others with inferior talent who consequently used this concept in theology. The complete and logical use of this concept can only disintegrate theology for everyone who uses it. The parts and members of theology have existence only in connection with the whole of the divine life, to which they belongs. Beyond that, it means nothing and is invalid and self-contradicting to say that they are

²"Atheologie."

³D. F. Strauss (1792-1860) studied in Berlin under Hegel and Schleiermacher. He is especially noted for his book, *Life of Jesus* (1835) in which he identified the Gospel narratives as a whole as the myth of the early Christian community in an effort to honor their ordinary mortal founder, Jesus, who came to think of himself as the Messiah. In this manner he sought to make the Christian religion acceptable to reasonable men.

⁴Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872) became a Hegelian philosopher while studying at the University of Berlin. Later he criticized Hegel's philosophy and made the claim that God was a concept reflecting the reason, feelings, and love innate in people. In his book, *The Essence of Christianity* (1841), he maintained that the Christian faith was but a dream in which people worship and deify their own nature. He had great influence on such men as Marx and Freud.

simply parts which might or might not be added to the constructed whole. It is invalid and self-contradictory precisely because this ability or inability to arbitrarily place them together departs from the essence of theology.

These observations of mine seek to teach, that theology should hold fast to its substance, or at least it should attempt to hold onto it. These observations teach that the concept of science does not lead back to the importance of the old, albeit inexact definition of meaning in *ἐπιστήμη*, *scientia*, *doctrina*, or if this were not possible – and it would be difficult to do to such a degree – science would deviate from its province. And nothing less. Rhetorical theology has too high an opinion of words, and since the Strauss-Feurbach anti-theology, science has become a concept or actually only a catchword for its method. This theology does not really have a concept of science because if it did it would proceed logically and without bitterness. The essence of rhetorical theology is inconsistency, primarily employing dialectical method, as if to distinguish it from geometry and astronomy. It needs words to accomplish its purpose; here it uses the concept of science; over there, in the next instant, it puts science aside. Today it uses both the word and concept against an opponent, tomorrow, indeed in the next instant, it disavows both and uses one against the other. School theology is as good as the theology of natural knowledge and dialectic, but its learning belongs at the same time in the trivium.⁵ This inconsistency reveals it as a school theology and from a lower grade than that of dialectical theology because correct definitions and subsequent conclusions must be learned in the trivium, if one wants to advance into the quadrivium.

“By the hand of science” rhetorical theology would love to find something new. It happily made new discoveries, happily imagined “new insights,” or at least desired to found a new general systematics. It is an itch for new findings; it is an itch for new discoveries by which theology of rhetoric is constantly plagued and from which it truly can not be freed. It has no Neptune in its orbit whose existence can simply be determined by mathematical calculation, as Leverrier

⁵Here are the basic courses in grammar, logic, and rhetoric from the curriculum of the Middle Ages. It was typically followed by the more advanced studies, the Quadrivium: music, astronomy, mathematics, and geometry.

discovered Neptune, and there will never be one.⁶ Not even a small planetoid have they found, and they never will find one. They have chosen the region of Biblical literature in order to make these “discoveries.” But the new discovery exists only by knowledge of vocabulary and the art of grammar: with the distinction between Pauline and Petrine use of language, with the conflict of Yahweh against the Elohimists, with the change of order and of the age of Biblical books, etc. Today Matthew is the earliest, then it is the Gospel of Hebrews;⁷ tomorrow the Gospel of Luke is first, on the third day, an ancient gospel which is a source of the others; on the fourth day, it becomes Mark. Today Deuteronomy was written before the others, tomorrow it’s last. Today the Book of Judges is first, tomorrow it’s last. The Psalms’ authorship wanders from David to the Maccabees, and from the Maccabees back to David, to Deborah, to Moses, etc. etc. These are the results of this “science” of rhetorical theology, the results of its “discoveries.” It does not strike me as necessary to completely reject their work, but to claim these things as theological science is laughable. It does not strike me as necessary to deny that these methods in a certain sense are calculated to be used against certain enemies of God, but they are only to be held in a subordinate sense. To claim these things as theological science is laughable. Seen from the standpoint of science, these methods applied to the Biblical books resemble nothing so much as the restless householder, who from month to month must always move her furnishings around so that she always have something “new.” When they have placed all their things in every possible combination, then she must look for another house or apartment in order to enjoy her household effects in a new configuration. The theologians of rhetoric do not appear to know how indescribably laughable they appear as they present themselves with their grammatical information, which they have played with in the Bible. They are indescribably laughable as they present themselves to people of real science, as they present themselves to people of natural research,

⁶Vilmar refers to the discovery of the planet, Neptune, by Adams and Leverrier. In the late 18th century they amazed the world by discovering Neptune simply by mathematical calculation before the planet had been observed.

⁷The Gospel according to the Hebrews is a fragmentary, ancient document once thought to be an early gospel account and was accepted by as an earlier witness than the Gospel according to St. Matthew.

before all the botanists and astronomers, the doctors and even the philologists, at least those who are from good schools.

So it is – I repeat it – with the standard of science. Or as one of the rhetoricians happily puts it, “on the hand of science” concerning the Holy Scriptures, i.e. with the presupposition that the divine life of the world first must be found in the details of Scripture. Thus they are to be found separately according to the rules of lexicology, according to grammar and the critical method, because only in this manner can we honorably and in consistent manner entirely forsake the godly life. From the human layout of these books belong speech usage, word definition, syntax, accident; I would never again parse the divine life from these, if I did not sense or feel the complete, powerful hovering of the Spirit of God over these details in these Holy Scriptures, and indeed in their totality. In the same way the anatomy of a living man cannot be reproduced from the dissection of a corpse, even though it shows all parts exactly and can show them all in their places as when it was alive. The physical human perceives nothing from the Spirit of God. As long as theology of rhetoric remains rhetorical, and insists in its pretentious manner the concept of science, at least in such silly, childish play with words, it will not be able to avoid the closest kinship to antitheology. What will they answer to the antitheological thug⁸ if he is insolent enough to compare the predictions of the prophet Isaiah concerning eternal redemption and salvation with the prophecies read from the coffee grounds?⁹ But what else can be said if the proponents of rhetorical theology then teach that the second part of Isaiah is doubtful to a very high degree since the prophetic meaning and value of the second part of Isaiah is dependent upon the time of its origin? Chiefly they will reply that someone used an out of place phrase because that is the real task of rhetoric to see the “phrase,” just as it is with the blasphemers.

⁸Vilmar saw the rhetorical theologians allied with the forces of revolution in his time. He had good reason to think of the political revolutionaries of his time as criminals and having been drawn from the dregs of society. These elements were not only anti-clerical but also were commonly free-thinker, i.e. atheists, who sought not only to disestablish the church but to oppose Christianity altogether as had often been done in the French Revolution of 1789. During the Revolution of 1848, Vilmar’s house was sacked and he did not leave his house without being armed.

⁹The term used here is “Kaffesatz “ and is used in a fashion similar to the use of “reading the tea leaves” in English.

Theology should recognize that it will find nothing new, that it has nothing new to discover. Rather its task should be to protect the deposit of Holy Scripture and the blessings of salvation possessed by the church so that they will be handed over to the future servants of the church. Then these servants will gain the completed, unabridged, certain, usable and most effortless possession of these blessings. Certainly it is always important to bring forward and to learn the same truths and that is boring for the rhetoricians, sometimes it is the object of scorn for them, if they see some orthodox flatheads with unmitigated silliness year after year serve up one of their trivialities (and these there have been and still are, I am far away from disputing it). This “boredom” appears quite often to have been the occasion for all sorts of outrages. Theology has for a long time now used a tainted method to determine the soundness of a theological teacher; it is especially popular to evaluate him solely by the amount and the importance of his completed and published “research” which certainly depends on the amount and importance of his books. But what is primarily important and must be required for a theology teacher is faith and experience, or that he is fit for experience in the Christian life. However this is not on account of research but knowledge, coupled with spiritual precision. So everyone strives and regularly pursues new discoveries, not only somewhat in the historical area, where indeed there can be a certain justification and expectation of research and discoveries, but also in the dogmatic area. Where there are no new or there can be no new, independent discoveries then there are new, beautiful forms and new beautiful words in rich abundance. It was certainly no progress in “science” of dogmatics, when Schleiermacher made a name for himself with an entirely new principle of Christian belief and with a series of new “scientific” dogmatics. By this “progress,” he set the whole of evangelical theology on its head so to speak. Certainly it was “progress” but not in the sense of progress in a natural science or also in historical disciplines. It was a progress brought forth by obsolete rationalism and pushing aside the person of Jesus Christ, or stated another way, as gates through which we pass to pantheism. Dogmatics have not been promoted as one might suppose, but they have been used in a new, more dangerous phase of decadence, just as this was the case with rationalism. It matters and continues to matter to remove the alien content of

dogmatics which Schleiermacher injected with great art into Christian teaching. Should this process now be called “science?” Should this new, alien process be called science or the substance of a discipline which destroys its own subject matter as soon as it is introduced? Should this subject matter be called science which sooner or later wears itself out and is itself consumed? Or is the task to eject alien subject matter from the discipline? Or should this revolution of the new and the trend-setting be allowed to simultaneously destroy new things and perishing things alike? Should the turning of this Ixions Wheel be called “science?”¹⁰ Possibly it should because with the muddled play on words this is always possible, especially in our days. But this “science” is something completely different from what was formerly named natural science. It is unlike natural science which was not distorted and squeezed into a seeming advantage, but really becoming a genuine disadvantage, and not an honorable work but a dishonorable one. Who does not remember yet the confusing play of concepts and word games with which theology was filled towards the end of the third decade of this century by the old theologians? Schleiermacher’s thoughts were at their zenith, and at the same time Hegel’s thoughts began to thrust their way into theology. The world spoke then of a new science of theology. Was it because of this wild promiscuous science? Was it theology? All the world had “research” and “progress” in their mouths in the area of theology. Was something new studied; has a better point of view in every way been reached? Turn back! The throwing away of all these things and the restoration of the origins, a returning to the old things was progress which then took place in theology.¹¹ And it was not through Schleiermacher’s “science,” but through his referring to the person of Christ, and then to entirely different speculations moving straight towards different paths (one only has to think about the powerful impression made by Tholuck’s unforgettable book, *The Doctrine of Sin*,¹²). But this way of progress no one calls “science.” Or was the appearance of *Hutterus*

¹⁰“*Ixionsrade*,” referring to the mythological King of the Lapithae in Thessaly who for an insult to Juno was cast down to Tartarus, and tied to a perpetually revolving wheel.

¹¹This return to older things could entail the renewed interest in the Lutheran Confessions which experienced a renewed interest across Germany as the tercentennial of the Reformation, 1817, and the tercentennial of the presentation of the Augsburg Confession, 1830. Vilmar himself viewed the celebrations of 1830 as turning point in his own theology.

¹²*die Lehre von der Sünde* written by Tholuck in 1823.

redivivus a “scientific” act?¹³ Much has been published that is memorable concerning Hase’s book. And this reaction does not come alone from the antithologians, such as Röhr, who greeted this book with loud protests, but also from many better theologians, and indeed also those, who were neither teachers nor who want to be teachers. They would cry out with great opposition against this work “as a straight jacket for independent research.” I recognize this act as an undeniably great service in some good qualities of this book, as well as disadvantages which were censured, and I recognize that these beautiful new forms and new beautiful words applied bridle and bit in much greater circles.

Should we in complete seriousness explain the alien stuff called “theological science?” Should we explain the theology of every philosophical system, officially name it, and on the whole direct its reception, digest it and finally be misled?¹⁴ This term, “theological science” enjoins the concept “science” only in a general way, but certain ones who now direct and use this term, with their own inner justification, are simply not going to turn back. Besides it is not the task of theology to explain each new system of philosophy or cosmology to every real or supposed student of philosophy. This is especially true for out and out “made-up” theology. It can be made up with little trouble in most cases because theology is a true art; it has or at least should have sharp eyes for all phenomena --but the new philosophy or cosmology is nothing but “cosmomery.”¹⁵ So it, for example, is not entirely necessary that theology give a long-winded explanation of all modern systems of thought to which belong the recently resurrected materialism. We do not only take up what is new. We do not continuously seek not always the new and foreign. Such a habit will destroy the intimate connection between real life and knowledge, and this is in direct opposition to everything which now with no justification is called science. But theology is before all else life. It is about real life and truly should confirm life. It

¹³A dogmatic work (1828) published by Karl August von Hase (1800-1890) a theologian of the University of Tübingen. This book attacks rationalism by using the fictitious device of writing as if it had been addressed by the great orthodox Lutheran theologian, Leonhard Hutter (1563-1616). Von Hase is credited with ending common rationalism. Vilmar cites it as an example of the value of emerging orthodoxy.

¹⁴“*Digerierung und endliche Egerierung* :“ these two nouns appear to have been constructed from two French verbs: respectively, *digerer*, to ponder, digest, discuss, and *egarer*, to stray, lose, be led into error.

¹⁵Here Vilmar indulges in a play on words: *cosmos* for the universe and *Momus*, the god of blame and ridicule in Greek mythology.

must have singular intent and determination. It must not value before life that which clearly seeks to rule it by pushing and shoving, or by forming and unforming.

All which influences real life in a superficial way, which is determined to rule it, endures only with difficulty, or is not consistently relevant to it with even superficial changes. So it is with theology and with jurisprudence. These suffer from a disadvantage which these other disciplines do not share. The natural sciences and related disciplines, regularly begin new undertakings whose results are so pleasing to their adherents. Consequently the teacher of theology and jurisprudence in order “not to be stagnant” must surprise his listeners every week, if not with new discoveries, then with new attempts he will set out to gain advantage. For from both of these disciplines proceed rule and the establishment of real life, of the spiritual as well as the outer life, of the private as well as the public life.

But even this is difficult for rhetorical theology to grasp. It does not want to act, it wants to talk, talk to their self-promoting reason, and to awaken a similar reason in others. At the same time they are glad to transplant in others an aversion to facts and action. They think that the Office of the Holy Ministry should speak, as theological rhetoricians habitually speak their thoughts, often only secrets behind closed doors, or not seldom, loudly proclaimed.

The theology of rhetoric has adopted yet another procedure from the area of science just as they appropriated the word science itself. It is only an empty phrase but whether used in seriousness or in empty talk, has been especially destructive and also deserves special mention. Real science does not know everything in advance concerning its experiments. Thus it knows nothing in advance concerning the relationship of detailed observations to the whole of the subject. Real science cannot predetermine its findings without contradicting itself and destroying its findings as well. So it proceeds with impartiality and is free from presuppositions in its observations and research. This impartiality and lack of presuppositions has been taken over by the antitheologians in their system with great applause, and it is understandable because by this move they achieve their goal: the destruction of theology and the ruin of belief. They attain the establishment of hostility to Christ and the renunciation of God; with certainty they separate souls

in need of redemption from those souls which can offer this redemption. Thus the godly life will be measured according to the worldly life, the knowledge of God according to worldly knowledge, and then the competence of theology is thrown thrown into ruin. The theology of rhetoric does not really want this, rather the game with words is to entice, and without provoking any misgiving of the laughable inconsistencies which it conceives. It takes this impartiality and lack of presuppositions as a fundamental principle of their "system." If the theology of rhetoric should break with the entire world, and with the concepts of the world, there remains one thing from which it cannot separate itself: with the words of this world. Words are the bridges of thoughts. They are the bridges of the essence of things, and whoever takes up words foreign to it, unknowingly takes up the thoughts and the essence of foreign invasion into the soul and does it of his own will. The devil is powerful also through words: this power of words and knowledge of words he stole from almighty God.

So rhetorical theology approaches the facts of revelation with "impartiality," i.e. in its own sense: without previous interest or antipathy against revelation. But rhetorical theology does not notice that it only plays with the words. In reality these words have no other meaning than opposition to the facts of revelation from previous interest or complete antipathy against revelation. If theology of rhetoric does not take impartiality seriously, then it cannot allow the subject matter to be taken seriously. With this subject matter it seeks to gain power "over the opposite parties" involved in every controversy concerning the facts of revelation (This is a well known rule of rhetorical theology.). At the same time it surrenders its substance as theology, becoming just like the theology of dialectic or academic theology taught in the higher grades.

This impartiality and lack of presuppositions of rhetorical theology have to be seen not only as empty talk, but is substantially willful self-approval. Rhetoric uses natural means of measurement to define the regions of dialectical inquiry and regards them as their own special possession, the *Sic und Non*,¹⁶ the struggle between *Pro and Contra*, in which at all times the

¹⁶*Sic et Non* (c. 1123), written by Peter Abelard (1079-1142) in which he argued that logic was necessary to establish faith. His method was to present seemingly contradictory statements by church fathers and that by reason alone could they be reconciled. This book was written against those who asserted the authority of doctrine to the exclusion of reason.

disputes remain unsolved. These disputes are not those which are balanced out by dialectic process or settled disputes, but they remain *Ja* und *Nein* at the same time, always according to pleasure, inclination, or need – should it also be the need of the itching ears – temper, or chance, regard for party loyalty or persons, and he regards it as his own possession.

It is characteristic of a rhetorician (*rhetor*) to be an advocate (*causidicus*) and at the same time a prosecutor (*declamator in foro*), completely unprejudiced in the subject. Today he is for this party, tomorrow for another. Today it is this subject, tomorrow the exact opposite subject is argued with all possible reason. All this is done, he claims, exclusively without prejudice and only in the interest of the actual process, while the result is to him a matter of no concern. The judge is interested in justice, but the rhetorician is interested in talk and delivers his penetrating judgments, simultaneously and immediately. The rhetorician does not penetrate in depth; his character does not allow for that. His area of interest is purely superficial. Seriousness is not his concern -- to him it is all the same, if it can lend itself to his ingenious game. Personally he never cares; at all times and in all his words, his heart never enters into the concern, though his tongue is at all times in motion. He serves no party exclusively because it is his calling to serve all parties.

Only in one case will he also become an interested party: if it strikes him instead of *Sic et Non* to say neither *Sic* nor *Non*, or perhaps it would be demanded of him to say *Sic* and to reject *Non* in matters of Christianity, if the occasion arises or persons come upon the scene who demand a distinction or at least want to make a value judgment. As the advocate is opposed to the judge, because the judge must bring a process to an end, and as the interest of an advocate is totally opposed to the judge's interest, so are such persons and situations totally opposed for the rhetorician. If a rhetorical theologian is forced to pronounce a definitive word in connection with Christianity, he proclaims for all time a *Non*.

He who thinks of eternal salvation does not receive such thoughts from impartiality or a lack of presuppositions, but receives eternal salvation and is sustained in it only by the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and it was won already by this savior on the cross. Dialectical theology explains this as a circle; rhetorical theology explains it as a figure of speech (a "viewpoint") which

it censures in order to tear it apart, and the greatest part of rhetorical theology sees it as a mediation between God and the devil, but not to be accepted in any case.

Thus this mediation for peace does not mean having salvation but refers to the rules of speaking of salvation. The fact of having salvation in the first place must remain apart from the question. It is a question of both warring powers following the same rules concerning truth, faith and salvation, that both of them – God on the one side and the prince of this world on the other side – that they both refrain from extreme demands, whether from the extreme right or the extreme left. They are both disturbers of the peace and science-destroying opponents who use the same kinds of commands, and if their demands become extreme, not much is to be made of them beyond their own self interest. The rhetorician says that if the talking is dispensed with, then the subject is dispensed with as well. Theology of rhetoric hopes for this triumph of their rhetorical science up to the present day, and none can take this hope from them. Who knows, on this path the devil may still go to heaven, and he does not even know it!

The subject could receive a new twist if rhetorical theology could persuade us that God and the devil themselves are only words and rules, concepts, and topics for science. Then the conclusion of peace will no longer be determined by the warring powers but by the mediation of science, and as it is dictated by science itself, and thereby rhetorical theology is no longer what it was but moves to a higher class, to dialectic.

But not yet! The war does not stop; it does not die out. How would that be possible because the single undying thing in the world is “science” (otherwise named “intelligence,” or as the science of making a living)! This science directly sustains itself, and its classes will be taken over by the school of vocabulary and grammar.

It is difficult not to write satire (*Difficile est satiram non scribere*).¹⁷ Indeed it was not possible to consider everything in this general chapter on science, but all that was presented here can only be understood by considering the details with a sharp, fixed gaze. Often there were only too many vague shapes to hold before the eyes. I go on now to consider the details.

¹⁷This quote from Juvenal refers to the literary genre of satire, the only literary form which is considered original to the Romans. Therefore it was deemed difficult to please Roman readers without including it.

III. LITERATURE AND EXEGESIS OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

The philologist's basic complaint is that there is no longer any interest in philology, not even among their own students of philology, e. g. the future gymnasium¹ teachers, and philologists deny any responsibility for this undeniable indifference concerning their science and attribute it to the increasing materialistic and realistic directions of today's world. It may be that this problem's origin is occasioned by the negligence of philology itself, and in the method which philologists have for a long time shared among themselves. It is true, philology draws it last breath, if it is not already dead. Its murderer is no one other than the Alexandrianism of philology.²

For longer than thirty years now writers are not being read but only being read about. Philological departments at the universities are not alone in directing this destructive war against ancient wisdom, but also those in the philological seminaries, and even more those in the gymnasiums. Where the text of the author is still read, he only figures in a subordinate role in the lecture or the lesson. The chief subject is found in critical discussion, in archeological and simultaneous literary-historical excursus, and it is found in the often measureless minutiae of grammar. The soul of the author rests no longer with the soul of the teacher; it resides even less with the medium of speech, because the competence of the Latin language, or at least the breath in it, was removed in striking ways by the philologists themselves. Thus the soul of the listeners and students comes into no contact whatsoever with the soul of the ancients. The content of the ancient writings is almost completely lost to the present philological world, along with the life which

¹A German secondary school which prepares students for university studies. Completion of gymnasium is roughly equivalent to an associate degree from an American university.

²Here Vilmar is referring to the "School of Alexandria," a method of Scriptural interpretation associated with Clement of Alexandria (ca. 155-ca. 215), Origen (ca. 185-ca. 254) and their followers who held that Scriptural passages of things found in history really signify something other than a normal, natural meaning. Therefore the literal meaning of the text is disregarded and an allegorical interpretation given to it. Reformation scholars such as Luther and Calvin rejected this assumption and method and used the natural meaning of Scriptures as its writers had intended it to be understood.

entirely lies hidden in this content is thereby distorted. Others will have taken action, as I did during both my almost twenty year sharing in the central directing authority of the state for the practical examinations of candidates for gymnasium teaching positions, and as I often did as gymnasium director. The candidates (*Candidaten Collegia*) knew of Platonic philosophy and were able to give a prompt account of it, but they had read absolutely nothing of Plato, or hardly even one of the easier *Dialogues*. They knew of Homer only by what had been presented in Greek literary history, but they had read nothing of Homer after they left school, and of his works even then hardly a single Rhapsody. They understood not the least thing of the old bards and of their art, all which make the souls of youth fruitful. But fragments of these lost writings they did understand enough to accumulate. It is obvious from their works that not all not all have become philological Alexandrians. I name two among the most worthy, well known, and exceptional, Eduard Wunder and Nägelsbach; but the Alexandrians will not want to yield to these exceptional men.

By changing the name you tell the story (*Mutato nomine de te fabula narratur*). Rhetoric as Alexandrianism has penetrated into theology as well and now wields an almost unlimited power in literature and exegesis. In these subjects the better, even the best scholars, make concession after concession to Alexandrian rhetoric. The result of this branch of theology will be no other than the end of philology.

The history of Biblical literature, the introductory science, as one now calls it, and whose concept and scope we struggle against without result, has in the past decade won significance by outflanking all other theological disciplines. It dares to take away what little is left. Consequently there remains little real Biblical knowledge is removed as it is used by the theologian, as he ladles it from the Holy Scriptures as the food of life for his congregation.

“One who has thoroughly worked through the introduction, can dispense with almost entirely with exegesis”³ has become a routine axiom for young theological students, and one not entirely in error, because a large part which is addressed in the introductory material repeats itself

³“Wer die Einleitung gehörig durchgearbeitet hat, kann der Exegese fast Gänzlich entraten....”

again in the exegetical lectures, but in expanded form, and it specializes in the minutiae. Often the introduction to Holy Scripture, it should be explained, takes away almost half of the entire lecture time. Indeed I have already seen for a period of years one very reputable university teacher's basic lecture on the *Epistle to the Romans* in which the introduction filled three quarters of the entire lecture.

A greater part of literature on Biblical history, in its vast bulk, is now dedicated to the attack on the authenticity of the Biblical books and the defense of them against these attacks. Antitheology will press these attacks because that is its inner nature which contradicts the word of God from the ground up; it is entirely natural and necessary that theology seizes weapons and seeks to build fortresses against these attacks. But the harm done to theology grows through this entering the attack on the enemy of the word and is very great, and it often outweighs the advantage of attacking. On this path the speech of God to us is shoved more and more into the background, and the speech of men among themselves about the word of God, often the rags of men instead of the word of God, is pushed into the foreground. Wherever not one heart is now present for the word of God, there literary science provides a welcome helping hand to abandon the words of God and to publish exclusively human words, thoughts, and information. In all the talk concerning grammar of New Testament idioms, speech usage, the relations between the writings and the writer to each other, discussions of concepts, chronology, historical connections, and proofs and counter proofs from early church literature, the content of the divine Scriptures is often entirely forgotten. And the Scriptures are often completely obliterated for learned people. If these learned men really read the Scriptures (In regard to the New Testament, theologians are not entirely out of practice, but according to my experience, they are decidedly in the decline.), they read the holy books singly and from the viewpoint of the Biblical literary science alone; they read with reference to the general and special critic, the speech usage of the individual writers, etc., and this the best of them manage after years to do, reading the Holy Scriptures to themselves and to themselves alone. That is rhetoric; that is Alexandrianism in theology, and it is a very dangerous method because this method of rhetoric is at best too close to being mistaken for real life.

According to our own experience this method will lead the young theological students against our view and our purpose, and they will necessarily come to regard the Holy Scriptures primarily as a human book, and only secondarily, as a divine book. By their method the professional rhetoricians have won the game against us.

A method⁴ has to be found through which these attacks will be turned aside as they are launched from the side of rhetoric, and even more from dialectic and the theology of natural science (*Physica*). A method has to be found to instantly meet the attack at its very basis, so that theology applies scholarship to this introductory science, not to make it superfluous, but to return it to the second order, while it now rules from the first order. The attention of all theologians who do not belong to the rhetoricians, vocabulists, and the grammarians must be turned toward them in order to oppose them. This method has to be found, or much more, this reality, and without doubt it will be found, as it becomes an increasingly vigorous pursuit for specialists in this area. I will later describe what is presently necessary and will be necessary if this method is to be found.

Exegesis suffers generally from the great mistake of dismemberment both in its entirety as well as in its details. In entirety: the university students hear little more than three to four exegetical lectures each on the Old and New Testaments; frequently only two exegetical courses of lectures (*Collegia*) on the Old Testament are heard, and often, it is even more likely only a single course of lectures. This deficiency concerning the Old Testament is very seldom made up through private lectures, and the entire knowledge of some theologians concerning the Old Testament extends no further than to some chapters in Isaiah and some forty Psalms. How should a merely tolerable knowledge of the Old Testament be arrived at in the face of so wretched an understanding of it? How should a vivid understanding of divine ordinance of the old covenant be gained in its entirety? How should love and a full reverence for the Old Testament be achieved? But such summary proceedings agree exactly with the mind of the rhetorician; they maintain that only as an example should elements of the Old Testament be read “as demonstrations until the student has had enough;” Concerning a thorough knowledge of the Old Testament they conclude, “it should be

⁴“Bannwort “

pursued only because the one or the other want to pursue special oriental studies.” This attitude reflects repugnance for the subject and a partiality for a certain category of developing bad habits. It is a reproach to those who have better discernment that this Alexandrian mischief is left unchecked. It is a reproach to contemporary theology which consents to the theology of rhetoric and joins forces with it.⁵

Proportionately, knowledge of the New Testament is no better; that portion which does not belong in the series of lectures on exegesis, should be made up in private lectures. Earlier the greatest portion was done through private lectures, but this is in high measure reduced into a commentary, only cursory and simply hurriedly read over in a book. This understanding of the New Testament will not be improved through “scientific” exegetical work of great effort, to which the student in theological institutions and associations⁶ are urged or directed. The learned are normally absorbed with thoughtful precociousness, not in learning, but with inopportune methods of learning such atomizing of the Scriptures in “scientific” manner, that is, to impose themselves on the New Testament. Ultimately, perhaps entirely, they consider the sum of all their efforts (*Elaborate*) on the Holy Scripture as comfortable cushions on which to rest. An assignment will neither be given nor desired to read the complete Holy Scriptures, not simply as so-called empty words, but Holy Scripture, as the actual word of God.

Thus there already appear in the theological candidates’ qualification exams, the results of this knowledge of the Scriptures discussed here, and today’s philological candidates’ apparent qualifications are entirely alike. History of literature should in the study of both Testaments make up for all deficiencies of knowledge. But the damage to the soul, however, for which theologians bear responsibility with this treatment of the Holy Scriptures, no literary history corrects. If we do not want candidates and pastors to shame themselves in the pulpit, and in other respects as well, we are completely justified in directing a curse against Bible instruction which these servants of the church have learned at the university. We have often heard them speaking with deliberate and open hostility toward God. And they speak with pure rhetoric. They speak of the Old Testament in

⁵“*Connivenz* “ probably from the French verb, “*connivence*.”

⁶“*Societäten* “

contemptuous speech. They speak of the law of God with naked invective. They speak of the God and Lord of the old covenant with ambiguous blasphemy. We are likewise justified in directing a curse against the negligence of the church authorities who put up with such instruction, supervise it, and do not consider reforming and correcting (*Correctur*) those preparing for the office of pastor, or those already actually in the office. Even more is this curse justified when this mischief is glossed over as it takes place or when it is anticipated by those whose call it is to correct this mischief by their saying: "it may by all means not be quite appropriate, but it is nevertheless a customary way to signify the relation between the Old and New Testament and the 'alleged slander' was 'only' directed towards the Old Testament; we should also commend the rhetorical adornments." This only means to desecrate the church twofold and threefold through rhetorical art. A Moses-like rage belongs here as he broke the tablets and called out to the Levites: "Come to me!" Yes, a threefold curse to these blasphemous, rhetorical soul-sellers! A threefold curse: from the deceived pupil whose soul was misled, from the congregation angered by this, and from the whole church slandered by such a servant.

Detailed exegesis is for them the most pressing necessity according to radical Alexandrianism. But on the contrary this exegesis essentially divides but does not unify, it is a mosaic fragmentation; it does not develop the details from within the total revelation of God, but piles up all the words and erects so-called "concepts," as the better and best have so far allowed themselves to be captivated by this Alexandrian rhetoric, that they designate the belief in God's word, light, life, and so on, as unbiased "concepts." And what is worse, they analyze these concepts, instead of first and foremost bringing to light divine existence, that is, reality. The exegesis of the rhetorician is totally philosophical and literary, and according to the standards of that philology, which from the outset are as depicted here, their philology is that of those who introduce their own extinction. Word and concepts do not stand only in the foreground, but they alone completely dominate, and the talk is not of divine reality. Rather what is alone stressed is a Pauline or a Johannine doctrinal concept; they stress an arbitrary collection of subject matter, so that a young theologian who in his time of learning has heard Alexandrian exegesis alone, brings

up the old accusations against me and thinks the verdict his own. Paul, John, and Peter should appear to him as professors of theology. And in actuality, it happens only too often that the viewpoint of the exegete carries the same weight as the “viewpoint” of the apostle. Ultimately the exegete himself has to set the apostle straight⁷ in the bargain. It is entirely destroyed in the consciousness of the listener that God’s word should here be presented and explained.

The rhetoricians know essentially nothing about the divine logic. The impression even more of “divine logic” is not only foreign to them, but completely laughable. According to them then the holy apostles have to demonstrate the connection of their thoughts to those of God, or better yet, they have to demonstrate them according to the paradigm dictated by Alexandrian fads. It is a singular beginning when the modern Alexandrian philologists falsely substitute the speech of a modern Demosthenes,⁸ according to the measure of popular Kantianism⁹ or indeed before the philosophy of Wolf¹⁰ (which in these things still prevails far more than one normally assumes). Could Demosthenes return how he would laugh! The Master of the apostles and the Lord of our salvation can and will come again; “then will the laughing be costly!”¹¹

Through an exegetical series of lecture the theological rhetoricians opens a “scientific discussion.” There arguments and counter-arguments are weighed, opinions heard and rejected, viewpoints drawn up and put down, and everything, or indeed the superior “scientific authorities” are applied to the words. Only one authority is not regularly applied to the word: that authority is the word of God itself. They will speak again and again about the word of God, but the Word itself will not be spoken. And the first task and responsibility of an exegete should be to return his listeners again to reading the passages of Holy Scripture with a collected and quiet soul, and to

⁷“*corrigieren*” from the Latin, *corrigo*, to put straight, reduce to order, set right.

⁸Demosthenes (c. 384 B.C. – 322 B.C.) was an orator of great eloquence who attempted to raise support for the independence of Athens from Macedonian hegemony.

⁹Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), the philosopher who defined the limits of reason and thereby identified those things of which little could known in themselves, i.e. God and the supernatural. This emphasis on reason systematized subjectivity and a dependence upon one’s own faculties and a rejection of revelation. The Christian religion was reduced to a system of moralism.

¹⁰Christian von Wolff (1679-1566), a philosopher and disciple of Leibniz. While he did not deny revelation from God, he embraced reason as the final authority. His rationalism was very influential throughout Germany. Rationalism was made supreme over the authority of God’s revealed word.

¹¹“*da wird das Lachen werden theur* (sic)!”

read them again and again and once again, without a human word, not even to allow one's own interrupting words. By and by the divine word takes on life and speech, even though it appears dead in the beginning, and catches -- in a very plain sense, with us, to us, to speak within us and shows us, that it is not a speech from single words placed together, but a divine act, that it is the word, at the same time light and life, from which bright and increasingly brighter beams fall on all the finer points.

It is just like secular philology. Here I appeal to all philologists, who are probably no longer a great number, but who still know joy in ancient texts, and who seek pleasure in the products of old literature, especially poetry, and even from the most difficult: Pindar, Aeschylus, Aristophanes. I appeal to those who approach them without explanations, without commentaries and learned lectures (*Scholien*),¹² and read it through seriously three, four, or more times, in spite of all difficulties of speech and subject matter, and if possible, skipping all these helps at first. By and by a surprising life and understanding from all this effort can be achieved and pleasure in it sustained. These can grow through the follow-on use of commentaries though these never can never take the place of actual reading. This method of philology is entirely anti-Alexandrian, and all things considered, it is not at all modern; it is old and "outdated."¹³ It belongs of course to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and was the reason for the great joy which at that time philologists found in the classical age, and Luther found in the Holy Scriptures.

While some of these wrongs of Alexandrian treatment of the Bible are not to be healed immediately and have been forced upon us by the theology of rhetoric, it is still at least possible for us to completely separate ourselves from all this Alexandrianism. There are means to successfully oppose this dissipation of divine reality and gain results from the Service of the Word opposed to this discipline of service to words.¹⁴

¹²A word most probably taken from the Latin noun, *schola*, which means learned lectures, conversations, dissertations, or the place where such things are to be found.

¹³"überwunden."

¹⁴The contrast in German between "servant of the word" and "service of words" is more plain: "*Dienst des Wortes*" and "*Wörterdienst*."

These means I cannot justify in Biblical theology¹⁵ or only in a narrow way. It is good that these methods at one time achieved a regular place in the academic lectures, and that they had wholesomely opposed the evaporation of theological knowledge into philosophical abstractions. But Biblical theology rests again more or less, on abstractions, which are opposed to the divine word, and it bears the impression of current exegesis as well. Biblical theology is not bound to the collective experience of the Christian church as dogmatics and ethics are bound to them. Rather Biblical theology bears the impression of subjectivity by current teachers as if they possessed a lasting significance and were part of its essential substance, and a necessary part of its being. Biblical theology can be good, but it can also be absolutely bad. And in most cases, since Sebastian Frank, who truly produced the first Biblical theology (*Güldin Arch.* 1538);¹⁶ Biblical theology bears the impression of uncertainty in itself. But of course it leads to the claim of objectivity. In Biblical theology no one wants “to mediate” in order not to appear subjective, but the experience of the church must not be allowed to intercede in order to teach unscientific church theology; it is easy in that case, to teach the sentences of Holy Scripture “unmediated,” i.e. really, as conflicting statements standing next to each other. And that is precisely nothing other than the worst subjectivity.

If we can accept the presupposition that Biblical theology rests on a clear, sharp, and certain understanding within the historical course of the divine economy, in spite of everything we would expect from it some benefit for the healing of the damage to our present Bible understanding. But there it fails completely in our so-called historical but essentially rhetorical time, though we dare to accept this presupposition concerning the substance of Biblical theology (as basis for this system).

We have to believe and even urge that in the university the old, now long-lost, special knowledge of content of the entire Holy Scriptures again be acquired. The basis of this detailed

¹⁵There were various schools of thought at Vilmar's time which subordinated understanding of the Bible gained from its text to methods which critically evaluated the Bible by external, rational standards. The meaning of Biblical narrative was subordinated to philosophical and historical criticism. Historical inquiry became predominant over dogmatic theology which became dependent upon this historical investigation.

¹⁶Sebastian Frank (1499- ca. 1543) was a Roman Catholic priest and mystic who opposed Luther and Melancthon.

knowledge of the Scriptures would of course be established in the families and in the schools, but really no more than the basis. For the most part it would in reality be established in the universities. I recall only too well, what happened in our own experience with entire oral examinations (*dicta probantia*) entirely in Hebrew and Greek basic texts, where we memorized at least twenty to thirty Psalms, eight to ten chapters of Isaiah, the first three chapters of Genesis and countless sections of the New Testament (the Sermon on the Mount, Chapters 14-17 from the Gospel according to John, Romans 5-8 and others) in the basic language. The value of this “mechanism”¹⁷ was not insignificant, and it did not seek a new way of rhetoric where this practice can lose its value through painful abuse. The word of God is living and powerful so long as it is the pure word of God without any addition. Some time ago I knew an elderly dying clergyman who had learned and performed all this and even more. Far more than eighty years old when someone began a Psalm for him in Hebrew, he immediately recited it through an entire series of verses from memory. This man was a complete rationalist, inclined and ready at every instant with the most annoying outbursts of foolish invective against Christ. But to the extent that it was a matter of a Hebrew or Greek text, perchance the beginning word of a Psalm would be given to him, he immediately stood in the presence of this word of God, often respectfully, quietly, and recited the Psalm and for the moment abandoned entirely all animosity against God’s word and of the praise of “reason.” Was it the mechanism or God’s Spirit who is in God’s word?

If only it were now possible for young teachers to be seized by the power of God’s word and filled with deep need, they would want to make this word of God their own, secure possession at every moment for the sake of their own salvation! Through their example, the students of theology would be made better. And by the teachers’ own witness and demonstrated use of this means of Bible knowledge, they would without question make a significant impact on these, the youthful students of theology in awakening and expanding their resulting service to the church. This steadfastness in the word of God, would at first only be an external steadfastness; it would furnish a shield against the attacks of the destructive Bible critics, as nothing else could,

¹⁷*Mechanismus* .

because the word of God, which we take as our entire and complete possession, already protects of itself and without our help, but it protects our own hearts as well, and – we do not consider the following a paradox -- it sharpens the intellect. On this path the theological student will seriously and submissively follow the word of God. Without question he will shortly develop not only an inner steadfastness in God's word, but during this time, he will find the still missing method against destructive Biblical literary science. A new generation will become so inwardly certain in the word of God and will become so deeply and completely immersed in the wholeness of the divine life which is found in the Scriptures, that attacks on the periphery of this life will not, as now, only be met at the periphery, with details, but rather will be met from the center of the spring of the divine life, in its wholeness, and it can beat back these attacks with one blow. We older ones have not achieved this in this blessed land, but it has only been seen from afar because we have all together stood in the turbulent waters of strife.

To this end it must be considered whether it is not possible to make a reading of the entire Holy Scriptures, without exclusion of a single part, and to make it a regular task during the time of study by our young theological students. Naturally it is not possible – at least not presently – to bring about this reading with inclusion of the collected learned apparatus of “scientific” exegesis. But this is not the only task of this reading. Its task is much more that the flow of divine deeds would in one and the same draught, unbound and not dissected, so flow through the soul of the future shepherds, that this soul is awakened for the Office of the Shepherd and to its tasks, and that they are brought the facts of divine revelation in their relation to each other during the present time and in the future of the church. Also they would be brought the understanding of their future position as shepherds, and be brought to the view that they learn to recover the glory of God, regain the power of his words and acquire the peace of his Holy Spirit. In this understanding they would know this joy, together with peace, and the power and the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. These would be imparted to the congregation who would again feel and know them. Very few scholarly references are needed for success to this end. As prerequisites for Bible reading in the Old Testament, for example, Biblical archeology is already suitably presented as it is usually read

and heard in theological courses by most. If this effort is successful as it is here concisely proposed, it will hardly be insignificant but perhaps have significant results.

Both pastor and congregation together would together be genuinely opposed to rhetoric; they would be a reality of the word, opposed to words which are only concerned with words. It would not be something simply learned but something experienced. The theological students would step beyond the borders of “science” into their assigned future, and into the reality of their lives. But at the same time it would bring this reality into their very selves, and the theological teachers in their present positions would again have an outstanding opportunity to save these students from the house of straw called “science.” These teachers would prove themselves as witnesses and masters, not simply as teachers, and would educate disciples instead of students and listeners.

The rhetoricians will already consider these proposals as little else than Birnam Wood moving, and they would not accept, this completely extraordinary movement of such a thing as a wild wood, as if an “idle forest (*ὕλη ἀτακτος*),” moved in the head of the writer of these pages.¹⁸ For me that would then be the sure sign that in the not too distant future Birnam Wood would really move itself toward the Macbeth of Rhetoric.

¹⁸The “unthinkable” predicted in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* ; when the unthinkable came true as predicted and Macbeth’s illegitimate rule came to an end.

IV. SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

This heading is already a rhetorical device, at least if system in the currently accepted sense (as development of all the propositions of a discipline whose autonomously founded principle and direction is capable of autonomous thought), not in the normal and old meaning of *συστημα* as it was used. Dogmatics and ethics are arbitrarily separated “by scientific need.” Dogmatics and ethics continue to struggle against this separation and not as one might suppose only in life, but also in books because these dogmatics and ethics are nothing other than an accumulation of the experiences of the church up to the present time concerning the acts of God in Jesus Christ. Doctrine, as the expression of the facts of the redemption, is sound only in so far found as it is a true expression of these facts, and listens to the life of the church. Through its teaching the church answers to the Lord concerning his deeds, or much more concerning his questions to the church, whether it understands his demonstrations of eternal mercy, accepts, intertwines this mercy into its own life, and thus has established the word of his forbearance. Dogmatics and ethics are therefore in and of themselves nothing more than confessions of the church; they are not consequences of the experiences or the speculation of individuals within the church. This viewpoint has meanwhile already been lost for a century and even longer under the influence of the general confusion of the human spirit, which has turned away from real life itself and turned toward an empty life of scholarship. Dogmatics and ethics are also the characteristic theological disciplines by witnesses of the events and experiences of the church. From these they have gone to “sciences,” from confessions to books, from results of the life of the church to the illustrations of ideas of individuals, and have themselves withdrawn entirely from the life of the church, and this even with intent and in some cases they oppose it with animosity.

This state of affairs cannot be corrected without the most serious preaching about the life of the church concerning academic theology, and if also in the last two decades some improvements

have happened, what improvement can be hoped for in this ruinous deterioration in the church, there is certainly the great need for a real improvement. The most important doctrines, these are better called facts, are compressed together to a minimum. They are still with us in this lamentably maimed form which they bore from the middle of the last century. Other facts are consumed in this questionable manner, and over everything in both disciplines, and especially dogmatics, blows the cold breath of doubt. It has become all the same to this so-called “doctrine,” i.e. human opinion concerning the facts of the revelation, and this “doctrine,” far different from the “word of the steadfastness of Christ (λόγος τῆς ὑπομονῆς χριστοῦ),” yes, the direct opposite of all “perseverance (ὑπομονή),” since its nature cannot be other than fickle,¹ it can essentially only be in doubt.

Whoever denies this condition of the persistently maimed form of our systematic theology, its turning from real life, its prevailing subjectivity and its character of doubt, then I consider this malady self-inflicted by him. I mean him, as I speak here and subsequently speak of him as a dogmatician or ethicist or rhetorician, because words count more than facts to him, perhaps words are everything.

Whoever properly considers the Holy Scriptures in themselves, and at the same time the world, who has above all passed through and experienced the inner and external events and conditions of the world in the last 60-70 years, he would be justly astounded to some extent to find in so many of the dogmatic lectures, indeed in many dogmatic textbooks, the persistent miserable treatment concerning the doctrine of creation, of the image of God, of original sin, of the source of evil, of the devil, of the effects of grace, of the church, of the sacraments, and of the last things in this flowering of rationalism, in this glorious period of vocabulists and grammaticians. Likewise forerunners such as Martensen,² whose language has a certain relationship with the language of the rhetorician, so that the language cannot be blamed for its “obscurity,” and finally in his diction the shriveled limbs began simultaneously to be extended and the sick body of doctrine at least assumed

¹The French word, “variabel” is here used.

²Hans Larsen Martensen (1808-1884) was a Danish Lutheran theologian was a professor in Copenhagen and then a court preacher. His theology was marked by a speculative-mystic tendency.

the appearance of health with a certain early recovery showing, have still produced no change in the area of dogmatic rhetoric. To be sure there is nothing to say about all these things, if we have experienced nothing of them and we are unable to defend ourselves against rhetoric to the utmost. People want to know and learn, certainly, but with the presupposition that they can remain distant and that these subjects can only be seen from the birds eye view or at least from a certain hiding place. Over in Turkey people may hit each other, but not in the neighborhood next to us; the clamor entangles the rhetorician in his rationalization and stifles his talk. In striking ways this turns up in the doctrine of the church and of the sacraments along with the doctrine of the Office of the Ministry, of which I have spoken at length below.

As shown the above articles of doctrine the living experience is pushed away as well, leading to the miserable, thin, doubting portrayal of rhetorical dogmatics, impressive enough to entangle the souls of the listener, if not to poison them. If for example, in the doctrine of creation the dogmas of faith also are communicated, they will only be communicated, not confessed, and in this doubtful, tottering circumstance, we see and hear from the lecturers opinions which are clear enough: "it is indeed still to be shown, whether everything is really as I explain it," and if it not as explained, as is now the case often enough, the doubtful, detailed, dreadful, remaining-to-be-seen article of faith is then poured out to the multitude. Clearly enough the remembrance which we want to instill is shown or hidden, or shown in the very fact of being hidden: "Don't believe everything too strongly, after all the story of Genesis is myth!" Instead with a fearless, unconstrained mien -- fearless through God's power and unconstrained through the knowledge of God's truth -- the first words of Genesis categorically set forth the first and only world picture and world-conquering word of authority and of peace with which the peal of a thousand thunders through all the millennia resounds, and a hundred times in the history of revelation; compared with the wisdom and history of the pagan world it resounds and finds itself confirmed -- instead of that an exposition that is halfhearted, inconclusive, and dialectical from the beginning will be proclaimed concerning the creation out of nothing. Were it in this regard genuinely dialectical and

not simply rhetorical, it would not be without result, and the process would directly lead to the area of natural observation, and would quickly result in the entire scriptural doctrine of the creation.

Just as with the doctrine of the creation, rhetoric deals with eschatology, about which the new dogmatics begins again to concern itself, and from which rhetoric is again not far removed. Rhetoric speaks and has to give advise on everything, but it never want to pray with or act with someone. The inclination of modern dogmatics contemplates once again the apocalypse and the doctrine of eternal damnation. The divine, awful depth of the first doctrine is too deep for rhetoric. This doctrine will be dismissed without further ceremony and some empty phrase. But if eternal damnation could be abolished with words, that would agree more with the irresolution and the fear of every permanent thing in which rhetoric excels. This will long be tried. In addition it is lamentable that Martensen's dogmatics in this point toyed with rhetorical dialectic although quietly; it ultimately concluded "that we do not know." Without question we could have concluded this in a shorter version; either back in the experience of sin, and this says to me, that the difference between God and antigod,³ which I have learned from the Scripture and thereby in the foundations of my own soul, there is an eternal God, who at some time in the future, if he actually is real, has to be known by all creatures; then, God will in the future do the most horrible thing of all that is horrible; he will stop arguing. Therefore I believe in an eternal life and am afraid of eternal damnation, and I want everybody to whom salvation is important to be afraid of the same. Or, if one indeed will not return to the knowledge of sin, so he progresses to dialectic which in this case quickly leads to pantheism by easy paths. By this we are separated and commended to eternal punishment.

Or how does it look concerning the other doubtful doctrines, e.g. with the doctrine of the devil? Our rhetoricians do not laugh any more about the devil, as the vocabulists and grammarians did forty years ago and still would if they were here, just as the naturalists did. The rhetoricians and the dogmaticians among them from the very beginning do not possess all the teaching of this unapproachable impertinence of the vocabulists, to whom their vocabularies are the world: in the

³"Widergott"

feeling of their weakness they join them in certain circumstances, however only to a certain degree; in other circumstances, especially with “in the rising sound of ruling science,” they listen to, they repeat, and they imitate. But now the doctrine concerning the devil has been rehabilitated through science in a manner of speaking, and some of these speakers -- the best of them -- only stopped laughing in the Year of the People’s Spring, 1848,⁴ and were basically, forgotten, when they noticed conditions of the human world which disgraced their entire psychology of a good human nature: “the faces, the eyes and expressions,” I then heard a rhetorician say, “are plainly no longer entirely human; neither political agitation nor brandy can offer sufficient explanation.” So the laughter disappeared, but the embarrassed expressions when there is talk of the devil, if indeed they get as far as this topic, are likewise, and in some respects, are more awkward than with the story of creation: the expressions themselves express what pious women of the common people would say when a cursing husband invokes the devil, “lets forget about him!”⁵ So the existence of the devil turns up again but exists only as empty words, only as a phrase: if the existence of the devil really entered into Christian instruction again, if it came to the attention of the shepherd and teacher, it must also be brought to their attention as the existence of what is dreadful and horrible too. Incidentally, the teaching regarding the devil, like that of eternal damnation, is not an article of faith and of consolation, but an article of knowledge and of fear. To it belongs something more, as in those things seen in the faces of the democrats of 1848. However these faces were haunted by the devil. Clearly it is to be seen that if we want right teaching and rightly to protect souls, it is necessary to have seen the glaring of the devil’s bared teeth from the depths (seen with physical eyes ; I mean that entirely literal), and experienced his power on poor souls, along with his blasphemy, and especially to have heard his jeering laugh from the abyss. Who can now testify to this? Who can enter such an experience with the boast of the Crucified One’s victory on his lips and in his eyes, as a teacher of the pure doctrine of Christ? Who teaches how to fight with the devil? Who teaches how to protect themselves against him? Who teaches how to overcome him? Dogmatics today are silent throughout in these points, these realities are entirely absent. And what

⁴The Revolution of 1848 which began in France and spread to Germany.

⁵The sense of this quote, “*lass mir den Mann weg*” is essentially, “I don’t want to talk about it.”

about devilish temptations concerning prayer – who still knows about them now? Our current dogmatic knows little more of it than our present ethics, and the future shepherds go in their position entirely uninstructed and as ignorant as pagans; they go from the university and into the office of the ministry. Before almost all other teaching points for the care of souls, knowledge of Satan is nearly the most important. Some years ago, I once from the pulpit with a jarring voice, but with a voice from the depths of the heart, heard the loud call to repent,⁶ “Can you then pray, pray from yourself and when ‘you want?’ You cannot, no! Why can you not? Satan won’t put up with it; indeed Satan, the devil, prevents you from praying!” What do you say to this speech, worthy theologians of rhetoric? Is it true, that I use an “empty unrhetorical phrase?”⁷ To me nevertheless rings this discordant voice. It rings to me echoing even now like the voice of the harp, which is there as the voice stronger than thunder and like the voice of the great waters. It was a call on the congregation for repentance by the judgment of a young man. And the congregation (a city congregation) understood this voice. I mention this call chiefly intending that those among the rhetoricians, who through their wisdom have become fools, that if it is possible, they might grasp that this wisdom of the real world, in the pulpit, looks entirely different than it appears in their books and in their often inept and unworthy communications in the shadow world of science, and while coining new phrases, by thinking in childish ways.

Yet this is to be found not only in the more dubious groups in dogmaticians, as I have mentioned them above, but the distance of rhetoric from reality and the course of hollow phrases and the dubious, doubtful sensational doctrinal norm is seen in clear, normal, simple articles of faith. So the theology of rhetoric has in fact turned away from the doctrine of justification by faith where in the dogmatics of grammaticians it amounts to nothing and has even descended to ridicule. It cannot be denied that the theology of dialectic together with atheology and antitheology sought expressly to take over this teaching, in order to justify its “what is right is not what we believe but how we believe.” It sought to design diabolical erosion of the human soul and to justify it as the “Substance of Protestantism.” It confessed this doctrine again and again, and it played this melody

⁶“*Apostrophe* “ probably from the Greek *upostrefw*, to turn back, abandon.

⁷“*unrhetorische Floskel*“

again and again, as it was requested: staccato, pizzicato and in full strokes with the bow, but it is not a divine melody; it is not a godly music; it is the soulless harmony of the present fashionable music, it lacks the experience of this doctrine, it lacks the circumstances of this experience, the experience which once was so powerful in Luther and through him in Melanchthon: the deep, unbroken yearning for unquestioned certainty of salvation. This yearning can painfully be missing from even otherwise good books. But not that alone. Almost everywhere there is something wrong with the foundation of this doctrine in its explanation because it steals this teaching itself. It is only truly possible to understand, if it is embraced as the summit of all other necessary presuppositions, and experiences (doctrines) of the church. All that is found in the teaching of God the Father and of the creation, of God the Son, of his true divinity and true humanity, of the divinity of the Holy Spirit, of original sin – all the church had known, had lived through, and had confessed, must be entered, lived through, and be recognized both when they are present and afterward, so that justification by faith appears as something new, so that it appears as the summit of all this forming experience and from it, by necessity, not as a line of reasoning, but as a fact.

But this does not happen, and so it does not appear in our generally accepted but all too much rhetorical theology. For this reason the Catholics up to this day consider and treat this core of doctrine of our church as arbitrarily contrived, and as an article of doctrine severing the coherence of church life, if not seen and treated entirely as a mere scholastic sophistry “which along with the doctrine of the church is simply not tolerated as it is now taught among us.” And what do we want to answer to these opponents, if we ourselves treat this teaching in so mediocre a fashion in our theology, often “dialectically mediated,”⁸ and in any case, its attributes clothed as fact but removed from all other experience in the life of the church?

Rhetoric now directs ethical matters to a high degree, just as it does dogmatics, and it appears as if dogmatics should first completely extricate itself from this waste, away from the old vocabulists – now rhetoricians. From this truly laughable, often more than anything else, wretched special morals of the old rationalism which we completely reject, we now get empty

⁸The process in Hegelian philosophy by which the universal and the individual are brought together, mediated, by the particular.

abstractions, a special morality hardly exists anymore. As a result then rhetoric has a wide field, and it plows it to the heart's content, soon forwards then backwards. Empty phrases are plentiful, but there are no facts. I select only two articles of doctrine, while I could choose a good twenty of the like, in which all or almost all facts of divine, Christian, church life are missing and whose general formulas teach in an astonishing way, as chicken droppings will cause luxuriant growth in an undeveloped but already richly verdant soil.

First the doctrine of the law. Having turned their eyes away, rhetoric can know nothing of the law because they seriously approach the law as "concept." As they approach the law they must experience a distinction between either *Sic* or *Non* –something they do not want to do nor indeed can they do as rhetoricians. So they err in present-day ethics almost from beginning to end in a profound examination of the political use (*usu politicus*⁹) of the law. Doctrine has retreated and ends up enclosed within the power of the world, within the authority of the state and of the state's relation to the church. This doctrine is one whose point of view is based upon experience and lends greater clarity not only in the political use also was used in greater fruitfulness. Even the ethics of Harless¹⁰ hardly contain anything of much profit beyond this; this essential article of doctrine has not been taught in our time – since the first French Revolution.¹¹ Also there is the teaching use (*usus paedagogicus*¹²) of the law which belongs to the complete exposition of the law as well as to the relationship of the so-called "states" to the church. It gets lost in a misdirected, unflattering way, and hardly finds any use for the doctrine of authority, although the A. C. Var. in the 18th Article points to it. It is true that only in recent times these things have come to our attention, but why will we not now basically treat the facts fully before us as our experience,

⁹This use of the law is the civil use which Lutherans often call the "first use of the law" which is primarily for curbing evil in human society.

¹⁰Harless, Adolf Gottlieb Christoph von (1806-1879) became the acknowledged leader of the confessional Lutheran movement in Germany as professor of systematic theology and New Testament at the University of Erlangen. One of his major works was a textbook on ethics.

¹¹The French Revolution of 1789. Vilmar's readers would have otherwise had the French Revolution of 1830 in mind; it had spread to Hesse, and there affected many. Even more did the Revolution of 1848 which shook the Hessian government and brought down many governments throughout Europe. Matters returned to normal only after the Parliament in Frankfurt failed to establish a united German state when the Prussian king refused to accept its crown from this democratic institution.

¹²This use of the law is the function which brings sinful people to repentance. Lutherans often call this use the "second use of the law" where the law acts as a mirror.

facts (*Facta*) we possess which lead us in the Holy Scriptures back to the Old Testament, to the facts of the Christian life, which will serve the future spiritual leadership of the people, who we so often have seen moving uncertainly back and forth, and lead them to sure guideposts, and to the correction of the basic treatment of the catholic notion of these things?

Now the teaching on prayer. No one can speak of it at all who does not know prayer as indispensable food for his soul and his spirit, who does not know it as the life breath of his very being and who has had no experience of prayer. It is lamentable how the rhetoricians are used to speaking lightly of the life of prayer, speaking in empty words, which are constantly confusing and are often senseless. But is the exercise of prayer still so new in newly awakened evangelical Christendom? Is the experience of the struggle of prayer and of answer to prayer so rare that a body of teachers of a better breed have not been appointed, a body of teachers which as a rule includes no rhetoricians, and also who do act as if they were rhetoricians not in this most important teaching? Do we stand still in Lavaters place,¹³ which in his sincere, but subjective and entirely individualistic piety and who with his notebook in his hand left no stone unturned¹⁴ to record those cases where a favorable answer to a prayer had been received? So the teaching of the discipline of prayer is entirely or almost entirely absent, a discipline which is genuinely useful ethic of the real Christian life for a person, the ethic which cannot be developed fully enough or urgently enough. The rhetoricians will not approach this topic at all because a true rhetorician thinks the discipline of prayer as a vain whining with words and is instantly ready with the vocabulists to quote from Matthew 6: 7 and the like. Yes, it is the rhetoricians, the same as the sectarians of Kohlbruggerians¹⁵ and the Baptists, who consider the discipline of prayer a slave's yoke, and they resist it with great bitterness, as no longer compatible with the "change in present moral circumstances." The best of them find it doubtful, whether they cannot themselves be persuaded that – that, whether, if the discipline of prayer may be demanded for our time of "inner

¹³Johann Kaspar Lavater (1741-1801) was a poet, philosopher, writer and theologian who was part of the movement away from rationalism and the promotion of idealism.

¹⁴"*in der Hand Land und Sand durchzog* "

¹⁵Here Vilmar insets a footnote: "The followers of Kohbruegge appeared in the small fatherland of the writer of these pages resolutely as opponents of the state church, as sharp sectarian subjectivists -- as a connection between spiritualists and harsh individualists."

light” Christianity, “submergence” in the Christian life, and they especially doubt whether it should be demanded of the grammatical children, the word stackers and the families of rhetoric or if it can be demanded at all, or if it might be demanded. How could a rhetorical theologian understand this doctrine of the power of prayer and the answer to prayer? Because the words *ipso facto* would lead to action, and that is a contradiction in rhetoric. It has to be taught and learned again that we can associate in all literal reality with God, with Christ. We did not learn this before, we did not want to try to learn the doctrine of Christian life and ethics; we are otherwise inclined to have our souls shamed. We did not want to learn earlier that we can speak with him and he with us, as a man speaks with his friend, and by it knows and feels, that we speak with him who truly is God, the omnipotent creator of the world and judge of the world. His name also is faithful and true, and his office is the office of a merciful high priest, who is able to have compassion on our sickness. It must again be taught – taught and be experienced – how and why the Lord our God, the Holy Spirit, calls to us from heaven and comes to meet us. It must be taught that for this reason prayer also reaches into other souls with irresistible activity, and that the throne and power of visible life, the throne of God the Lord, will alone make certain the endurance of worldly things and above all worldly authority for the sake of the prayers of the faithful. Likewise the powerful teaching of the stubble of prayer must be taken out again from the unfortunate dumbness of oblivion as the Lord pulls us back, going against our grain, and we hold onto him all the more tightly, as he pulls us to himself more strongly. We cling to him all the more incessantly, and we come to him with all the more effort of the body and the spirit. Really he pulls us down harder in order for us to learn and to experience in this wrestling what the Patriarch experienced in this wrestling, certainly not figuratively, certainly not simply inwardly, that through the wrestling with the enemy in the faithful friend, the opponent turns into a wonderful and blessed convert. Are these fantasies? Visions? Sugar coatings? Theosophic insolence? Or are they not much more witnesses of the powerful currents of eternal life which for eighteen hundred years of Christianity, or which flowed for two thousand years through the people of the prophets and patriarchs before the future Lord came in the flesh, and were then finally emptied in the loud torrent of the living creator, the current which

went out from the seat of God and the Lamb? Who can witness to it; who comes and teaches the doctrine of the Christian life?

I could likewise cite the doctrine of temptation. Those in the real life of faith know the significance of a healthy teaching of temptation, and such people do not lead a contrived, comfortable life. But in our prevalent dogmatics and moral teaching there is nothing at all to be found about temptation, though Harless made the first attempt to reintroduce it. Rhetoric stands in fear of this doctrine because it suspects that thereby that very troublesome “man,” the devil would return, and the suspect that they would have to unavoidably describe the reality of temptation just as it would be necessary to recognize the reality of the devil. Besides, the doctrine of temptation is not grasped other than through life experience and in this rhetoric does not only err, but it despises and confuses the teaching, and evades it painstakingly at least in the classroom. For to establish the experience gained from life as the foundation, could be viewed as nothing other than “breaking in (*Dressur*)” for the Office of the Ministry. This is how rhetoric views the matter. Whatever is useful for life, i.e. for the eternal life of the congregation, will be painstakingly discarded precisely because it is “useful.” This life now is in such condition that it now and never again will use the smallest useful thing, and that habit will be cultivated so carefully, and just for that reason, because it needs no one in the world. Rather in its classrooms rhetoric finds value in useless teaching, e.g. Schleiermacher’s doctrine (*Güterlehre*). It will not condescend to consider the teaching on sin in moral philosophy – it appears to them to be too ordinary and rhetoric disregards it since such a teaching appears as if it could be useful in some way; with especially careful steps and quiet tread it walks right past the sins so appealing to the eyes (sins for which a thorough description has yet to be developed); perhaps it passes by with the dark suspicion that by describing these sins, rhetoric has to describe itself. Besides we could indeed use such a description in our time. And we should need nothing useful.

The formerly beloved and customary phrases from “freedom of science” have overall themselves fallen into disuse in the domain of rhetorical theology, and rhetorical philosophy will

only use them, if trends are an indicator, if something special could be attained, e.g. against a person, against the dictates of church authority. The term “scientific freedom” in complete seriousness and in the complete scope of its concepts will be used only in the jeering laughter of faith-destroying and church-destroying people. It will be used only as needed by scornful, laughing, country-destroying and throne-toppling people; those people of rhetorical theology who make use of this expression without distinction, do not know what they say, and with the other rhetoricians pass without qualification as fatheads. Rhetoricians now subordinate the church, i.e. claiming to want to teach a theology of the church, and makes the claim for their dogmatics and ethics that they should be thought of as “ecclesial.” But going from proclaiming and claims to reality, from words to deeds, is not just a longer step, but a long journey. A genuine doctrine of the church will require that this doctrine present in every point of its exposition, in recognizable ways, the experience of the church and in which the teacher himself takes part unconditionally. The dogmatician has these experiences of the church as the only sources, next to the Holy Scriptures, from which he may draw, and draws explicitly and throughout his entire presentation to anchor its belief. For us, above all for the students of theology, nothing else should remain to do, than to live in a similar according to this experience, and to order (*corrigieren*) our own thoughts and knowledge according to these experiences. Also it would not be permissible to adopt certain details of these events of the church as a measurement of our own experiences, while leaving others on the wayside or thrown away: the experiences of the church form a whole which may not be separated without the most severe harm to the spiritual life of the Christian individual. This experience of the church everyone should learn in its entirety as it is established by fact in the confessions of the old church in the Augsburg Confession, which precisely in its unity and wholeness, from which we may not remove a line without destroying the entirety, or at least defacing it and making it incomparably ugly, so to speak.

Our systematic theology appears opposed to this Confession and for that reason often is heralded as unqualified “independent research,” and the entire dogmatic presents itself not as subordination to something higher, but as an equal of many opinions, views, and research,

according to one's free will and others. The authority of theologians outweighs by a wide degree the authority of the church's confessions, and the construction of many teachings are regarded in the same manner as legal differences over a controversial doctrine. Thus allegation upon allegation are the result, but throughout, dogma has its character as dogma stolen, and it is forced down into the history of dogma.¹⁶ But the church's confessions which belong to its life, should not be simply books to the theologian, books which he compares to other books, primarily approached and entered critically, but an approach which gives the confessions a justifiable claim on our life, so that by them we strongly confirm our doctrine and our activity. To them belong first, resignation, and second, a somewhat longer and harder effort than one is usually inclined to assume, so that we might live in them, or much more, live according to these confessions.

It should be this way. The facts should prevail over words; facts should prevail over talk and the incursion of one's own thoughts, words, and rules as long as we still know something of a church where the path to salvation is known, indeed as long as we still want a church. But does it stand always as a question in the theology of rhetoric; it recognizes the word, it accepts the names, but what about the fact (*Factum*) and the thing itself?

¹⁶Vilmar refers to the tendency lasting into our own day to make all dogma relative to the time it was formulated and not binding on future generations.

V. CHURCH

No article of Christian doctrine and of Christian life was more discussed in recent times and with more enthusiasm and fruitfulness than the article on the church. Indeed, it is this article in the area of Protestant theology which has never or hardly ever been so closely discussed in such a significant way as now. But on the other hand no other article has ever roused such strong hostility and disgust from the rhetorician as this one.

Everybody who now has taken the doctrine of the evangelical church to heart and made it the subject of their “scientific” research or their way of life, aims for the certainty of their salvation in Jesus Christ, and considers all ongoing changes in the understanding of these teachings. They also want to share this very salvation with everybody who comes after them, and they want them to know it with unquestioned certainty. The possibility of communication of the certainty of this salvation is seen in the church. Since salvation was given by Christ, its certainty can only be given by him. They have to move on from the concept of community (*Gemeinschaft*) which is often something subjective and is only the result of Christ’s establishment and his desired communication of the certainty of salvation, and we have to progress to the thought of institution (*Anstalt*) by which the congregation begets objectivity. If I am not fully mistaken, the treatment of the doctrine of the church has reached a point where this last fact of the theological world is internalized, maintained and its design grasped. We begin to add to the two necessary means of salvation of pure teachings and sacrament a third one, which is rightly the preservation of the pure teaching and the right sacrament which embraces the other two (And if the Apostle’s Creed contains objective truth for salvation it no less necessary.): to add the preservation of pure doctrine and right sacraments, and to recognize ordinances, to recognize an institution through which this preservation is safeguarded. By doing this we never step outside the Augsburg Confession as the rhetoricians complain, who of late have promoted the tasteless sacrilege of the

doctrine of the church as an exclusively invisible church, a doctrine declared necessary as a consequence of the doctrine of justification through faith, just as the Catholics triumphantly accuse us and some of us have willingly and rashly been responsible, but by placing ourselves back into the midst of the Augsburg Confession it would be easy to show if its there and to present it. That much is correct in as much as this point of doctrine, or better, this fact of the church, is one of the facts of Christian life, facts which remain to be experienced by Christianity. There is no congregation nor can there be any congregation nor any confession of a congregation wherein this fact is already exhausted and its integrity abandoned. Yet the Catholic Church can maintain this about itself and go astray because if this depository of faith were really stored in it, then it could have overcome its schism with the eastern church. And what is more the Catholic Church would not have been in a position to regard itself in this way without the Reformation which will be admitted by everybody who is not a totally, bigoted Catholic. And for the present, we do not demand more than this admission.

Enough -- we should experience something now, discover something which was not experienced or discovered until now, which is the unmistakable signature of time in the connection with the community of Christendom, beginning with the evangelical church. A new birth struggles from the womb of Christianity by virtue of eternal mercy, and since it is not otherwise possible, with great labor pains those in whom eternal mercy is materialized struggle free. Just as the true deity of the Son and the true deity of the Holy Spirit are fact; just as the true humanity of God's Son and the receiving of his dispensed salvation endured by the strongest pains of earthly Christianity and as the crucifixion and resurrection of the Lord are fact, from these facts flow all others as from their common source, and they have gone forth with the heavy pains of the holy apostle (John 16: 21,22); they have gone out into the experience of this world.

But by its nature the theology of rhetoric is basically unwilling to join in this painful experience. Here it senses deeply that it means nothing any longer to make words here but has to stake his entire person; here rhetoric senses deeply that books no longer mean anything, but comes to an understanding with life. It is not peaceably taught, but comes from the Spirit of God, which

as the wind of the storm blows through the world, wafts along, fills, teaches and leads in the school . The glib rhetoricians maintain with a lack of shame, which is surpassed only in their senselessness, that the debate of the doctrine of the church, as it now emerges, is “peace destroying,” by which they are in all respects right, because its peace – this lazy monks peace – should in all cases be destroyed. Others, not less glib but much less peaceful, cry deafeningly about “catholicizing tendencies,” and which of these questions of the church and about the church should be concealed or brought to light. This latter group, rabble-rousers by nature, appeal to the mob with their cries. They are incapable and not willing to measure the depth of the questions. They only welcome such questions, because they then have opportunity to bicker, to shout, to slander and to lie, as they loosen all restraints to their hearts content. It is also rhetoric but only a rhetoric of theological ultra-violent republicans¹ and Jacobeans, a rhetoric of the alley and the fishstall. Further, others connected with “the scientific discussion” would not be afraid if this discussion were entrusted to the professionals alone, i.e. the men of the classroom and the world of books. For it is scandal that so many non-professionals, i.e. the pastors, so actively take part in this matter. These “non-professionals” hold conferences, one after the other, and thereby outflank “the peaceful development of science” in so clumsy a manner, disturb the “quiet course of research” and display the audacity to excessively speed it up. The good men do not grasp that these things in themselves belong to the classroom and to them only in the second or third place; they do not comprehend “science,” not to mention that the matter could be settled, and that they should in this instance play the role of the non-professionals. These good men cannot suggest that the treatment of every question should somehow precede them, at least not before the contents of some dozen books can be written and read. And indeed even with this done it would be irrelevant even if there were something to find in books because with the use of all their talents the rhetoricians share nothing less than prophecy. Finally others, the most childish of all, think these questions are cleared away by “union” or indeed they can be attended to by the afore mentioned botched work. The “joining” of the Lutherans and Reformed Churches does not settle these

¹Here Vilmar uses “Sanscülotten” from the French, *sansculotte*.

questions at all, but the debate only begins all the more concerning these questions at the point in time of union. There the common interest between the Lutherans and the Reformed comes to an end. These childish souls do not know this because they only know joy over the word, "union,"² and its rhetorical adornment; nothing else is of any consequence for them; nothing else can be found for them. As for the rest nothing more need be said; with the unionists there are not some, but many, who see further than these childish ones; they understand that union would be an unbearable device and would undo all certainty in Christian faith and life, consequently making the church an institution of talk and a debating society, to be used in a theological classroom alone, and to this end their entire struggle is concentrated. A church with resolute, unshakable confession, with a powerful soul-moving content of faith, with vigorous claims on real life, is the object of their hostility, and for many of them, it is the object of their hatred. In other respects the question which begins to enter the foreground in the new debate over the church about the universality of the church, and which the rhetoricians oppose, is to them in any case entirely especially loathsome, indeed inconceivable; they unite in Nassau and Hanau, in the Palatinate, in Baden and Prussia, in Anhalt and Waldeck, and it goes no further; it will not be brought further except to separate little churches with small confession but with great dispute, with small spiritual life but with much worldly rule, with small power but with many phrases. The union not only does not establish a universal church, but it is impossible for it to prepare the way for it; this is known to those who are used to learning facts, and it is already the case, that the unions suppress in a similarly dismissive and hostile manner both Lutherans and genuine Reformed believers alike. So the disintegration of the church is increased only in one member of the body; but it nevertheless tries to win for union not only the Swiss, but the Scottish Independents, and not to mention the Dutch! We will not make the church large but just the opposite: the weakening of certainty in the

²The union of the Reformed and Lutheran churches was enacted by the King of Prussia, Friedrich Wilhelm, in 1817 to mark the tercentennial of the Reformation. The lead of Prussia in forming a Protestant Union proved to be a popular initiative in many German states. Consequently, in rapid succession, these states established a union of confessions: Nassau (1817); Hanau, Rhineland Palatinate, Waldeck, and Pyromont (1818); Anhalt-Bernburg (1820); Baden and the Hessian Rhinelands (1821); and Württemberg (1823). Ironically this move coincided with an emerging Confessional Movement within Lutheran circles; they viewed the union as a method of diluting and destroying churches of the Lutheran confessions.

church, and where possible, nullify the collective church where traces of the church are still to be found. We will break up and hinder the future formation of a true common church as an institute of Christ the Lord by the founding of numerous little churches of human caprice that want union just as the rhetoricians do. We do not say: “the rhetorician do not really want all that; they only do not see that it is the necessary result of their talk.” It belongs more to myopia and spiritual dullness which I ascribe to the members of the Prussian General Synod of 1846. They failed to grasp, that with the then current attempt of new general confession and with the general ordination agenda that this synod placed itself exactly with the German Catholics³ who attempted to extinguish the experiences of the church from her history and to deny the development of such experiences as impossible. And have we not recently heard one of the symbolic phrases of the theological rhetorician proclaiming “what matters now is to blow the Augsburg Confession from the hands of the Lutherans?” And now, if we are to name a name, it is Bunsen,⁴ the rhetorician *par excellence* ? He plainly said as much that the dissolution of the church would be the goal of his unionist talk. It is good that is he a rhetorician and nothing else; he admits that he flirted extensively with dialectic and also with the Quadrivium. He will not move progress beyond this because it appears he lacks all competence. He will remain what he is: “First in Rhetoric (*Primus in Rhetorica*).”

From what has been described here, that the rhetoricians are not only inclined to reject and disavow the majority of the experiences of the church as they are now known, recognized, and appropriated, but that they also view the church with hostility as the church is in its current state: awakened to a considerable extent to new life. Indeed they regard it with hostile eyes, and in some cases they persecute it with bitter hatred. It now is maintained with determination and energy, that facts are present in the church and that are real. This places into opposition all disregard of them draped in fancy words. But this is what the theology of rhetoric finds unbearable in all situations.

The church should be in agreement that the Holy Spirit in the church is essentially present through word and sacrament, and that he not only works but is imparted through word and

³The German Catholics were a group of revolutionaries in the period of the Revolution of 1848.

⁴Christian Karl Josias von Bunsen (1791-1860) assisted in the preparation of the church agenda for the Prussian Union. He was a scholar, diplomat and personal friend of two Prussian kings, Friedrich Wilhelm III and IV.

sacrament, but this is assailed by rhetorical theology, and they may confess it, but they do not believe it. The obliging members of the rhetoricians admit that the Holy Spirit works through word and sacrament, but deny that he would be imparted through word and sacrament. And the obliging ones might confess this latter belief but believe it so little that they are like those who believe that the Holy Spirit only works through word and sacrament; for both of these groups the Holy Spirit is only a principle concerning certain phenomena in human nature, really only to signify voices of the soul. Rhetorical theology is not suited to the recognition of the presence of a real being, a person, from whom flow the powers of eternal life, which, themselves are spirit, and they flow to the related human spirit which really awakens to its true life as spirit, through whom we alone desire it, coming powerfully it response to prayer, who is the author of our prayers, and who also comes in response to our prayer ,when and where he is called, who brings about the company of saints and at the same time preserves the visible church with its teaching task in fact and activity. Rhetorical theology is not suited to recognize that all these are real things, objective reality. For the rhetoricians everything is only a figure of speech, inflated formulas more or less. The rhetoricians consider the Holy Spirit as somewhat distant, otherworldly; they consider him a deception, at least self-deception, and as imagination and extravagance. We among others believe the Holy Spirit is one near, that he is in this world; he is present, and we know him as the personal comforter and living power.

The rhetoricians perhaps confess the Holy spirit as a person, but always are careful to stay in the area of abstraction, which is offered to them by philosophy and the theology of recent decades (instead of sound study) and instead gives them the welcome opportunity to consider “person” as an abstract concept; the Holy Spirit is to them in any case an alien person. But to them “person” is really only a phrase which they hide themselves behind; in reality for them the Holy Spirit is only a voice, a feeling, an “impulse of the active creature.” That the Holy Spirit fills the church, first made the church to be the church, and truly fills and makes the church, and he does this because he is alive and makes alive, a creator and Lord, and that the church according to the word did not exist before then. Without this living presence of the Spirit from the Father and

from the Son and without his unceasing efforts the church has to sink to necessarily a human association with completely arbitrary statutes -- this thought which to us is a dreadful thing, appears to them not especially frightful, perhaps indeed attractive, provided that one allows them, these rhetoricians in the classroom, to make these statutes and then change them as they wish, that "science" be seen and count as the "the living church" -- as we have heard this rule spoken uncountable times. We have heard it in a chorus and even those from whom better should be expected.

To the rhetoricians it is a dreadful thing that the Holy Spirit still today in the church, and in all reality and truth, is shared and received. They can agree that formerly, in previous times, in that uncultivated age (*aevo incultiore*), the Holy Spirit would be shared and received. This they admit happened with some shrug of the shoulders, as an historical, i.e. an obsolete fact, but really they dismiss this visible historical fact in a matter of circumstance, "in the still disordered, not yet settled life of the early church." And if these gentlemen wanted to be honest, or as much as rhetoricians can be honest, they would have to confess that they think the imparting of the Holy Spirit, especially through the laying on of hands was done "in that former time (*illo tempore*), when the animals talked" as our old folks used to say.

Yet our church still has an imparting of the Holy Spirit through prayer and by the laying on of hands, and for the rhetoricians if that is not the most dreadful thing, it is certainly the most dreadful thing among many dreadful things which bristle against them, from the theology of fact, which is from the church "of the restoration and reaction"⁵. Many indeed speak of these things as a "petrification of the church," so that we have to assume, that the "repristination" of these things is in a genuine sense a Gorgon's head.⁶ But fortunately it is not a repristination, at least not in all churches, that the Holy Spirit is imparted through prayer and the laying on of hands, but it is a

⁵This phrase "der Restauration und Reaction" refers to the restoration of royal rule in Lower Hesse as a result of the Congress of Vienna which established government in much of Europe where Napoleon Bonaparte had held the nations in thrall during his rule. In the subsequent Revolutions of 1830 and especially 1848, the established Lutheran church became identified by the revolutionaries with the "forces of reaction."

⁶The Gorgons were three, hideous, mythological monsters whose faces would turn to stone anyone who looked at them. The most famous was the Medusa who had snakes in place of her hair, and according to legend was slain by Perseus and the head placed on a shield where in a "repristinated" form it still turned people into stone.

practice proven true from the time of the apostles in unbroken continuation up to the present day, and it is at all times a new efficacious fact. The church in Hesse to be counted among those fortunate state churches. Its Church orders (those of 1539, 1566, 1573, and 1657, this last one pertains to the so-called Lower Hessian Reformed Church) contain introductions concerning prayer and laying on of hands to perform confirmation. They direct the rite of the laying on of hands, "Receive the Holy Spirit, Protection and Shield from all anger, strength and help for all good, from the gracious hand of God the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." And with this formula confirmation has been done with the laying on of hands at least since the year 1539, and it is even done this way today.

Now it is asked, if this formula, "Receive the Holy Spirit," is just a phrase? Or is it the indication of an occurring fact in the moment where it is spoken? The rhetoricians are not in a predicament for even an instant; it is only a "way of speaking," they say, a formula, and nothing more than "best wishes" where good intentions, thoughts, moods, are all like the laying on of hands; they ask whether this action is nothing other than a ceremony, a certain obligatory movement of the hands, a method of rhetorical posturing (*Gestus*) with which I only demonstrate to the rhetorician the person to whom I give best wishes. With one word: the confirming pastor is imparting the Holy Spirit with the laying on of hands. They acknowledge that the pastor, who finds such rites as those named in their church rules (KOO) (and, as in Hesse in genuine church usage), possess an "external justification," to use this formula and to effect this deed, but notice, it is only a justification, and indeed only an external one – they desire always to serve themselves with these empty figures of speech, effect these dreary ceremonies! Of an internal, factual justification, of a mandate, to really receive the Holy Spirit, of a responsibility to impart the Holy Spirit in baptism, they may not speak. This now again is something dreadful to us, and that we are not alone in respecting and honoring our old church orders, and live with the conviction that they lead us in to the real life of the church, but never and nowhere to destructive ceremonies and ineffective wishes, never and nowhere do they direct us to empty formulas and meaningless figures of speech. It is to us a dreadful thing, not only concerning the rites of our KOO, and not

about that alone it, because these KOO with even these rites refer to the “prophetic and apostolic church” (as does the Hessian KO of 1566), but because we know the imparting of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands from the Scriptures, and maintain it is absolutely godless to want to find somewhere in the Scriptures meaningless figures of speech and ceremonies. We know the imparting of the Holy Spirit as from the life of the Lord in the flesh and from the life of the apostle directly passed on to us, and finally because we have know and experienced, that we, we ourselves, in confirmation, we clergy still more in ordination, really receive the Holy Spirit, that we really have imparted the Holy Spirit, if we have shared him according to the orders of the church.

There remain to the rhetoricians only two choices. Either they say to us, “That is all self-deception, with which you deceive yourselves until you grow up.”⁷ They speak this way in compliance with rhetoric. They comply because they entirely, simply, and sincerely believe their empty words to be the only ones available in the whole world. Or they say, “You are hypocrites and cheats, and proceed to the subjugation of mankind through hierarchy” (which always “was only deceit and despotism”), and that, what “you propose, is nothing but a hierarchical contrivance.” The first accuse us in their naïveté with: “science says nothing to them of this reality,” and that is correct, because science as it now is, or rather, what is now called science, in fact knows little of reality of the life of the church, and of the reality which is spoken here, it knows nothing at all. For many of these good people it has gone so far that they think real life is found between books and the classroom. They mistake a sham life for the real life, and we cannot really attribute it solely to naïveté. The others are at a minimum short-sighted and confined: they suspect, that something more than our self-deception and spinning yarns for ourselves hidden behind these things, and that on our side nothing less than stupidity governs our authorities. But for that reason they have another charming possession with the so-called liberalism, which places them in a widely variant direction from the one in political and social areas. The people in this direction, are completely unable to produce anything; they desire no other activity than that of the

⁷ “*Das ist alles Selbsttäuschung, mit der ihr euch verfabelt, bis ihr ganz und gar vom Verstande kommt*”

artificial pretense, the achievement of party goals through party means such as the cliques and the intrigue. Because they now themselves are impotent,⁸ and they have no concept of impotence – chiefly they have a dark suspicion of this which excites their bitter envy and deep anger. They also think, whatever others do, even those acts emerging from the springs of the real, eternal, divine life, which do and work, are nothing other than active patriotism, party spirit, artificial pretense, intrigue and treachery. On our side we find it entirely conceivable that the more informed (more sarcastic, finer) class of society finds the rhetorician correct. They are no different themselves so how can they think except as they themselves are? They have placed themselves into the class of the unproductive; how could they be in any class which wants to associate outside the circles of those who share their views?

It is in any case not enough to simply regret that in so many evangelical territories dead orthodoxy, pietism and unbelief were strong enough generally to forget the reality of the imparting of the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands. Now confirmation is nothing more in extensive churchly circles than a “fatherly admonition,” i.e. a speech of pastors to the children who stand around the altar, where the distribution of confirmation certificates and thoughtful sayings still often play a sentimental roll. It is not enough to regret that in some state churches⁹ even ordination has completely been discontinued (and in some places only recently practiced again). If, as a result of such subjective secularization, a sound of amazement is heard in certain circles over our faith of the real imparting of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands, it should not surprise us at all. But what can be asked is that these forces of secularization and the beginning of paganism not expect us to take their path, and that they not measure us with their bent measuring stick. We have no calling to thrust our church life as a standard of measurement for their wretched degeneracy – they want to sink down into paganism, if they would prefer and not want to hear our witness – but if they want to burden us with their lamentable condition as the norm for the church, they should

⁸*zeugungsunfähig*

⁹“Landeskirchen” referring to the established churches in the numerous German states. Since the Peace of Augsburg, 1555, these could be either Lutheran or Catholic, depending upon the religion of the ruling prince. With the Treaty of Westphalia, this legal status could also be extended to the Reformed church if the prince desired. In Vilmar’s day, the validity of confessional subscription, which provided the underpinnings of these state churches, was being questioned.

rather join us, not in meeting their match, because we do not want to praise what they praise, but they should with us resolutely and truly find our God.

That the laying on of hands should not be a sacrament, i.e. not be of the same significance as Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper, this we well know with the entire evangelical church (and the Catholic Church itself does not depend upon confirmation for salvation) But that the laying on of hands does not belong to the life of the church, he could only convince us of that who could demonstrate to us that we must throw away not only some but the entire life of the church from the last eighteen centuries, not only some but the entire Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testaments themselves and without further question. No one will persuade me at least that the laying on of hands directed in the Old Testament in Exodus 29 and Leviticus 8, and especially Leviticus 16: 21 were empty ceremonies. It should be confessed that through the laying on of Aaron's hands on the head of the Asasel¹⁰ ram all sins were placed onto the head of this animal, and that the ram carried all sins with or on himself into the wilderness. Although this is only a shadow of the future deliverance, the high priest truly laid on the ram's head not empty words and formulas, and not with the intention of deceiving the people of Israel, but that their sins were truly taken away. The high priest laid on this head the real sins of the people, in all reality, and it is unmistakable in this authoritative act, the laying on of hands, the high priest with the power allotted to him, would transfer by this means the sins along with the curse on a sacrificial animal according to the sacrifice of atonement. I believe also in the Old Testament, in whole and in details, and take it completely seriously.

Likewise in the New Testament the laying on of hands endured as a conferment of power by the Lord of the apostles (Mark 16: 18) and will be exercised as such by the apostles. It is an exercise of power, through it (*διὰ τῆς ἐπιθέσεως τῶν χειρῶν*— Acts 8: 17-19) the Holy Spirit with his gifts is shared; it is an exercise of power by which the Lord Himself had himself taken the curse of sin on himself. Cf. Acts 9: 12, 17; 19: 6. The laying on of hands for the imparting of the Holy Spirit belongs according to Hebrews 6: 2 to the beginning of Christian teaching (*ὁ τῆς*

¹⁰Leviticus 16: 10, "Azazel," a Hebrew noun meaning "entire removal" is frequently translated as "scapegoat."

ἀρχὴς τοῦ χριστοῦ λόγος); it belongs to the foundation (*θεμελίους*) of this life and so it is also communicated from the apostles, because the Lord had continued this bestowal of power, 1Tim. 4: 14; 2 Tim. 1: 6; 1 Tim. 5: 22; Acts 9: 12, 17; 13: 3 etc. If these are phrases, and not the real, shared Holy Spirit, but only something “good” intended with the laying on of hands and was a mere gesture, then the entire New Testament is one long figure of speech, a book full of deception and illusion. And if this endowment, through the laying on of hands imparting the Holy Spirit, communicated nothing, if it did not extend further than those, whom Timothy had laid his hands on, and if this should now be extinct, then the entire calling of the church in the New Testament is nothing but hot air. For who would give me the authority to communicate the teaching of the New Testament, and exclude the ability to communicate this, while both are cited in the New Testament in the same passages?

No, we do not exclude these endowments; we institute this exercise of power in our church still, and want to assert it and will assert it against the world and the devil. We know that it is precisely an exercise of power, and we want on that account, mindful of the warning of the apostles (1 Tim. 5: 2), to carefully exercise it. We also know, that because this gift is an exercise of power, the Holy Spirit does not come through it alone. We know moreover, and the wretched rhetoricians do not need to remind us, that the Holy Spirit is not something material who travels through the finger to us be chance as an electrical current (*Fluidum*). Whoever means to attack us with such stupidity is no better than the complaining brothers who played the childish trump against the imparting of the true body of Christ in the sacrament of the altar: “ the sacrament should not serve as food for the stomach!” Such people belong at a school desk, but not in the office of the ministry.

But finally we know that to exercise this power we must possess the Holy Spirit. We are in this case not sacrament dispensers of whose worthiness or unworthiness the efficacy of our action is dependent. The Holy Spirit is not now as in Holy Baptism, established in the element and in the word (the consecration¹¹), or, if someone prefers, bound together, but the Holy Spirit is

¹¹*der Eingsetzung*

bound with our spirit, and goes through the organ of the spirit, the soul and the body, through the agency of the other's spirit. Our "I" in this case is shared in the all-personal way with the imparting of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands, and it requires the teaching office, it needs every single member of the teaching office, indeed to witness what he does, if he undertakes the laying on of hands. We only want to suggest the terrible thing, that can threaten in the background, the terrible thing that we hardly dare mention. But here we have to mention it, because it matters, to the full power of the teaching office, but also to show the corresponding full responsibility: whoever carelessly lays on the hands, and carelessly, without constant inner supplication, speaks the words, "Receive the Holy Spirit," he is on the direct path to sin against the Holy Spirit. We want only to indicate the individual stops on this dreadful way for everyone who wants to follow it, and to help him find himself and to charge him with the gravity of his office.

From this it follows that those to whom we want to impart the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands, we cannot consign the Holy Spirit as we do through the sacrament of baptism to newborn children – where they receive the Holy Spirit although they do not have according to human understanding of God's gift of grace for the time being; they have as little understanding as the children whom the Lord blessed. Rather we have to communicate to them the aim of the will to receive the Holy Spirit, i.e. that we are obliged to open their organs, their souls and thereby their spirit, and by this opening, they would desire the Holy Spirit, and can receive him. This instruction should above all serve that purpose at least what we suitably dub "confirmation instruction." How then do we make this unsuitable expression suitable. This instruction unfortunately has assumed almost everywhere the character of an entirely subordinate orthodoxy. This knowledge must be presupposed in confirmation instruction in the elementary school, and this point is commended to the Christian teaching office regardless of its difficulty. This knowledge should be made alive in confirmation instruction: it should share a longing in the children for the Lord Christ himself in the sacrament; it should share the longing for the Holy Spirit himself to be imparted; it should awaken a joyful desire in them to walk in the obedience of the church. It cannot be done, and it should not be attempted to immediately give all confirmation children the

stature of the Lord Christ. But by the person and teaching of their shepherds they should see that Christ really has a form and that he is present. He should be shown to the children, and not much of him be taught, because of what the children do not yet know. In short, the task of the shepherd in confirmation instruction is not that they be converted, because there are two or three steps to be done beforehand, which still cannot be done at the age of the confirmation children. Rather it is the task to awaken and to enlighten them. That is also a topic which hardly more than any other has fallen prey to rhetoric – that topic of the distinction of calling, awakening, enlightening, and converting. How often has one awakened been mistaken as a convert, but one who has been converted is mistaken only as one awakened! How confused rhetoric is here even by the best of them in use of language! So many of them hardly appear to know what enlightenment is not to mention that they themselves know not how to distinguish between the call and subsequent growth. We must indeed experience that the change of view which happened with Heinrich Heine, not something only in a general sense, in which conversion is used in the Old Testament, but what has been called a conversion in the real sense, while throughout this was really nothing other than a condition of the real efficacious call, if it does not want to serve in the narrower sense of rhetoric. Before all else the academic faculty has very serious responsibilities to fulfill: these stages of development must again be precisely distinguished to the students of theology again, and not in abstraction, but in living forms. The empty formulas must again be filled with the stuff of a sanctified life. If this has not happened for the theology student, then he cannot conduct the so-called confirmation instruction, much less lead a congregation.

One who grew up in the most grievous waste of the life of the church can still see in all cases that rhetorical theology knows and possesses nothing at all of the laying on of hands, and it knows little of the imparting of the Holy Spirit. It only knows and performs the tradition of long past events. What is even worse, is that rhetoric does not know anything right about prayer; it knows nothing of prayer, which assumes the primary place in the congregation. It knows nothing of prayer concerning the Holy Spirit. Prayer concerning the Holy Spirit is something troubling for the rhetorician; far more troubling is the prayer concerning the Holy Spirit for another person; but

unbearable is the efficacious prayer concerning the Holy Spirit on behalf of another. And indeed in this last example an indispensable requirement is placed before the church and all those in the teaching office, a demand, directly tied with the one spoken with the laying on of hands. While true in many other cases, it is especially true with the laying of hands which completes confirmation where real prayer pleads for the children by praying for the Holy Spirit. It is not chiefly about a prayer, and not about a possibly inefficacious prayer or possibly a doubtful prayer, or possibly a prayer existing only in empty words, and thus not favorably heard, and it is not a forgotten prayer. Rather it concerns a prayer through which the Holy Spirit is imparted to the child, precisely because it is operative. The one confirming and the congregation should actively pray for the children that they receive the Holy Spirit, and therefore the congregation, and the confirming pastor especially, should be full of the Holy Spirit, who alone is the Spirit of prayer, who alone effects the prayer in us and makes it powerful, who imparts himself by it with no delay. Undiminished and in all power and authority he pours out eternal life for which intercession takes place by his power. For this purpose almost all church orders for all confirmands are dedicated to a spoken efficacious prayer to accompany the laying on of hands on each single child.¹²

But rhetoricians think that the laying on of hands could also be something else rather than an efficacious prayer such as a prayer dedicating an individual. And that has to be what they mean because the laying on of hands is nothing else than a certain intention and wish accompanying the movement of hands; the prayer is also a wish and expresses an intention whose result is not only

¹²The author adds this note: This dedication I once also called the seal for the child of an efficacious prayer for the Holy Spirit. And that I did with full authority as provided in and according to our church orders. Because the Church Order of 1566 (page 152b) reads: "And as you said to us, what we ask you in your name as dears sons ask, for what you would want to give us; so give also to everyone who we now in your name lay our hands on, and thereby bestow your grace, and your Holy Spirit, the Spirit of all strength and help, give hope with a good Christian life, that they will not despair, you want all to endure in any circumstance, with your divine hand, to protect them from all harm, etc." And the Church Orders of 1573 and 1657 (where the prayer, less correct than 1566, first after the laying on of hands ordains the speaking, according to the Church regulation of 1566 it should be done before) say in the prayer admonition: "Beloved in the Lord, you heard how these children who openly confess Christian faith, offer the time of their lives to best remain in this faith, pledged all dutiful obedience to God and his dear church and the communion, upon them also with laying on of hands of grace and strength, of consolation of the Holy Spirit and promise fulfilled;" in the prayer verbatim from 1566, only with the arrangement suitably changed, it reads, "... in your name the hands are laid upon (them), and by that they have hope of your gracious hand and your Holy Spirit." This consolation and promise of the Holy Spirit, which we direct and observe in our church orders, I have called certain, undoubtable, eternal (because it is a divine thing: "for which we now in your name lay on hands") a seal which for the children is efficacious prayer for the Holy Spirit, and I repeat it, I have called it this with the full justification and clarity of the expression.

independent as with the intention or wish of a human, but which in itself and by itself remains a simple thought and wish which brings about no result at all. To the theological rhetoricians it is “a fabric of the most gauche and erring expressions or imagination” that the congregation and the pastor should efficaciously ask for the Holy Spirit, and at the same time for the confirmed youth, that the pastor himself possesses the Holy spirit, has to be full of the Holy Spirit, if he wants to efficaciously ask for the Holy Spirit for the youth. Indeed it appeared that the favorable answer to such a prayer is not clear (*ex professo*) for the rhetorician alone, but it is also not clear for right believing, churchly people, and those who trust in something better than this, and they have been deceived completely.

Also does not theological rhetoric know that the Holy Spirit, who from within me calls and implores, prays through my spirit and my mouth, asks and intercedes, that this Holy Spirit is in my supplication, calling, and intercession which is his calling, his imploring, his interceding through the almighty power of the Trinitarian god thereby comes and goes to where I call him? Does rhetoric not know that he who comes to those with knowledge of sin, with faith, with comfort, with great certainty, all for which I plead and ask? Indeed if I want to know the Holy Spirit has been imparted to someone, I must myself have the Holy Spirit of the prayer, the fearful but comforting prayer which in the certainty of my painful unworthiness possesses the confident certainty of God’s nearness and his favorably hearing the prayer. Everyone knows this who has only once experienced a favorable granting of an intercession. Whoever has often had this experience did not let God off; just like Jacob of the Patriarchs he had to wrestle, he not only knows that, but he has seen God face to face and his soul was healed. May we then know this experience, not just as teaching, because this we long have known, but as personal experience -- that we, we poor, sick, weak people cannot send the Holy Spirit, but it is not necessary to send him, because he already has gone out and is sent from the Father and the Son when and where we call him. This event, this experience every pastor should impart not only once but uncountable times at every confirmation.

Of this theological rhetoric knows little; they read letters of the alphabet; they read words and phrases; they cannot pray and of prayer they know nothing. For rhetoric can only be thought and wished with uncertainty, wondering whether or not something will result or not from this these thoughts and wishes. It is much more certain for them that nothing will result. These thoughts and wishes are clothed with a shrug of the shoulders. Is it known what they do? Is it known that they clothe their thoughts and wishes in prayer? Moreover it affects not only individual souls but the prayer of the congregation. For the prayer of the entire church, in the congregation, and in the entire church, it considers a doubting prayer as a justifiable one. How far away is theological rhetoric from the infamous phrase, "My God, if there is a God, save my soul, if I have a soul."¹³ But with us it remains as always: a doubting prayer is the devil's prayer!

Moreover this intercession for the Holy Spirit which goes in the direction of the will is in sharp conflict with the confirmation instruction mentioned above. Of this rhetorical theology knows nothing because it understands nothing of prayer. Meanwhile the certain knowledge and consequence must be firmly grasped and conveyed to the congregation that he who knows that he is prayed for, the results of the intercession only then will be given, if he remains focused with all his inner being on the substance of the prayer. Not only contradiction and opposition exclude the fruit of the prayer, but in the case of indifference and sluggishness, recklessness and carelessness the gifts of the Holy Spirit are not received as well. It would be better if the one in need of the intercession would know nothing of the intercession rising to heaven for him and nothing of the intercession descending from heaven to earth, than that he know of it and even hear it, but with the disposition of his not be in agreement with the prayer and truly not certain and steadfast toward it. In this last case, the fruit of the petition is not only lost, but a serious sin is committed (2 Cor. 6: 1). It is one still more serious, than if my thoughts stray away from my own prayer, with the thoughts becoming weak or completely departing (from the prayer) and so on. The right disposition of one's will in prayer is achieved only through hard work and through long practice, as all those experienced in the care of souls have known. In the same way also the disposition of

¹³*Mon Dieu, s'il y a un Dieu, sauve mon ame, si j'ai une ame.*

the will concerning the intercession needs a long and serious exercise, and this should in the so-called confirmation instruction be employed and attained.

Theological rhetoric understands as little of the genuine life of the church, as it does the acts and ordinances of the church. For rhetoric all facts of the real life of the church are realized in words, formulas, and phrases, and beyond the formulas and phrases theological rhetoric has nothing. And with such empty food the poor theological students go out into the world as candidates for the office of the ministry. There they remain entrusted to the graceful guidance of God, which we so often feel tempted only to call chance, whether this graceful guiding will lead them to hear, experience, and live something better than has been offered them in the classroom of rhetorical theology. Or whether they will not be fixed in words and figures of speech and against facts for their entire lives. Or whether they will not finally altogether forget and throw away what they have heard but not experienced. And so they go into the office of the ministry.

VI. SACRAMENTS

If we begin anywhere within the sphere of theology, then we must begin with the doctrine of the certain, unshakable facts of the sacraments and return to them after every speculative excursus for the sake of the enemies of this doctrine, perhaps return to each individual point of this doctrine; it is presently necessary to undertake this task, and it will have to be pursued for a long time. Unmoveable facts are first and last the only things which are really necessary, and I am glad to say it is not enough to depart from them and then to return to them again, but it is necessary to stay with them. The congregation gathers only around a steadfast and immovable fact, and when now, after a more general assumption which is only reluctantly accepted by rhetorical theology, that Christianity is just that, namely Christianity is fact, not dogma. Another fact less willing to be accepted by the rhetorician but acceptable according to the words alone, "the other pole is this around which flocks of believers as large as the sky filled with stars are swaying in equal rhythm." In like manner the sacrament is not different from Christianity itself -- it can only be understood as indispensable for the preservation of Christianity. Its substance will be similar to Christianity overall which endures and stands firm in the fact that the word became flesh. This will be a true and indubitable fact.

Certain, indubitable, unchangeable facts are sought and exist alone in God and God's acts. The will, the thoughts of humans are changeable; they are not facts, and the acts of humans which arise chiefly from human will and human thoughts, arising from the shifting human soul and the human essence, are unsettled. If we want congregations and to preserve the church at the congregational level, we have to exclude every mixture of human will and human sense, every mixture of human thoughts and activity. If we want to destroy the congregations and to destroy the church at the congregational level, then we have to mix the sacrament with human sense and will, with human activity, thoughts and experiences, however so quiet and small these contributions might be mixed.

Whoever would remain steadfast in the facts of the sacrament, must recognize in the sacrament that God gives something by it, because in the gift of God for our salvation we are able alone to grasp God's acts. There are no other acts of God for us than his gifts for our redemption from sin and death. These gifts of God in the sacrament we receive from outside of us, just as the gift of the word is from outside of us and can only be received exclusively, but not in some cooperating manner of behavior.

Thus far are the sacraments similar to the word of God, with the exception, that I make the word of God my word, i.e. these words reproduce and these same words can produce other words. The sacrament acts otherwise; like the word it is not my possession. It is by far exclusively an act of God just like the word. Nevertheless there is something more in that the word comes through the Spirit and works from above as it influences the person. The sacrament by contrast is the physical act of God toward the person; it works from beneath, through corporeality on the entire personality of the person's body and spirit (or if one prefers, the spirit, soul, and body) for the redemption of the entire person in body and spirit. Accordingly we distinguish between word and sacrament, between unquestionable fact of the proclamation of the word and its efficacy, and the same unquestionable fact of the sacrament and its efficacy.

This difference is not one of degrees but of its specific distinguishing of sacrament from words -- this sacrament as the corporeal act of God, to which we ascribe in the same way of objectivity, certainty, and immutability, as the act of the word, which is by far not come from human wisdom which attacks it, and from this attack our first seed of rhetorical theology developed. The word of God is externally similar to the human word, and therefore there is the seductiveness to tempt God, tempted by the human disposition to compare the contents of the word of God with the word of man, i.e. as a word without facts. This same seductiveness now sets itself against the sacrament and because in the sacrament the word is present, so the attempt is also made by human disposition to replace the word in the sacrament. Consequently the corporeality which clothes sacramental word is removed, finally subjecting it to the same treatment to which the

word itself has been submitted. This temptation must prove unavailing since the corporeality of the act of God remains. This struggle from human envy seeks before all else the removal of the divine corporeality from the sacrament, i.e. to strip bare the mysterious act of God -- if not its entire mystery, then the greatest part of it.

Others of us are not tempted concerning this act of God, but leave it untouched, unexplained, its mysteries not stripped bare, understanding the fact as it stands before us, unconditionally as a matter of faith. The acts of God, should they work our salvation, have to be accepted as they are given. Already the attempt to explain the rich mysteries of God insofar as he has not in advance opened them up through his word contains a mixture of human thoughts and activities in the acts of God. This mixture we have already dismissed as intolerable and as necessarily destroying the church.

The sacraments are in this sense acts of God to us, in this sense gifts of God. They cannot be symbols and pictures of other acts and gifts of God, because pictures and symbols are not acts, but chiefly promises. Much less are they assurances either preliminary, accompanying, or subsequent acts of God. In that case the difference between word and sacrament would be concealed and abrogated, the sacrament concealed in the word, and the sacrament's attribute as a physical act of God would be removed. The sacrament would moreover cease to be an act of God; it could only remain as a human act in this case where God through his word had fastened certain acts of his mercy. It could be above all, if not entirely efficacious, leave only a certain degree of difference between word and sacrament in the discussion. At the very least the comprehensibility or incomprehensibility of the divine act in the sacrament -- the bodily presence of Christ in holy communion -- would be subordinated to our measurement. In this way, the assumed incomprehensibility is able to deem the sacrament as only a symbol or an assurance, or this finding may be supported through this assumption. Accordingly human thoughts are directly mingled with God's act; it is human thought over God's acts; it is man over God. In similar fashion I would not want to recognize the way of God as corporeality in spirituality.

Whoever seriously accepts the concept of the sacraments as either symbols or assurances -- (and I am not of this opinion), all who do this, from unexamined presuppositions, at the same time unproved and untried are to be counted among rhetorical theologians -- these are whoever tries this concept once in real life on which, I repeat it, all depends, I know, because the theologian does not contrive and speculate but should save souls. With this concept he attempts to explain baptism as the baptists explain it and with this concept he attempts to explain holy communion as the theosophists explain it. If he is serious with this concept of God's act and is able and game enough, not to think of the consequences alone, but also to promote himself in the view of others, he will consequently arrive where the Baptists are, with the sects of the so-called theosophists (spiritualists), and stand with them completely on the same basis, though in consequence and depth the one will surpass the scope of the other. If baptism is not regarded as a new birth, it is inevitable that conversion and new birth will be combined and baptism becomes only the assurance (sealing) of the new birth, i.e. conversion. If there is in the Lord's Supper not one word of the specific, distinct physical reality of the bodily presence of Christ, but only that an intensified word of God is present (Christ is even present outside the Holy Supper, though not in the same way he is present during the Holy Supper), so it is inevitable, with extraordinary force, to which a true theosophist¹ are the immediate spiritual presence of Christ, which completely flows and penetrates the soul in the most graceful movements, with the presupposition that the Lord's Supper is only a strengthening of the weak in spirit, to include those not born again, while it is indeed a food of eternal life for the born again.

May the Spirit of God help those who accept these views and lives accordingly, whom it helps -- (I trust that he will, because others as well as me have experienced this help) -- that this Spirit brings them to the view that they have begun on the way of the wisdom of empty talk, perhaps already walking on the higher paths of the proud wisdom of the world, and that nothing remains to them if they would not be baptists or theosophists, but to turn back to the divine facts.

¹The author's footnote: These, not to be confused with the Inspired, are present here in Hesse as in all of Germany. They separate themselves from the (visible) congregation, and are already so old that hardly any observations can be found concerning them in the pages of church history.

Then they may also become convinced that with this concept of sacrament it is impossible to turn to the sacraments or to attribute to them decisive life experience or to gather a congregation around them -- these sacraments which the world and the devil despise.

It is now a goal of the various aversions of that theology which I name rhetorical to incorporate such views in the congregation, in the church itself where it attempts to mingle these views with real life, to arrange and adjust itself to it as it speaks of the consequences and the possibilities and impossibilities of the "system," it introduces dangers for salvation, and speaks of the doubt which as a bird of prey feeds on the soul, and these attempts it introduces are wolves which tear them from reality. To many of the adherents of rhetorical theology my recent proposal will appear to be a clumsy personal argument (*argumentatio ad hominem*); they only want "scientific" arguments, i.e. through words which they always set against other words, contend with, and as they allege, refute. But a word battle never ends. Others will shy away from the commotion (*turbis*), from the dispute with the baptists and theosophists, and urgently advise their friends to avoid the commotion (*turbas*), from which their beautifully drawn circles in the sand could be wiped out. All of them are far from human honesty, and want incessantly with Lessing, to chase after the truth, though they never reach it. It fails to gain this truth. And now my proposition with its premises provides them a welcome reason to cast a slur on its proponents as Lutheran, New Lutherans, Hyper Lutherans, Catholics, Hyper Catholics -- all in one breath. As you like it, gentlemen! Maybe you can now say also, "Baptist!" "Theosophist!" -- a better thing to do in the presence of the mob than this wheedling talk of yours. Its worth the attempt, but most will entirely ignore this proposition and its premises. Okay, God himself is ignored by so many in so much.

VII. CONFESSION

Those comments already addressed to rhetorical theology concerning church confession pertain on the whole to the worst damage to those confessions. The confession belongs to the congregation, not to theology, at least not to an isolated theology of the congregation, and is an undivided result of the entire events and experiences of the church. It possesses its preserving and strengthening power of witness in the congregation only when it is entire and whole. This is easy to see, in the application of the confessions of the Lutheran church, particularly in the Augsburg Confession and in like manner in the Nicene Creed or the Apostles' Creed. But today rhetorical theology cannot stop breaking the confession into small pieces and shaping it so that to the eyes of the yet inexperienced, it is a patchwork, and it is a matter of indifference, of theological individualism, portraying it as a complex of optional teachings. It would be better to entirely eliminate the confession, to completely throw it out, than to treat it in such a way by breaking off pieces and shaking it up. Theological problems admit balancing and fragmenting -- indeed they demand it -- but not the church's confessions, on which the church's life rests, and is not simply something of the church's teaching. Insecurity, uncertainty, and doubt are cast into the life of the church by the rhetoricians, and consequently the life of the church is incessantly eaten away and destroyed. Insecurity and doubt are terrible and simply unbearable in the individual's religious life, which is much more a real life -- one blessed life, one eternal life -- if it does not have one single crack, not to mention a split or a fissure; insecurity and doubt are certain and quick death for the church's life. In individual lives the beginnings of uncertainty and doubt can be healed with certain presuppositions even in neophytes, but in the life of the church this is not possible. In the life of the church, it is truly not possible nor can it be possible for the church to struggle with itself, to wrest away its own events and experiences, as with the individual (whose events and experiences will fail him); uncertainty and doubt eat away continuously, like a cancerous abscess, and all are employed from the human side against the spreading uncertainty and doubt. This serves not to heal but only to accelerate the progress of the sickness and to quicken the decay of the

church's body. Whoever effects doubt alone toward the esteemed confessions of the church, introducing many better things although only too often with reprehensible scorn, or at least indifference, lays an unbearable responsibility upon his head. It is guilt of the corruption of the soul which first in doubt, and then in unbelief, perishes. Certainly it is possible that the Lord heals the sick church through a storm of his judgment, by means of a strong shock, through a powerful pull to close the tears, and bring together again the fragments and closes the crevices -- the hand of the Lord is not shortened, not even in this case. Rather it goes out patiently against doubt. Yet to desire this storm of judgment because it is profitable or indeed brings about the healing -- can truly be called sinning audaciously against God's grace.

And how inconsequential are we against these times and these people who now oppose these confessions? To him it has become possible, with a single fleeting view, to set the vain and childish sounds of his mouth with this breath of God so that they may point out a somewhat better way for them. This confession he opposes with his thoughts of uncertainty, his half-heartedness and immaturity against this steadfastness and peace, against the phenomenal strength and certainty of the Augsburg Confession, which is the exalted peace of certainty in eternal salvation; this unchangeable certainty, this strength and peace it also wants to share with succeeding generations, and it alone is able to share it, this confession which was once filled with a breeze of the powerful mountain air which blows from the mighty mountains of faith.

For all that, comes this burden to our present rhetorical arbitrary theology, of breaking the confession into pieces and shaking it up. Yet at least one other expected mistake is especially seen from this book--theology. It is the ignorance of the confessions; one does not know not to say whether really or artificially. Indeed it is more than ignorance, and much more than whether it is artificial or real. It is a destruction of them directly regarding such points where the confessions first and last depict the greatest decisiveness. This happens mostly with regard to the doctrine of the church. One can read the longest diatribes about the church without their once remotely having made the attempt to discuss Articles VII and VIII of the Augsburg Confession and their connection with the related articles. With general statements about the invisible and visible church one carries

on in great profusion and with great agility, but in vain one looks to find out whether and in which sense the Augsburg Confession teaches an invisible church as the only legitimate institution of the church, and whether we really knew of the church as a mere invisible church according to the text and sense of this, our basic confession, with our doctrine of the church . With just as little consideration, they find with great certainty in the Augsburg Confession a steadfast doctrine of the rule of sacred matters (*jus circa sacra*), about the so-called authority for reformation, about the right of secular authority in spiritual matters, teaching where for a century unqualified sovereign practice stands in flagrant and irreconcilable opposition. Would it not then be the simplest thing that one could expect, that this appointment by the Peace of Augsburg of 1555, which secular authority has promoted since the beginning of the seventeenth century, as the basis of its episcopal power in the protestant church, and that this connection to the Augsburg Confession be once thoroughly examined and seriously researched to determine whether this Peace could have or wanted to diminish¹ the Augsburg Confession to such a prominent (*eminentem*) degree? There is not a word from any of them! This ignorance of the Augsburg Confession along with the Apology is most remarkable in its treatment of the Holy Ministry. In this regard not one of the rhetoricians will know that there is significant emphases on these in both the Augsburg Confession and the Apology. But it is incomprehensible that those of other parties pass by it as if there were nothing there. Indeed in his work, “Church and Office according to Luther’s Teaching,” Harless² did not regard this teaching as that of the Lutheran church but as Luther’s teaching and hardly mentioned the Augsburg Confession at all. And while he concluded with mention of the Augsburg Confession, reliance was on other statements that have been taken from the sayings of Luther. And for years there was enthusiastic discussion of “the Christian state,” good confessionals perceived something entirely new, that a “Christian state” should not at minimum be in agreement with the Augsburg Confession. If the Augsburg Confession is really our basic confession, we we

¹The word used is “*derogieren* “ from the Latin verb, *derogo* , to repeal part of a law, diminish, detract from

²Gottlieb Christoph Adolf von Harless (also known as Adolph Gottlieb Christoph, 1806-1879) was a conservative Lutheran theologian educated at Erlangen and Halle. He served in various positions including professor in Erlangen and Leipzig; president of the Munich consistory. He was an author of extensive works in Biblical exegesis, dogma, and ethics.

should consult it first for our doctrine; likewise we should consult it for these things we have mentioned which concern the existing church in the world. We should listen to it first and last and act in accordance to it. The connection of our church to the world -- and one must not forget this -- as long as we do not want to disintegrate into free or independent congregations or thoughtlessly be absorbed into the Catholic Church, we must be definitively be governed by the Augsburg Confession. That what is here said about the fragmentation of the confessions and the arbitrary welding together of the pieces has immediate application is easy to see in itself. Half confessions -- as if I receive from the Augsburg Confession the certainty and steadfastness of the Fourth Article, the same certainty and steadfastness which in the Ninth, Tenth, Twelfth Articles in exactly the same way is present, if I exclude it from these articles, then they are no confession because they are a shattered and uncertain confession. They open the door to uncertainty, wavering, and at last lies. Welding together the broken pieces, i.e. a visible church organism, which is able to justify imposing two or more entirely distinct, indeed contrary presuppositions and basic principles onto one and the same church body -- somewhat according to the choice and arbitrariness of the present day shepherds -- are first and last lies. Both manifestations come from unionists, who first and into the present time are the "German reformed" and their comrades whose proceedings against the Lower Hessian Church are unfortunately proof enough. "Protestantism" will not be strengthened on this path as some think it will in foolish empty words. Rather the Lutheran church -- I fear -- is irreparably weakened. This path leads with adverse consequences to a ecclesial rationalism, which is vastly more harmful and brings greater danger than the old common doctrine of rationalism (*doctrinelle Rationalismus vulgaris*); this path leads not to purity but inevitably to unstoppable disintegration, not only to those already isolated, but also to those still in unity. If on this path the Catholics want to cry to us triumphantly "The self destruction of protestantism!" it would be difficult to disregard them, to avoid them, or to determine what to say to them.

VIII.. CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Rhetorical theology pampers itself by fabricating opinions hostile to church discipline, but then we have had no church discipline for almost a century, and here and there for longer than a century. This is all because entirely unjustifiable, worldly decrees and political regulations have one way or another forbidden them, and the church with its faint-hearted officials under the worldly yoke, often only all too willingly, allowed them to be imposed. So the word “church discipline” has of course become an empty word for the present generation and in part already for the preceding generation . It is good for the service of the theology of empty talk. Men of the pastoral ministry, who otherwise have nothing to do with rhetorical theology, know nothing of church discipline and are counted in this matter entirely with the rhetoricians; they are against the reawakening of church discipline. Moreover church discipline is not restricted in this regard to the protestant church but to some extent, in even greater measure has died in the Catholic Church as well. The recovery of it is faced with no small obstacles, as it is with us, so that the practice of church discipline in the Catholic Church has become for all time principally more and more lax.

On this point the rhetoricians stand with their theology entirely on the side of the world and make the same general case against the church. There we hear the adventurous assertions, e.g. that the Office of the Keys should belong to the entire church and not simply to the office of the ministry, that the protestant church knows no excommunication,¹ or at least the great

¹The author adds this note: I call this assertion adventurous although I indeed know how old it is, and which authorities they cite, because I never -- not even in my early life, where I found little contentment with the Office of the Keys, as in many other matters of the church -- and was able to understand them only from a distance, as one only by necessity can justify it from the Scriptures. For me the Scriptures said the direct opposite from this assertion and have always said it to me. Our Confessions (Augsburg Confession, Articles V, XI, XII, XXVIII and the applicable discussions of the Apology) may truly confront and truly destroy this assertion. It is not necessary to prove it, but of course the case mentioned earlier applies here, that for a long time and often repeatedly, the contents of the symbols were entirely overlooked where they were not held in contempt. It should be self explanatory, that the beginning of the Schmalkald Articles concerning the power of the bishop (*de potestate episcoporum*) lends no support to this assertion, moreover, the explanation of the Augsburg Confession cannot enter and may not enter into opposition against it. In every case this attempt belongs to these hazardous adventures (*adbenteuerlichsten Abenteuerlichkeiten*), to want to operate against this supplement to the Augsburg Confession.

excommunication),² and it should be observed as something that has completely died out and that has become something entirely invalid, or that it "runs against all protestant principles, to preserve the sins in the great excommunication in the case of unconversion at death of the excommunicant into eternity and to preserve this most recent judgment in God's name," All this (criticism) was introduced in recent times, indeed in the most recent times from renowned universities and from the mouths of "correct believing" teachers of the contemporary theological world. All of this is in direct and unwarrantable opposition to the Augsburg Confession and its Apology, direct and unwarrantable opposition in regard to the so-called disuse (*desuetudo*), in direct opposition to the practice where, at least in single countries and regions, e.g. Lower Hesse, at least in this land, excommunication was never used. When I was in the administration of the church superintendent in 1851 I came upon the great excommunication in full use in Diemel and Schwalm. There I found it used and actively demonstrated in an unusual way (and for me, an unexpected way); then it was chiefly applied against those who rejected the church marriage ceremony for the civil wedding. So I would be rushed from all sides, from the pastor, church elders, and single members of the congregation, to use this means of discipline also against other, known sins and insurrection contrary to God's word and the order of his church; accordingly I not seldom had to grant permission with patience and slow steps to the use of the earlier mentioned lower means of discipline and order. Also there were other church discipline regulations, which concerned various Lower Hessian church authorities in the years 1850 – 1855, e.g. a discipline of repentance, discipline according to regulated steps, which I myself introduced and accordingly the consistorium in Kassel also for what was then its pastoral district; it entailed a stronger emphasis on the authority of the pastoral office. It was prepared by the consistory in Kassel and thereafter would be adopted by the Superintendent of Kassel and Allendorf, an ordinance concerning the

²Here the distinction is made of the Middle Age practice of the lesser excommunication or ban which denied the sacraments, and the great excommunication or ban, also known as interdict, which involved civil penalties and excluded from all grace and blessings of the church. Vilmar notes that the Lutheran Confessions only recognize the lesser excommunication. The author adds this note: It is here and everywhere understood, where I mention the great excommunication of the protestant church, that it is imposed at all times exclusively through the word (of God), to the entire exclusion of worldly power, and of the appeal to temporal powers for its maintenance. This is how it should be used and always has been used by me.

exclusion of the suicide from church burial and other similar cases. Further in this regard, it reflected the general wish of the pastor and presbyters and the congregation members of the same mind, as had the earlier indicated decrees concerning the church excommunication. I cite these facts so that one can thereby decide what to think of comments such as those of Mister Richter in Berlin (page 64 of his opinion concerning the proceedings in the protestant church of the Electorate of Hesse, 1855, 8.), where in all respects he joins the general voice of rhetoric in chorus with the voices of the world hostile to the church:

that the closer understanding of discipline is in decline and often forgotten, is a heavy loss. But to revive it by orders from above, not involving the awakened (spiritual) life of the congregations, remains highly questionable, because it stands in danger – because it is dangerous to establish a clearly law-oriented work thereby completing the alienation of the church altogether. This measure is simply not recommended by the pastors, but also is observed by the consistorium.

This "recommendation" is not applicable everywhere, and this is decidedly so in the Electorate of Hesse. Should it be addressed to the Electorate of Hesse, it would be inept because Mr. Richter did not want to make the effort to look around in the local area for real, available facts. But the facts are these, that the aforesaid measure with us (in all Lower Hesse, in Hersfeld and Schamalkalden) really promoted the awakened (spiritual) life of the congregations. I cannot even make an exception of the city of Kassel in this respect. Whoever wants to make so disparaging a judgment as Mr. Richter, without knowing, whereof he judges, he is to be spurned as an entirely incompetent judge, and one laughs at him to his face.³

The cited statement of Mr. Richter contains still other, common errors besides this particular one, and not less harmful than this one -- all together emerging from the small details that rhetoric does not consider about real life and real needs and regulations of the church, much less believes in its classroom or is ignored in the salons of the fashionable world. From where should the awakening of the life of the congregation come? Simply from the sermon? By that rhetoric is in the worst error. The sermon can awaken, that is not to be denied, and the pure word of God in the sermon certainly awakens, sooner or later, as it pleases the Holy Spirit to open the heart. But

³Here Vilmar uses a pun. In German, judge is "Richter" and such a judge is held in contempt, as "Mr. Richter," it is implied, should also be held for his unjustifiable statements.

the sermon does not always awaken, in part (and in the majority of cases) because it is not the right method. Essentially God's word does not appear in the sermon undiluted enough (this is not to say God's word is not entirely pure) to be purely "thus says the Lord" (*haec dixit Dominus*), in part because the Holy Spirit often long hesitates before he enters an individual heart, and this waiting period often contains the worst scandals which cannot then be swept away by a sermon. It is precisely the well-off, externally and visibly most respected village residents who are not seldom sick from this evil, more sick than poor day laborers. Then a different word of God is needed for awakening than just the word of the sermon, and it is one of the most hateful blemishes in our present rhetorical theology, that someone, in lamentable opposition to our confessions, calls only the word of the sermon "God's word." But correction given by excommunication, the retaining of sins in God's name, what indeed is effected is only through God's word, is considered as only a human act. That is a diminishing of God's word which calls for serious correction, and this diminishing of the Lord God has been avenged without question in recent days.⁴ This is because through this diminishing an uncountable number of souls are lost, who really very easily could have been saved, in part through the use of the word of God in the power of ecclesial administration of justice (*potestas jurisdictionis ecclesiastica*). And to whom the gift of the word of God was not given in sufficient measure in the sermon, the remedy is often excellently bestowed through the gift of God's word in the Office of the Keys (*Strafenamt*). But least of all may the Office of the Shepherd wait patiently until the life of the congregation awakens somewhat "of itself" (as is said in shameful blasphemy) if it does not want to bear guilt on its own soul for the eternal ruin of the souls entrusted to it. In its hand the Office of the Keys is placed (and in the majority of state churches [*Landeskirchen*] with exclusive authority), and this Office of the Pastor must know that from it should the awakening of the congregations proceed, or the Lord will scatter the shepherd and the sheep together. The pastor must know where it has to awaken with the Office of the Keys, and not allow the office to err through such insipid and arrogant phrases concerning the life of the church and the responsibilities of the Office of the Ministry like those empty phrases

⁴Vilmar attributed much of the revolutionary turmoil of his time to God's chastisement for apostasy.

cited above from Mr. Richter's mouth. Such present-day empty rhetoric promotes, enjoins, and advises the Office of the Ministry and the Office of the Bishop to negligence, laziness in preaching, and advises him to speak of abstractions (*Prosopolesie*). That is another way of saying they do not see death in the congregations because they themselves desire this death. From time to time some make the word of God a legalism -- was the Office of the Bishop by chance responsible for it? Was it responsible for the abuse, which without its knowledge was done through individual stupidity and novices with regard to the word of God? But since the Office of the Bishop knows about the foolishness of novices and God's word of judgment of legal righteousness, so those in this office have to be judged contemptible and be under a curse if this stupidity should not be controlled by means easily available to them. Of should the Office of the Bishop for this reason fear that the use of excommunication by some individuals would serve to complete their own alienation from the church? That would indeed be a vile, worldly failure of responsibility (*Prosopolepsie*). Does rhetorical theology know or the rhetorical church authorities know the word of the holy apostle, Paul, that the word of God he spoke was to one the breath of life unto life, and to another the stench of death unto death? Plainly this word is known by the rhetoricians because rhetoric knows all words. But this saying of the apostle is one of those which the rhetoricians, theologians as well as church authorities, certainly do not understand. The instant they might understand it, they would cease being theologians of rhetoric and become theologians of fact. Where God's word is proclaimed as God's word, there is a separation, a definite parting.

I mention this, that the word of God, preached in the pulpit, is not the only word of God, so that besides the word of God from the pulpit, there is the express command of the Lord instituting excommunication which is also a word of God. But there are still other forms of the word from the pages of the evangelists which have to be valued and proclaimed besides the word of God preached from the pulpit if the Office of Pastor is to accept its responsibilities. Above all else in this regard is planting the word of God in the family, and a form of this planting is the so-called fiancées' exam (*Brautexamen*). This practice provokes the rhetoricians to universally intense displeasure. They claim that its reintroduction heralds a rigid thrust toward legalism and

partakes, even degenerates into a plain excess without the gospel. Rhetoric wants instead of the required recitation of the catechism a "free discussion" of the pastor with the betrothed couple. They should appear to me entirely satisfactory if I would be assured that the future husband and wife abide by the contents of the catechism.

But that is the issue, and indeed the family cannot be a stranger to the language of the catechism; it cannot be without this basic minimum of Christian knowledge of a family, as a member of a congregation, and which is from a congregation, and is expected to be a member of the one holy Christian church. The word of God must be known verbatim at least in its general and elementary parts and at every moment be at their disposal, and this above all by the father and mother of the family, or they will fall from the word of God and from the congregation, and from the church. The connection of understanding between the shepherd and the members of the flock can rest on nothing other than on such simple but (at least in memory) unshakable, steadfast words of God. Individual sermons are forgotten; the simple word of God in the catechism is not forgotten; the catechism makes it steadfast and this steadfastness is timely when it is needed, and is a time-proven method in the church. In this way such simple words have marked the Christian church for ages and the Lutheran church since its beginning; we call these words a catechism. These passages are of course learned in school. But they reach far beyond the confines of the school, and reach far out into life itself, reaching even to the hour of death. It is through fear of this hour that the teaching and steadfastness to these catechism passages is sustained, and is learned as the church acts partly as a school (and that is the rule of rhetoric, which it in this case regularly employs, in entirely the same manner, as the progressive educators of our time). Rhetoric does not know of what it speaks, at least it knows absolutely nothing of real life in the church and life's real needs. It is a portion of church doctrine and not simply a subject for school. The contempt which is here shown is not much better than the misunderstanding of the word of God in the Office of the Keys, which we addressed above. In one point it is still worse because it destroys the family as Christ's family; most of all it destroys it in its certainty and in its basis.

Who has had the experience I had thirty years ago, of individuals, those who have been out of school for four or five years, those who are in rural congregations, and almost everyone in city congregations -- and well nigh without exception include those of the "intellectual" classes -- could recite the Our Father without error? Already in the extinguishing of all prayer discipline, a complete ignorance of prayer has entered into future families and has to be anticipated with unquestioned certainty. It has to be anticipated that the articles of faith will hardly ever emerge in single, fragmented sentences from dim memory and even the Ten Commandments will by no means be remembered. Avoiding this unhealthy and deadly devastation of the church through its restoration must be recognized as one of the most serious responsibilities by us, and accomplished by a means still available, for the healing of this malignant damage by this intentional practice. I once made this attempt by means of a reintroduction of the fiancées' exam (which is prescribed in the Hessian Church Orders). It was a call to the shepherds whether they still had insight, will, and power to gather the scattered flock, and to the flock, whether they still wanted to be gathered. The call remained unheard -- and I know what sign thereby was given, that the word of God Almighty (Ezekiel 33: 9) will protect me. As little of what remains of the practice of the fiancées' exam appears to rhetoric in its worldliness as an "excess without gospel." They really could be won over to it if there were a real consideration of facts and not empty phrases as soon as the gentlemen of rhetoric want to familiarize themselves with a hearing on the fiancées' exam with one of our true pastors (and we have many of them in Hesse, thank God). Such a consideration taught me, and I learned about it myself; whether a rhetorician would want to be edified is another question; whether they would learn is another question. These are facts and they shrink from them. That this system of preaching the divine word outside of the pulpit, that this institution really accomplishes more than the sermon from the pulpit, can be confirmed by me from the repeated experiences of the last six years. In congregations, where for fifty years very little took place in preaching or anything else from an anything but blameless pastor who later through hostile or weak rationalists had been removed, the procedures of this first pastor were still strongly followed as the norm -- and from a pastor who had really done almost nothing other than hold the fiancées'

exams as prescribed. The fiancees' exam was the origin of the only knowledge which remained and served to oppose rationalism. Yes, of course! Experiences? What Experiences! Words, formulas, empty phrases!

This last method of church discipline is especially needed (along with some other passing types of discipline which can be used in combination with the former method) by the class of society which calls themselves educated. This condition can only be remedied on this path: the association of the family with the catechism, understanding between the educated and the uneducated, the filling in of the deep rift present in Christendom between the nobility and the common people -- there is a difference which our cultured world contrives to do in the same way as rhetoric with almost anti-Christian, steadfast, tenacity -- only on this path, can the one as well as the other persevere the same elementary parts of God's word -- with the catechism whose discipline can treat and can again heal this tear. Only in this way is it the weighty duty of the office of the ministry to deal with this discipline without special regard for nobility or commoner, educated or uneducated. Or do rhetoricians know another discipline, which perhaps would be more appropriate to our time and to proceed with it? No rhetorician would dare to give an answer to this. They know no other discipline; they want no discipline at all.

Rhetoric now proceeds on one and the same path with the most unrefined worldliness and indeed with pronounced hostility to the church, namely:

The old church orders are still observed as part of legal substance, where they are not canceled. But since the time when they were adopted and the present time, there has been a change in the customary state of affairs, that is in the relationships of life and its presuppositions; these have taken the lead, and these new provisions, replacing the old, may not be ignored, unless merely external legalisms are not to be demanded, but these changes should be observed if true progress in the rebuilding of the church should happen.⁵

Such comments deserve one of two comments, but one certainly: either they are uninformed or they are frivolous. The "change in the customary state of affairs" means that the cultured world has fallen away from Christianity; the "change in the relationships of life" means that the intellectuals and uneducated, the nobility and the commoners, rich and poor have been

⁵The author cites "*Richter Gutachten*, p. 64."

isolated from each other such as has not happened since the fall of the Roman Empire. The "change in presuppositions" means that the phrase rules instead of the fact. These are signs of decline. We bring these signs to the account of the administration of the offices of the church, of the government of the church. We implicate the offices of the church and the government because the decline of the church means so much to us. The church resisted these changes relentlessly and unconditionally with its discipline, which it exercised through the word of God. Only through this means will it prevail; the present world will pass away if it will not allow itself to be changed through the discipline of the church.

IX. PASTORAL OFFICE

Already in the preceding, and most recently, both parts of the divine teaching have been interwoven in the discussion of the church with its discipline, and the opposing contradictory concepts of the church and church discipline on the part of the theology of fact and that of the theology of rhetoric and their equally opposite concepts of the office of the pastoral ministry.

To rhetorical theology the doctrine of the pastoral office as it now emerges is much more inimical than the doctrine of the church, not as it is now simply taught but ultimately as it is exercised. The loathing of this doctrine is so great that rhetorical theologians and their followers are led away in blind rage to their well--known story of the opposite assertion: that the Reformation was not initiated by the pastoral office and even more they include in the Preface to the Augsburg Confession a confessional contradiction.¹

As everywhere in the church and in its doctrine and interpretation of its doctrine it is proper to approach these doctrines not from the tiresome laying together of details but from their entirety, not from the empty vessel, but from the fullness of its contents, not from the uncertain and doubtful, but from certain steadfastness, not from the seeking but from the found, so it is fundamentally necessary to approach the doctrine of the pastoral office in like manner.

The pastoral office is nowhere understood as a means of experience. Whoever has assumed the task of shepherd in one congregation, or in another congregation with more members, whoever has assumed the task to be shepherd of this or of that congregation -- whoever saw what doubt was there to clear away, what direction to give, what warnings to impart, what hazards to proclaim, what struggles to mediate, what attacks to beat back, what temptations to overcome -- what deep blindness to heal, what unrest to still, what hunger and thirst for the word of life to satisfy, what certainty of comfort to confer, what certainty of the forgiveness of sins to give --

¹The Preface is a statement by the civil authorities of those lands where the Lutheran Reformation had taken hold. It would be easy for someone who was unfamiliar with the theological debates which precipitated the Reformation and the Augustana to conclude from the Preface standing on its own that the civil authorities themselves had brought about the Reformation without benefit of clergy.

whose entire soul trembled from all this, often with the deepest shudders -- who knows with unquestioned simple certainty, that he only had to go back to one source for relief from doubt and struggles, to one source of this victory over the world, sins, death, and the devil, and indeed has applied to this one source. From him, from his soul, all these souls -- perhaps many thousands -- justifiably demand the life and salvation -- he cannot hide it from himself. Where does this authority come from? From where comes a corresponding power? From the congregation itself which makes this claim? From the congregation which is itself a turbulent sea of diverse opinions crossing one another, of worldly cares, doubts and opposition against God's word? This question subsides where this need of the souls has mounted as a swelling wave, filling the heart with fear, coming where this thought does not come and cannot come. This one source is Christ the Lord himself, who has placed him -- who even if still weak, himself entangled in sins -- placed him for the sake of the sins of sick, poor people in his place. This office is directly and immediately Christ's office, can only be his office, because alone from this office the truth goes forth, the way is shown, the light shines forth in the congregation. If this office were not immediately the office of Christ the Lord -- his direct mandate, his command -- the office would overwhelm the holder or the holder would cast the office away from himself.

Does the congregation furnish this office itself? The congregation in which the truly believing are mixed with the evil, the ungodly (*in qua vere credentibus admixti sunt mali et impii*)? Will the number of the godless and openly sinful in the church of the holy, truly believing and obedient (*von den sanctis, vere credentibus und obedientibus*) furnish themselves with this office? Or finally do the communion of saints and true believers (*communio sanctorum et vere credentium*) furnish themselves with it? Does the congregation beget it of itself and thereby exercise it according to their commission?

The answer from the preceding plainly becomes clear; it is very simple -- simple, so long as it is created from living experience and not from dead theories. By way of example the majority -- almost all -- of the identified needs of the congregation are not just needs of the evil and ungodly (*mali et impii*), but in part chiefly, in part exclusively for the true believers (*vere credentes*), as

long as they still are on our side of paradise. A far greater succession of needs, almost exclusively in the sphere of the true believer (*vere credentes*), and these needs moreover belong exclusively to those allowing themselves to be counted among those with such needs. Or does not the seventh chapter of the Letter to the Romans deal with the inner life of the converted, the true believers and the obedient (*vere credentes et obedientes*)? -- Should the need produce of itself the means of preservation? Does hunger give its own nourishment; does thirst quench itself; does the assault defeat itself?

The single thing that genuinely makes and preserves him as a pastor -- not only in difficult times, but also in every time, since every time is a difficult one for the pastoral office -- makes him a pastor and efficaciously vests him, without which he is only an orator like Demosthenes and would at first throw his protection away from himself is that he has to stubbornly say with St. Paul, all apostles and prophets *Haec dixit Dominus*, that God himself says. And again (*Et iterum*) I have become an apostle and prophet of Jesus Christ in this sermon. Whoever cannot boast this about his sermon, whoever cannot say this in preaching, then he lies "of a certainty and blasphemes God (Luther, "Against Hans Wurst")."

We console ourselves in this certainty. We boast in this trustworthiness and even in all our weakness. But we can do this only if we attribute the office alone to Christ and not to a middle man and his intentions but according to Christ's intentions -- only from this certainty, from this assurance that the office is directly mandated by Christ, who immediately stands behind the exercise of the office. Christ is active in this office and leads it himself, gives us the unqualified protection in the storms of the world and in the temptations which also afflict the believers and saints, gives us the fearlessness and lack of regard for all dignity of the person, gives us the power, the congregation from the new paganism not only through word and sacrament, from the abyss, but also preserves them through word and sacrament and the Office of the Keys, gives the power to break up the worst sins with single words, and also gives the power in a soul which the evil foe has submerged into the night of insanity to climb up and through the deep darkness to cast the beam of light: "Christ comes!" In applying one's self to that need, the stubborn knees of hatred

bend and the wild fists fold into prayer for the first time in decades -- yes the power, for a soul to climb up where the old enemy himself has taken up residence, and there with the defiant tearing of the abyss, to struggle face to face and eye to eye. Not everyone in the congregation can do this, not even the congregation of saints, nor can it lend out the power, commission, mandate and authority to do these things. At the same time they are not able to look into the devils angry eyes because what is clear from the most recent times, that were it possible, the elect would be led astray, and that counts as a greater consequence than single appearances of the devil in this world. He scatters the congregations before him, one from another, as flakes of snow, not led astray, but frightened to death. Only we are not terrified and not afraid, because he, who has defeated the prince of this world, stood for us before the devil's dreary serpent eyes, before his blasphemous and spiteful mouth and before his frowning face showing the anger of hell.

But we have especially a power which is exercised in our office (not as charisma), which preferably we have employed in the congregation of the obedient, faithful saints. That is the power of spiritual calmness and presence of mind. One of the most normal and at the same time dangerous temptations of the true believers is that, their faith itself desires what is seemingly better -- their faith is seemingly commonplace and quite insipid, and this faith would be better expressed in extravagances (emotionalism, curiosity, theosophical meditation, etc.) and this faith deteriorates and they tempt God, or it is by chance that they seek experience in some manner when the devil, a miserable spirit, besieges the diligent and is able to converse with them (*vel ea temeritate, ut quaerant experiri, quomodo cum Diabolo animam miseram obsidente curiose possint colloqui*). In such cases it is necessary to be strong, not to be warmed by this sham although it is a strong, glowing fervor. But it is necessary for the pastor to remain cool, and to bring down again peacefully the soul which has been carried to the pinnacle of the temple, down the steps, to lead it step by step -- that is one of the most difficult tasks of the office. For someone who has come near to this situation and who has freed someone, he knows that neither this task, nor less, the power of this redemption, comes from the congregation or from its activity (not to mention the ransom

itself), but it comes from Christ alone, completely unmediated, and it comes through this pastoral office.²

Instead of the confident certainty of the facts on which we stand with the doctrine of the pastoral office, we see now the greatest uncertainty in the theology of rhetoric, where the pastoral office is hatched out of the congregation. This theology is opposed to facts such as those we have cited. Rhetoric does not appear once to have considered them; they move in great abstractions and often entirely in empty, fruitless theories. This reproach especially hits home as it is seen in Höfling's famous book, *Principles of the Evangelical Lutheran View of the Church* (*Grundsätze evangelisch-lutherischer Kirchenverfassung*), with so many subsequent printings; one can justifiably call it a confused book. This confusion -- in which this book is unfortunately not the least -- contains by far the majority of the remarks stemming from the side of rhetoric concerning the pastoral office. It is especially confusing since it rests primarily on established theories of the invisible church, which infect the basic principles of Lutheran teaching actually found in the Augsburg Confession and the Apology. If one wants to take the pains, one may examine the efforts through which the teaching task of the church -- where not removed -- is unduly thrust into the background. This is particularly done with a direct attack on Article VII of the Augsburg Confession, and with it Articles VIII, XII, XIII, XV and the attendant discussion of the Apology. This attack advances the doctrine of the invisible church,³ which is put forward as the doctrine of the Lutheran Church. If one wants to take the pains it will be found that this doctrine has no basis in the Augsburg Confession. From rhetoric comes the doctrine as well that the pastoral office originates from the congregation. But if one accepts this concept of the exclusive authority of the invisible church, then by it emerge strange conclusions. If one disavows this special office in the invisible church because here it is usually identified with administration of the means of grace, and

²The author adds this note: That in all the above cited examples even the function of the pastor, charisma have not been cited, experiences will come to them without my noting it; I think there are not an abundance, and I emphatically point to this difference.

³The Reformed Church view of the church as invisible was a point of contention as Vilmar sought to uphold the certainty of the Lutheran teaching of salvation given to all by baptism. He considered the view of the real church as invisible, a communion of elect, as antithetical to the assurance of Christ's salvation having been delivered "visibly" in the sacrament of baptism, as well as the other means of grace whose delivery are a defining role of the "visible" church.

accepts this as a special office in the visible church , "for the sake of order" as one usually says to explain it, i.e. assumes it is functional, principles which rhetoric rejects on this basis in theory, and theory is its only basis. Because if for example the divine mandate of a special office in the invisible church did not exist, but is subsequently founded by people (perhaps by a concession from God), in the visible church, then it could not be dispensed with, and the final outcome is unavoidable, that the original source of God's mandate for the temporal world is not sufficient and improvement would be necessary by human hands. And how is it possible to justify these things plausibly from the Holy Scriptures!

But even more, if entirely superficial and childish concepts are proposed, e.g. that indeed all Christians are called at all times and in every place to preach God's word and work, (in which prophecy according to the proof of the New Testament is not part of the pastoral office and is distinguished from it) which has nothing to do with the present question -- it goes without saying that the pastoral office is not an office of efficacy and reality but only an office of preaching through which the church is a theological classroom in the modern sense -- the congregational community turned into mere spectators. This view directly contradicts the apostolic gifts and specification, the confessions of the Lutheran Church and its collective historical witnesses -- or that the pastoral office really is nothing other than a spontaneous job for evangelism, a concept through which the congregation would be scattered -- the congregation from which the office should result according to theory -- and in various ways, does not once measure up to rhetoric, but belongs in elementary school, and should not be considered further here.

These theories of rhetoric are uncertain, wavering, self-contradictory, and are formed in uncertain, regrettable ways -- wavering, and full of doubt. But an office which is exercised with uncertainty and doubt, is not the office of Christ. It is not an office of salvation, but an office of the cursed and damned because the seed of all curse and damnation is uncertainty and doubt. Thus it is with these rhetoricians who now gladly want to make Melanchthon a saint and the only church father of the Reformation.⁴ From precisely this Melanchthon could something be learned if they

⁴Heinrich Hepp, a professor of theology at the University of Marburg was one of the opponents of Vilmar against whom this book was written. In such works as *Geschichte des deutschen Protestantismus in den Jahren*

were capable of really learning something rather than following church-destroying tendencies. Servants of these theories, who are otherwise of a praiseworthy Christian mind and with serious human purpose, are at all times in doubt whether they in specific cases are to speak God's threats and to take them seriously, whether they may proclaim God's law in special circumstances in the congregation, whether they have a call to gather a congregation, whether they can bless with efficacy, whether they can impart the forgiveness of sins or merely announce it,⁵ etc. Many of them who have in themselves the charisma of the power over spirits (a *ἐνέργημα δυνάμεων*), are weakened in their uncertainty in the use of this gift. If they now proclaim warnings, call the congregation, speak blessings, absolve, and do these only with the lack of conviction of whether they have the authority or the power to do these, or from where they have the authority or power to do them, whether from this or that place, then these things are almost altogether not efficacious; it is altogether certain, without exception, that they administer them to judgment. He begins necessarily to replace the act with the word; he begins to make phrases; he proceeds to hypocrisy and finally to the lie. Truly one at times comes to his senses and turns around on the path of error, as a sincere doubter of my acquaintance once was led. He was a pastor and was called to the death bed of a wicked sinner who embraced conversion and wished for forgiveness of sins. Still under the influence of theory about the office coming from the congregation, he consequently spoke only a general assurance of the forgiveness of sins, and he began to do so. But the sick man called to him saying, "The proclamation of the forgiveness of sins I have long known, and it was recently offered to me by others, but I don't want to have sins with all other sinners forgiven. I want to have my sins forgiven. I want to know whether you have the authority and power to forgive me

1555-1581 he promoted the "Protestant Idea," his term for a synthesis of conflicting theses of the sixteenth century; this synthesis he thought was championed by the irenic Philip Melancthon. Such Lutheran movements as the orthodox confessionalism as seen in the Formula of Concord were illegitimate since they did not conform to this irenic "Protestant Idea." It can also be said that all orthodox Lutheran churches who since that time found confessional common ground in the Formula were also illegitimate.

⁵Here Vilmar refers to the difference in Lutheran absolution and the Reformed worship service. In the former the pastor pronounces absolution and thereby delivers the forgiveness of sins won by Christ on Calvary; in the latter only a general forgiveness of sins is announced; the denial of the actual delivery of forgiveness of sins by the words of absolution marks the difference between a church which is sacramental and one which is not. Vilmar believes that the Lutheran practice is mandated by Christ and lends certainty to the sinner since the sinner actually receives the forgiveness of sins and is not left to a general statement.

these sins." With that, he said, the scales fell from his eyes, and since that time he has not announced the forgiveness of sins, but absolved in the name of Christ the Lord. Or as it was with another person, who also still believed in the theory of the pastoral office being received from the congregation, but who adhered to the service in his agenda which dictates that he had to pronounce absolution. It occurred to this very same person while reading the formula of absolution the realization that this is contrary to the theory that the congregation forgives its sins themselves, and it is a contradiction of that theory. He stopped short as he read and paused for a long time to the shock of the congregation -- but he returned to his home forever cured of this theory.

The consequences are plain to even the most thoughtless theoreticians. To suppose that this office stems from the congregation and that this theory is popular with "contemporary Christian awareness," is only a step from the coarsest anti-Christianity, as it is to view (the awareness, the opinions) of the individual congregation as the norm for the pastoral office and its administration. Rather than achieving changes for the better in this thoughtless but unavoidable consequence, they stagger back and forth from fashionable thought to eternal thought, from the certainties to the uncertainties, from human power to God's power, from human authority to God's authority, like the constantly changing flight here and there by flocks of birds, and this seesawing and wavering they often attribute to the most pitiable circumstance, until they finally want to be released after a length of time with a flying leap to their death from the one constant human characteristic, unendurable wavering. They are then released from the consequences of accommodation to fashionable thought or the fickle opinion of the congregation.

How one could justify this view of the pastoral office from the congregation from the New Testament and from the confessions of the Lutheran Church would be purely and simply incomprehensible were it not for aversion to unbending facts and the love of pliant words. That "make disciples," "baptize," and "teach" (*μαθητεύειν, βαπτίζειν, διδάσκειν*) is conferred on the apostles by Matthew 28: 18-20 is indeed just that; that is what the office of the pastoral ministry has to carry out today. And they are to remain in effect until the completion of the age

(*αἰών*). The rhetoricians themselves at least understand in this passage that "age" (*αἰών*) is not confined to the time of the apostles. From this it follows however, if the perverse design of understanding does not lead to other paths, that it is not the apostles alone, but all those, who follow them, the authority of Christ the Lord: the "make disciples" (*μαθητεύειν*) from which ensues all other acts of the pastoral office, in which they lie together as if enclosed in a mother's lap. These acts are in his place and in his name and are to be repeated until the end of days. This consequence cannot be avoided without the most confused side stepping as they direct themselves in one of only two ways: either Christ indicated that he would return again with the death of the last apostle because that would be the end of the age (*συντέλεια τοῦ αἰῶνος*) because he was a false Christ, not David's son, and not God's son; or it must be that the apostolate was to continue in unending line, according to Irvinites ideas.⁶ Then Christ the Lord erred in his apostolate (more to the point in the efficacy of his Holy Spirit) and in just the same way was not the real Christ.

One now considers further a distinct and complete misinterpretation of the New Testament concerning the office of the shepherd and teacher instituted by God. This office is identical with the bishop's (presbyter) office (1 Peter 5:2; Articles 20, 28, AC) with the *ἡγουμένους* (Acts 15: 17; Hebrews 13: 7, 17) and *ποιστομένους* (Romans 12: 8; 1 Thessalonians 5: 12), and the image and continuation of the archbishop's office (John 10; John 21; 1 Peter 5: 4, 2: 25; Hebrews 13: 20). As these shepherds are supported by the apostles and evangelists, and what is more the propagation of this institution is explicitly mandated (2 Timothy 2: 2), against which the antithesis is the false teaching of the authority coming from the congregation (2 Timothy 4: 2) -- as one considers all this, one is amazed over the thriving of a theory of the pastoral office, where its authority should come from the congregation. He is alarmed that the most intense research and "preoccupation" in writing has been possible in our time, and he is amazed that this writing in a directly contradicting theory, not only spreads, but especially that it convinces. This is only explainable if one knows what unbelievable power overwhelmingly empty phrases exercise, and

⁶Irvingites were the followers of Edward Irving (1792-1834) who was deposed from the ranks of the clergy by his presbytery in 1833. They formed the Catholic Apostolic Church. A key tenant of their belief was that Christ would only return during the time of the Apostles. Accordingly they designated twelve "apostles" to teach with apostolic authority.

what impact rhetorical statements have on so many souls. Things do not stick with them, only words.

This is still beyond understanding but possible if one does not pay attention to the explicit words of the Augsburg Confession (Article V in the original German text, Article XXVIII) and to the detailed and penetrating discussion of the Apology. Only this lack of attention can call into doubt the institution of the pastoral office from immediate divine origins, the office as immediate divine power, immediate divine mandate. Whenever the allusion to the Holy Spirit is applied to the power of the bishops and pastors and without further comment, according to Article XXVIII of the Augsburg Confession (as this is yet authoritative in our church orders), this Spirit whom the Lord confers on the apostles according to John 20, and his command of Mark 16, one hears simultaneously stupidity, perversity, and biased evil design, in order to deny that the office of the pastoral ministry in the church is the succession of the office of the apostles and even should be called to it as the apostles were called to it, to continue the work of the Lord in the world for its salvation – to preach the Gospel, to administer the sacraments, to retain or forgive sins. Yes, with respect to the order of the church (*ordo ecclesiasticum*) which clearly is to be distinguished from the ministerium of the church (*ministerium ecclesiasticum*) (it is the *consequens*, the ministerium the *antecedens*), this order of the church is removed by Melancthon to the congregation in the Variata⁷ where he explains the essence of ordination (*rite vocatum esse*), "and just as Paul told Titus in order to constitute a commonwealth of presbyters (*"sicut et Paulus paecipit Tito, ut in civitatibus Presbyteros consitutat "*)." And the Apology there accordingly explains in Article XIII that the order (*ordo*) could be called sacrament as well as the servant of the word and sacrament, then the order (*ordo [ecclesiasticus]*) has two meanings, what belongs to the sacrament: divine mandate and divine promise and the laying on of hands could also be called a sacrament. How one could argue against these symbolic pronouncements and declarations the Treatise⁸ to the Schmalkald

⁷This "Variata" is the "octavo" edition of the Apology published by Melancthon in May 1531 and which served by far as the most authoritative version of the Apology throughout the sixteenth century. It should not be confused with his "Variata" of the Augsburg Confession which was written later.

⁸This document is the Treatise or Tractate prepared by Philip Melancthon at a meeting of the Schmalkaldic League, February 7-23, 1537, and signed by all theologians present. This document was later incorporated into those articles revised by Luther and published together as the Schmalkald Articles.

Articles concerning the power and jurisdiction of bishops (*de postestate et jurisdictione episcoporum*) – if we do not want to assume premeditation – cannot be explained as nothing other than negligence and irresponsibility. This Treatise deals with nothing other than the measure of the pastoral office. Of this it is justifiably maintained that it should be considered the jurisdiction of man (*humani juris*), and that ordination should be effected through a pastor in his church; it should be a matter of divine jurisdiction (*jure divino rata*). Also where the church is with its office, there also the election and ordination of the clergy should be legitimate and consequently the church by virtue of the gospel may then not be tied to hostile bishops. Concerning the origin of the pastoral office from the congregation this Treatise says not one thing, but in the introduction (The gospel allots to those who preside over the church, the mandate to teach the gospel, forgive sins, administer the sacraments, after this jurisdiction, it is clear to excommunicate those who leave: *Evangelium tribuit his, qui praesunt Ecclesiis, mandatum docendi Evangelii, remittendi peccata, administrandi Sacramenta, praeterea jurisdictionem, videlicet excommunicandi eos qui rel.*) directly the opposite and from the source of the order (*ordo*) from the congregation, nothing further than the election of the clergy, whose confirmation remains reserved for the bishop.⁹ There it is no question about the pastoral office, and only in the second place about the order (*ordo*), but only in so far as it determines through election the administration of the order (*ordo*), because the "origin of the pastoral office from the congregation," would be one and the same. This the most long-winded and most opinionated rhetorician will not maintain. That would be an assertion hardly worthy of the primary education and the ABC's.

In recent times the ecclesial estate and the pastoral office by which it exists and determines what it is, has laid claim to all its inherent authority and all responsibilities laid upon it, and the authority due to its domain, namely independence in church affairs, and has thereby provoked the anger of the world. The other-worldly God is put aside, and Christ considered distant and long

⁹The author adds this note: The symbolic (*præceptive*) place of this second Treatise to the Schmalkald Articles is at the conclusion of the same: "Therefore with bishops...." (*Cum igitur episcopi*) etc.: all preceeding is foundational. Besides it is clear and undeniable that in the entire account of this Treatise the church (*Ecclesia*), including the pastors and the office of the pastor, is itself opposed to the office of bishop (*Episcopis*). This opposition applies to ordination (*ordinatio*) which is claimed by the church, not the church without the office of the shepherd, but the office of the shepherd in this church is in antithesis to the usurpation of ordination by the bishop.

dead, and the Holy Spirit dismissed as a phantom (*phantasma*). As soon as this God and the executed Christ himself are depicted as living and present and ruling in the real world, this "apparition" of the Holy Spirit enters in very noticeably and wants to straighten out this real world -- then the powers of the flesh appear: the mob lifts all estates and joins in an inarticulate cry, and the fashionable people of the salons, those of the coffee houses and theologians alike, call to the mob: "hierarchy -- priestly rule -- catholicizing -- papacy -- Tridentinism -- the deep Middle Ages -- thick darkness -- spiritual slavery -- inquisition -- burning at the stake!" And immediately with such shouts thousands of confused wild goose chases ensue.

The mob has already heard the first of these cries.

The mob's cry is that it is more qualified to perform the tasks of the pastoral ministry, and it seeks to take over the tasks which are torn from this office, which (the mob claims) are not given to the office exclusively by divine authority. Thereupon this could easily be an occasion to ask concerning the authority of the Augsburg Confession (in whose Introduction, in paragraphs 14 and 15 as in Article XXVIII), which our current church authority wants to remove with a future revision. Meanwhile we thank the fashionable people and the mob for the raising the cry, and wish that they first of all would endure for a while, so that this competence bestowed on them by this period of trumpet call and opportunity, would prosper to maturity.

X. HOMOLETICS

It is not the homiletics of the universities alone but also the preaching method -- as it overwhelmingly still predominates among us -- that continuously bears the character of a relentlessly rhetorical time. It is a time where an unshakable axiom prevails that preaching should be the only content of the divine service, and also the only aesthetic presentation; thus rhetoric in a real sense was the exclusive norm of homiletics and of the sermon. One was far removed from content and only pulled it into his area of concern superficially. One knew nothing of a "congregation," a word which earlier had to have been of consequence; rather one only knew of an "audience (*publicum*)."

Whether an "impression" was made on this "listening audience" it was known only in so far as one sitting in the audience made the effort himself, whether "it should work through the head to the heart, or through the heart on the head" -- as I myself have experienced it. The result was nothing for the "heart" or for the "head" but missed the heart and went over the head. Now and then there was need for a handkerchief but the audience truly left the church having been preached to.

This time has still not entirely been subdued. Rhetorical theology maintained in all cases that there had to be "Biblical" preaching. It imposes continuously in the first priority the old and now somewhat modified demand, that the sermon must be a work of art. There are still some rules in the outline, which stem not only from Kantian philosophy, but even more from Wolf's formal philosophy -- where even Hegel's categories now and then lend¹ something into homiletics. From there then comes the uncommunicative, stiff, dry, wooden, pretentiousness that our pastoral candidates bring with them to the pulpit from the universities. Seriously and it is with sorrow that they only made a good impression by avoiding all "decisiveness," as I more than once have done myself. This can lead one to an entirely distinct "Yes" and "No" in one and

¹"*spuken* "

the same sermon, to a veiled "Yes" and "No," which consequently had to lead to an entirely impotent and empty sermon. Then there were the dullness and thinness of the portrayal, since the candidates had been warned earlier about the "pictures" of the Old Testament, about their "ups and downs."² Inevitably the language has become incomprehensible to the people for a long time, so that it can be rightly said that the people would have been edified by a Latin liturgy as much as by many of our modern German language sermons with their language from the classroom, books, and salons. To that end it fails in all Bible knowledge. The requisite Biblical citations certainly appear in the sermon, but only too often these citations are in general places, while the concrete, directly pertinent passages are occasionally deliberately avoided, occasionally are truly not known, and the narrative of Holy Scripture is left completely unknown or as was once said to me by a pastoral candidate, it is "all too well-known," in response to my reproach concerning the whole of his superfluous sermon. From such preaching, including that preaching held in the highest opinion, one cannot help but say, that it hardly contains the word of God. In every case these sermons are arranged expressly for the purpose that God's people should not be familiar with his word. If preaching is from the pericopes, so the exposition proceeds so very superficially from the point of view and means of expression in the Holy Scriptures, that one come to receive pure human words and not the words of revelation. Scripture interprets scripture; this particular method is seldom used and is almost never used in the universities. Contrary to this approach, preaching is an arduous effort of exegesis, i.e. using the Biblical literature. In preaching on texts from the Letters to the Corinthians I have spoken whole quarters of an hour on the condition of the congregation in Corinth; in a sermon on a text from the first half of the Letter to the Romans I presented a somewhat longer treatment of the layout of this first half; in a sermon on John 14: 6, I gave an exposition of the "general concept of John" concerning truth and life, which can appear to find no end.

All this from men of the best opinion among whom were those of genuine faith. From them comes then the unpleasant tendency, which moreover is not only from rhetorical theology,

²"*Spitzen und Ecken* "

but from the gathered "intellectual audience." Indeed it is promoted and favored at all times to say something "new." A return to the striking passages of Holy Scripture from sermon to sermon is forbidden. From these passages Christian people formerly obtained a large part of their Bible knowledge, and they provided their understanding of the sermon. Formerly the sermon always contained God's word even from weak pastors, but such a return to Scripture and repetition of Scripture is forbidden by rhetorical theology as trivial and tasteless and dismissed by the "audience" itself -- the "faithful" -- as unbearably boring.

Whoever teaches homiletics and wants to train evangelists must have the courage to place at the summit of his teaching the sentence: "The sermon must be a testimony and to be sure a testimony established through prayer." To that end, the preacher lets Christ take shape in the delivery, as he should take shape in thoughts and will, in life, and moreover, that Christ acquires form in the preacher, even if it is a dark form at first -- still a real form: that the preacher has experienced something of Christ the Lord, the crucified and resurrected, and does not simply hear, learn and himself have had spurious feelings. The "I am yours and you are mine, and the enemy will not separate us" has to be the emphasis of every Lutheran sermon; this sermon should contain, if not entirely, then at least in one place, the entire, true and deep sense of salvation in Christ. Once at least in every sermon, if not in the entirety of every sermon, the preacher should be in the same spiritual condition in which the true poet discovers in himself and in the world when he writes; his entire soul is fulfilled from one theme.

When this stands at the summit of homiletics, it is taught most urgently and enjoined by all spiritual authorities (*Auctoritäten*), above all from the magistrates (*Ephoren*), from all experienced pastors under whose care or influence a candidate of the pastoral office is placed for his welfare. Then instruction is given in the method by which one acquires the competence of this witness -- then the theorizing and moralizing, the systematic and rhetorical sermons have to cease; our present theological world still lies sick from the toll taken by such sermons. In some groups this sickness appears to assume a questionable character as one flatters himself that he

preaches Christianity and only preaches words, phrases, just as if they were read together arranged alphabetically from a Biblical concordance.

Here is then also the point at which our Lutheran preaching is distinguished from the eloquence of Catholic preaching, a distinction which deservedly brings a strong reproach to many preachers of our day. It was refused to the Catholic priest (in preaching) to make a confession, forbidden through his position in his church and with regard to his church; he can only do one of two things: illustrate or moralize and both mostly with far greater virtuosity than we possess. It is certainly not our task to give proofs and to moralize. That is also the point where there is still attached without question a great tradition³ in our church, which must go deeply into the Catholic Church with victorious power. If the pastoral office is to be regarded as a true institution in high estimation, embraced as an immediate, divine mandate, then the question will immediately provoke in days to come the pointless question, already asked by the pietists of whether every pastor has to be a convert? And this question becomes primary and can be entirely answered if the teaching of the pastoral office as one direct and clear extension of the mandate of Christ is again steadfastly accepted by us, and with that the entire doctrine of the pastoral office and of the spiritual estate undergo an alteration, and truly not only in the Lutheran church. This new experience has to light a new light in our midst. With this light we so clearly see the face of the calling Lord until his return. We see it as Christendom has not yet seen it up to now, and this light from us will illumine the whole Western Church like a bolt of lightening. We will make this discovery and not the Catholic Church, who will chiefly experience through us what there is still to be experienced in Christendom.

Still it should be self-explanatory but it is unfortunately not self-explanatory, that in homiletics the charisma for preaching from the Holy Scriptures and of the church's own experience should be characterized and distinguished -- rhetorical theology cares only for general "natural constructions," and its content remains for that reason superficial. It fails for that reason and on all basis of facts and experience for those homileticians who are rhetorical theologians. It

³"*Erlebnis*"

should also emphatically be stated and at great length that the preacher is the spiritual center of the congregation, that he holds the office of the forgiveness of sins, that he is the revealer of the mysteries of God, especially as he perceives and knows the sacraments, that he does not just speak about something, but that he gives something, that he gives food for the soul, living bread. It should also be distinctly said, or much more not stated but a strong and sincere witness be made that before all else the scent of life to life emanates from the sermon, and the scent of death to death emanates as it must. As long as the phrase is heard from the pulpit and is made to sound Christian, the world will not be raised as a reproach, but this reproach is the hate of the world and is unavoidable. And this separation can only be attained by the preaching of the crucified Christ as a scandal to the Jews and foolishness to the gentiles. To effect such a separation through what is foolishness to this world should be the rightful responsibility of every preacher, and this is the only mark of the preacher who is doing what he should. All these things, as facts, plainly do not proceed from rhetoric.

But can it not be said -- as I have had the opportunity to observe in almost all homiletical classrooms and in most of the homiletical seminaries in Germany -- that these rhetorical practices are the beginnings of a suitable method for those to whom experience is naturally the point of departure, and should this not be possible to do? Is not the natural character of the sermon a testimony to present in preaching? In this manner they believe they have guarded against crossing over their boundaries, becoming interlopers, avoiding what is not suitable, avoided touching on a subject with conceit and producing unfounded testimonies and speaking blessed uncertainty and spiritual lies in Christian language.

As far as I know there is only one means to protect beginners from this very great danger. They have to comply exclusively with the objective facts from the immediate witnesses, i.e. historical preaching. At first one only tells the simple stories of the Old Testament, and indeed in the all too simple method, explains or allows the story to tell itself -- and it is no small boast to explain from the pulpit just one story of the Old Testament in proper style. For this learning coheres and is not arranged (*disponieren*) according to human logic but according to

divine logic. It does not think in the sense of some human philosophy or philosophy of history. One finds his way according to fact and lives according to fact. Such things must also be powerfully and thoroughly impressed upon outgoing theological students and those candidates just arriving. But for someone who is unable to do this in the beginning, these so-called "easy texts," are recommended to him, e.g. places from the high priestly prayer of the Lord, or the eight beatitudes, or places from the pastoral letters, e.g. 1 Timothy 4: 8; such "candidate texts" are recommended today by such stupid rhetoricians just as they were forty years ago. There the young men learn nothing other than to make phrases because they go a long way from their area of experience. I know from very many preachers who proceeded on the basis of just such an over-estimated enthusiasm, on reckless, premature treatment of difficult preaching subjects, and who produced insipid blather, although they certainly did not appear in their method so spiritually corrupted according to natural attitude and sense. I am grateful to one of those church officials, of which there are many in our land who can rightfully and with contempt be called coarse rationalists -- the same man who already once was mentioned in these pages -- grateful that he early on made this point understandable to me and emphatically made Isaiah 49: 15 understandable, i.e. that such apparently easy texts "for a candidate were inappropriate and were much too difficult." The warning has helped me, and I should be indebted to the one who is now in his grave, the one who warned me. There is need for this advice to help others! It is still necessary to the same degree as it was thirty-five years ago.

XI. PASTORAL THEOLOGY

I have to consider the instruction for the direction of the pastoral office to consist entirely of empty words and rhetoric, as it has been cultivated in the universities and for the large part continues to be cultivated. Those who teach this "course of study (*Collegium lesen*)" themselves understand very little or nothing at all, if they know the most complete and precise "relevant literature" alone. The best pastoral theology remaining today concerns itself entirely with the external performance of the pastor, as it was regulated through special legislation; but if it gets along with the general or special church authority, it is brought forth in knowledge from books. But it is in instruction in pastoral theology where the only opportunity for the instructor to explain is in anecdotes, which bring the listeners to laughter and derision, and others completely to gushing, shallow, stupid phrases, and chiefly of such a dull, trivial, indeed stupid quality, that strong temperaments are filled with such disgust toward the pastoral office that the student would rather avoid such wretchedness. And today such sad occurrences have not died out. Frequently Klaus Harms, who indeed could be a most drastic medicine, has produced a noticeable effect in some circles. In this matter books cannot properly influence but chiefly incite: the description of the inner and external experiences of a person have to be verbally explained; if anywhere in theology, it is here that the master-disciple relationship is necessary.

I am not bringing out the only important issue, but the obvious points and indeed those whose deficiencies seem to me to be encountered sooner or later in real life.

A foundation for a beneficial pastoral theology is not simply useful but is necessary. Such an arrangement clearly is not found nor can it be found at the universities unless the current organization is changed either altogether or concerning the theologians. I think that theologians would be hindered in pursuing academic freedom in so far as it is unrestrained. What help is it for those who would be pastors in serious instruction in the area and discipline of prayer, the

most urgent instruction of discretion, sobriety, and chastity needed by those who would be pastors, or for mediation, etc. if in the same morning where this instruction or direction are given the students come from the classes of summers or of the duel? What good does it do then if they see in their current life the antithesis of sobriety and chastity, and indeed seen so close that they cannot avoid this antithesis in the actual act, e.g. in our time nothing is worse than the soul-corrupting extravagance of the student world? And this inability to avoid it has to be confirmed by everyone who knows the current life at our average sized or small universities. What good does it do to portray the essence of church life and inculcate it into hearts, if at the same time the direct opposite of all church life is justified in their society, and no one even once asks whether they visit church on Sunday and whether they receive the Lord's Supper? This will not be done with the hopeless arrangement with the professors of theology; it will not be attained though they may want to establish spiritual care for their students, which is a good intention; it will not be attained as long as the theological faculty do not regard themselves as members of the church, as long as the professors want to be teachers rather than masters and therefore fear to spoil by this spiritual protection what the rhetoricians term their "objective opinion" in regard to the student.

What remains wrong in the present pastoral theology in a conspicuous way, is the direction in the discipline of prayer, which the pastor has to exercise for himself and for his congregation. In earlier times this was not an omission in pastoral theology, e.g. as was seen in Rambach's homiletics. It is essential that the pastor hold a spiritual sabbath celebration at least once a day, as Rambach call it. Such an observance usually should last at least an hour with spiritual occupations and thoughts; daily must the soul of the shepherd be completely still, where the souls of those entrusted to him are laid on his own soul, so that they can say with good reason, "Speak, Lord, your servant listens;" daily should a soul speak with its Redeemer in questions and answers, requesting and hearing, lamenting and comforting, praising and blessing and so forth. Once daily should the soul hear, "I come soon" and daily answer, "Yes, come Lord Jesus." This has to be taught in pastoral theology. It must be exercised early in the instruction

because without early exercise of it, the newcomer to the pastoral office is overwhelmed, busy and distracted, managing prayer only with difficulty; he gains this firm basis of the office on which our grandfathers and on which our fathers still partially stand either late or not at all.

The breviary of Catholic priests can be dead spoken words, and it often is just that, but one indisputable, sound basis lies beneath the usage of the breviary; we adopt this foundation, we who have overcome works righteousness; we have the competence, but with it, we also have the responsibility.

Just as the pastor should exercise this discipline in his congregation -- a thing already suggested above -- when and how, and prayer should not be "out of the heart." Direction should be given when to pray the Psalms and when the Lord's Prayer and the Creed and the Ten Commandments, when to pray special intercessions and thanks, when the prayer of confession should be used, when to pray the prayer of the Lord with application of the special condition of those praying, how attention and concentration in prayer be achieved and so on. It has often been said to me "that one learns this better from the right pastor than from all the professors together in the world." I partially concede this, but not exclusively, since it could be fully taught by the professors, by those plainly experienced in the pastoral office, by those who have believing hearts and remain steadfast in the faith, even if it were only present in the basic principles.

Furthermore it is necessary in the pastoral office to communicate a distinctive mark of the time both in general and in particular. If our theological students have to bear the torches as they precede the returning Lord Christ, then we also have to light these torches. It is a question also of distinguishing clearly the spiritual currents of the times in their connections to the pastoral office, to the church, to the future of the Lord, and also the external, proximate worldly future, to distinguish clearly the tasks which the servant of the word must perform against these spiritual currents. They must be prescribed with relentless severity: the world of pleasure and extravagance, industry (the so-called "intellectuals"), materialism, poverty and communism, revolution and the "omnipotence of the state," literature cults of genius, art and science, and with

them (everywhere made necessary from dereliction of the pastoral office which comes about, through lack of recognition and disregard of it, originating with these of the other side) the endeavors of the inner mission. These must be the themes in our day of an accurate portrayal in light of pastoral theology.

Here it now matters to establish and with insistent conscientiousness to teach that the word of God which should have been proclaimed with confidence up till now, has been excluded in all this worldly striving, with worldly wisdom and trust in worldly mainstays. The hands which should have worked for their temporal livelihood day and night to pull souls from the depths have turned to play and amusement and have pulled the powers of the world into the church. The hearts which should have burned in fervent love and sincere compassion are filled with the fire of earthly passions and the smoke of earthly thoughts. These hearts have become as cold as stones and have gone after the society of worldly temptations and desires which penetrate into the congregation, and these hearts without a doubt are indifferent and callous with regard to them, not to mention actual resistance to the congregation. Here it now matters to show that and how every one of these directions of the world are met with, and how they could be a disgrace for the pastoral office; how the holder of this pastoral office himself should be on the lookout for them and no one else; how he would struggle and win and can use the God-given fundamentals of the office for the service of the church.

Here it matters to show what unceasing and what difficult work devolves on the soul of one who cares for souls, and that he does not gather on one side the congregation in the midst of the world and on the other side the impenitent. He does not gather them with well intentioned sermons, nor with worldly persuasion, and not through example, but through the power of the Holy Spirit who rests in his office and through this office, rests also in his person, through the breath of life to life and of death to death which proceeds from him, to bring about the saving act of separation from the impenitent. Here it finally matters to show what long and difficult work is necessary to impress little things of faith and of discipline -- simple institutions these -- but these impressed with such emphasis in spirit and in the midst of the life of this age that the following

generations necessarily will remain bound to them. And this instead of again having to find their way back, and then with a poor imitation, repeating the example of the Kingdom of Judea with an unpleasant decline, and then finding it necessary to reestablish these institutions; they can and must transmit the existing legacy.

But plainly one must not demand all of this from rhetorical theology. It knows nothing of work on behalf of the soul, but considers work with books to be work, only literary activity as activity, only comfortable office work as an occupation. Life is with papers and books which do not talk back, which demand no comfort against eternal death with loud cries of pain -- and who count full knowledge of literature as experience. Here however can the painful experience of life make an impact with the maturity gained by the uncountable ups and downs of real life's many-faceted, examined experience. And this experience on the contrary must be examined with the experience of all experiences and the fact of all facts: that Christ Jesus has come into the world to save sinners, of which I am the greatest. That has to be the first word and the last word of all pastoral theology; it should also be my confession as the final word of these pages.